



Location

This meeting was held in a hybrid manner, with remote attendance via Microsoft Teams and in-person attendance at Administrative Service, 5205 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226.

In Attendance

Trustees: Rodney Lofdahl, Chair; Lori Jump, Vice Chair; Erika Lautenbach, Secretary; Matthew Santos and Holly Robinson. Absent: None.

Staff: Christine Perkins, Executive Director; Michael Cox, Deputy Director; Jackie Saul, Director of Finance and Administration; Thom Barthelmess, Youth Services Manager; Mary Vermillion, Community Relations Manager; Lisa Gresham, Collection Services Manager; Beth Andrews, Human Resources Manager; Maggie Mae Nase, Learning Coordinator; Em Olpinski, Administrative Assistant.

Guests: Jenny Bagne.

Call to Order

Rod determined quorum and called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m., followed by a reading of the WCLS Land Acknowledgement by Christine.

Open Public Comment

No public comment.

Consent Agenda

The Consent Agenda included minutes of the February 21, 2023 Board of Trustees Regular Meeting as well as the following:

Expenditures:

General Fund:

- February 1-15, 2023 payroll: check nos. 1033298744-1033298747 and voucher nos. 554139-554287 totaling \$220,107.57 and February 16-28, 2023 payroll: check nos. 554294-55442 and voucher nos. 1033418525-1033418528 totaling \$196,789.71.
- ACH transactions for employee benefits, telecommunication services and monthly sales/use tax filings totaling \$94,057.56; \$31,486.18 of this is for employee funded contributions to dental insurance premiums, PERS and deferred compensation plans (made via payroll deduction).
- Claim 2023-06G: warrant nos. 1162322-1162333 totaling \$12,497.16
- Claim 2023-07G: warrant nos. 1162505-1162530 totaling \$128,675.89
- Claim 2023-08G: warrant nos. 1162842-1162858 totaling \$40,572.24
- Claim 2023-09G: warrant nos. 1163903-1163919 totaling \$92,043.58

Capital Fund:

- Claim 2023-01C: warrant nos. 1162603-1162606 totaling \$4,794.19
- Claim 2023-02C: warrant nos. 1163087-1163090 totaling \$19,054.29
- Claim 2023-03C: warrant nos. 1164008-1164009 totaling \$67,779.54

Holly informed Em of a typo in the February 21, 2023 meeting minutes: the Northwest Drive Library Express operating hours should be noted as 6:00 a.m. - 11:00 p.m., rather than 11:00 a.m. Em responded that they would make this correction.

Matthew moved to accept the Consent Agenda with the edit to the meeting minutes, as discussed. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

Financial Report and Resolutions: Finance Committee Report

Jackie reviewed her report, noting that revenue from property taxes is usually low this time of year, as most of these funds are usually received in October and April. The majority of the revenue we have received so far this year is from annual funding sources, including revenue from a service contract with the Whatcom County Jail and funds from the Whatcom County Library Foundation (WCLF).

We are currently on track with expenses for the year thus far. Up-front payments have been made for annual property, liability, and auto insurance premiums. Payments have also been made for IT and Collection Services software maintenance contracts. We have dipped into the Cash Flow reserve fund to make certain we can maintain expenses, and will likely do so again in March, as property tax revenues lag. The fund will be replenished when property tax revenues are received in April.

Hiring a new Facilities Services Manager is currently underway and the LED lighting retrofit at Deming Library is in progress. Rod asked Jackie if the lighting project is moving slower than expected. Jackie responded that it is. Scott Electric is working on the project, and they are currently waiting on sample fixtures to arrive. Jackie is hopeful that the updates to the library will be completed by fall.

The Friends of Deming Library have approved a project to install a new metal roof on the Deming Library building, which will likely occur during spring or summer. Because they are investing in a new roof, the Friends will not be contributing as much to the LED lighting retrofit as originally planned. Christine commented that a metal roof is more expensive than a composite roof, but it has a much longer lifetime. The Friends are really glad they can provide this improvement to the building, and Christine is grateful to the group for financing this project.

Jackie then presented Resolution 03/21/23-04 Amending the 2023 Capital Fund Budget to the trustees. She shared that in the amendment, expenditures have been adjusted to account for payments that began in 2022 but weren't completed until 2023. Expenditures have also been updated to included expenses for projects that were planned for 2022 but were delayed until 2023, such as updating the teen area at Everson Library and updating the staff and circulation desk area at North Fork Library. The final costs for refurbishing and opening the Sumas Library and Sumas Library Express are also included. Grants and reimbursements have been updated in the amendment to account for the decreased contribution of the Friends of Deming Library towards the Deming lighting retrofit. The overall impact of the amendment on the budget is an increase of \$18,252 to the 2023 ending fund balance.

Holly moved to accept Resolution 03/21/23-04 Amending the 2023 Capital Fund Budget, as presented. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

Jackie shared with the trustees that the City of Sumas has discovered damage to the roof of the building that houses Sumas Library. Since the City is still economically recovering from the flooding of November 2021, they have asked WCLS to participate in cost-sharing to help replace the roof. Our Agreement for Exchange of Services with the City states that the City will be responsible for expenses relating to the upkeep of the structure of the building. We are not obligated to contribute towards structural improvements of the building, but our agreement states that we may agree to participate in cost-sharing on improvements.

Jackie suggested that if there is any money left over once the Sumas Library repair project is completely wrapped up, those funds could go towards cost-sharing to replace the roof. Jackie also shared that the damage to the roof is above the building's restrooms and is not specifically above the library.

Lori commented that it could be worth investigating whether the damage to the roof is related to the flooding that occurred in Sumas in November 2021. If it is, then the City's insurance may cover the cost of repairs.

Christine noted that the City of Sumas currently owns the building housing the library. Holly asked if there are other tenants in the building. Christine replied that Whatcom County Parks and Recreation is also a tenant, and they have an agreement with the City of Sumas that says they will contribute to structural projects on the building, unlike our agreement with the City, which says we do not have to. If we decided to contribute towards repairing the building, our estimated contribution to the project would be about \$15,000.

Jackie shared that we will know by next month if there are any funds budgeted for the projects at Sumas Library left unspent, and that the trustees could decide today if a portion of those funds (if any remain) may be reallocated to contribute to the City of Sumas' roofing project.

Matthew asked what would happen if the board moves to allocate funds left from the Sumas projects towards the roof, but there end up being no funds leftover. Jackie responded that we would bring the decision to contribute towards the Sumas roof project back to the board.

Rod moved to accept the reallocation of unspent funds budgeted for the Sumas Library projects, as outlined by Jackie. Seconded. Unanimous board approval.

Jackie commented that replacing the roof in Sumas is a positive thing, and that we are glad the city is making this improvement.

Erika joined the meeting.

Trustee Education: LibCal Events Calendar and Meeting Room Use

Michael shared that WCLS wants our libraries to be key meeting places for the communities they are located in. And meeting rooms provide a great location in libraries for community engagement to occur. Michael then gave a summary of all reservable WCLS library meeting spaces. Meeting room capacity has been adjusted throughout the pandemic. We are just now beginning to allow full capacity at certain locations.

When reserving a meeting room, patrons can request a laptop, an LCD Projector, Hearing Assistant Devices, and a PA System to be used in the room. Lori shared that staff at Ferndale Library are very helpful with connecting and setting up technology in the library's meeting spaces. She also suggested further publicizing that laptops can be reserved with meeting rooms. Meeting rooms can be a great entry point for introducing people to using libraries.

The Sudden Valley Community Association manages the South Whatcom Meeting Room, which is a shared space with the Community Center. Library staff can help patrons reserve this space, though. Lori asked Michael if private businesses are still charged a fee when using this space. Michael replied that WCLS has no authority over this meeting space, and thus, our policies do not apply to its use.

The North Fork Side Lot is WCLS' only reservable outdoor space and was advocated for by the Twin Sisters' Farmers Market. Matthew asked Michael if any amenities are available with this space, such as folding tables or Wi-Fi hotspots. Michael replied that North Fork Library has limited storage, which makes providing amenities for the outdoor space difficult. Thom asked if the building's boosted Wi-Fi is usable from the outdoor space. Michael replied that he believes it is.

Rod asked if there are any options for making a meeting space inside North Fork Library. Michael responded that meetings can be held in the area of the Library where the Friends sell books. However, what is being discussed in this area can be heard throughout the library, making the area not suitable for private meetings. Therefore, we are not able to make this space reservable.

A huge selection of named groups and organizations are currently using library meeting spaces. Since September 2022, at least 130 community organizations have reserved WCLS meeting rooms. Commercial use of WCLS meeting rooms has been allowed since 2016.

Michael then gave a breakdown of monthly meeting room occupancy for all reservable meeting spaces. Monthly occupancy, which represents the number of hours a room was booked over the number of total hours the space was available, has been gradually increasing for most meeting rooms since September 2022. This is likely a sign that people are beginning to return to their pre-pandemic habits. Michael also shared the number of total hours meeting rooms were booked monthly in 2019, 2022, and thus far in 2023. Meeting rooms were reserved more hours in March 2023 than in March 2019.

Holly commented that she finds more value in looking at the various groups utilizing library spaces than in analyzing meeting room occupancy. The story of the library's value to the community is in the groups that are using meeting rooms for events. Michael commented that he was astounded upon seeing the wide variety of groups using the library. Holly believes this is evidence that libraries are providing valuable resources to the communities they are serving.

Matthew noted the importance of sharing the message of how the library is being used and how people can get involved with the communities WCLS serves. Doing so could be helpful in preparing to go out for a levy lid lift. Holly commented that the groups already using the library will likely be advocates for a levy lid lift. Beth suggested showing how much these groups have saved by using library meeting rooms.

At a recent facilities retreat, Matthew learned that there is an increasing demand for individual study rooms at libraries for patrons to attend online meetings. He is curious how branches are assessing if they are meeting the community's needs with the reservable spaces currently offered. Michael responded that he would touch more on this issue at the end of his presentation.

Michael then summarized Meeting Room and Facilities Use Policy 7.03 for the trustees. He highlighted that WCLS reserves the right to deny applications for meeting room use based on the space's availability, the frequency a person or group has reserved the space, or as is deemed necessary by the Executive Director.

Christine mentioned that a few years ago an organization, perceived by some as spreading anti-transgender rhetoric, booked a meeting space at a Seattle Public Library (SPL) location. A protest occurred and SPL received pushback from the LGBTQ+ community, but SPL ultimately allowed the group to host an event in a library space.

Christine also shared that an author has been offering to host Storytime events at libraries around the country to read a Christian children's book he wrote. Instead of agreeing to co-host the event with the author, some libraries have suggested he reserve a library meeting space for his reading. The author has claimed that the libraries' infringed on his First Amendment rights. Michael pointed out that by law, libraries can't limit a group's ability to use library meeting spaces because of the group's beliefs.

Holly asked if there have been any events held in WCLS meeting spaces that have attracted controversy. Christine replied that an event about racism was hosted by a local nonprofit in a Ferndale Library meeting room. WCLS staff and the event organizers sensed that the event could draw attendees with polarized viewpoints and invited local law enforcement to be on site to keep the peace.

Outbreaks of violence at libraries can be inspired by groups at either end of the political spectrum, but we have to uphold our policy and cannot disallow a group from booking a library space based on their beliefs. However, we do get to choose what programs and events WCLS sponsors. We have a team of professional staff to select and design library programming.

Michael then gave a summary of some of the guidelines for meeting room use. Alcohol can be allowed at events hosted in meeting rooms when approved by the board. The requesting group must have a state banquet permit. Michael also presented the updated fee schedule for commercial meeting room use.

Holly asked Michael if we track commercial versus non-commercial use of meeting rooms. Michael replied that we keep track of commercial use by tracking payments.

Michael concluded his presentation by announcing that a meeting pod will be installed at Blaine Library on April 1. The pod was funded by a private donation and will hopefully help accommodate the increased demand for private meeting spaces.

Erika exited the meeting.

Rodney and Matthew thanked Michael for presenting the trustee education. Lori suggested recording trustee education presentations in the future for general educational purposes.

Break

Rodney adjourned for a break from 10:30 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.

Staff Reports: Executive Director

In addition to her written report, Christine shared that WCLF board member Paul Steere recently passed away. He had a fascinating library career.

Bellingham Public Library (BPL) will be hosting a ribbon cutting for their new Bellis Fair Mall location on April 26. Christine is grateful that this new location will be providing library services and materials to the surrounding community.

A First Amendment audit recently occurred at a WCLS library. This involved a person entering a library and video-recording staff and patron reactions, likely with the intention of posting the video online. The people conducting these audits believe they are doing a public service. In the face of these audits, we want to make certain staff are confident responding to questions about intellectual freedom. First Amendment audits will be further discussed at next month's meeting.

Congratulations to Public Services Assistants—Hispanic Focus Amelia Martinez and Diana Antaño and Youth Focus PSA Evie Harman, who will be receiving 2023 Merit Awards from the Washington Library Association for their outreach work to migrant communities in Whatcom County.

The Lynden Library building is turning 20 this year. Our agreement with the City of Lynden says that after 20 years, we can renew our lease for 10 years. Christine and Dianne Marrs-Smith, Manager of Lynden Library, are meeting with City officials at the end of week to discuss extending the agreement. Once updated, the agreement will be brought to the board for approval. The City of Lynden has been a great partner for the last 20 years.

Christine included an article from Business Insider in the March agenda packet about Gen Z's preference for printed books over eBooks. This is the most encouraging news Holly has heard for libraries in a long time.

Staff Reports: Deputy Director

Michael reviewed his report, highlighting recent library programs presented with community partners, such as Self Defense Classes with Arc Tactical and the Columbia Valley Parks and Recreation District and Advanced Care Planning with PeaceHealth. Christine has attended the Advanced Care Planning and highly recommends everyone attends a session. Rod asked how often this event occurs. Michael shared that PeaceHealth hosts these events regularly, and several dates are coming up.

WCLS chooses to co-sponsor events when WCLS' mission aligns with the content of the event and the organization presenting the event and when the event helps us achieve our strategic plan goals. Christine noted that sometimes organizations approach us about events, and sometimes we approach them. Other times we become aware of a group because they've already been using library meeting spaces.

Michael concluded by sharing that the Washington State Library has awarded WCLS eight grants totaling \$6,000 to support staff attendance at the 2023 Washington Library Association conference in Wenatchee. Fifteen staff

members will be attending in person, and one will attend virtually. WCLS has multiple staff members presenting and being recognized at the conference this year.

Staff Reports: Youth Services Manager

Thom exited the meeting early. In his absence, Christine gave a summary of his report, which focuses on Youth Services (YS) outreach programming. YS staff visit parks and schools regularly with programming and events, attempting to reach youth where they are.

Holly asked Christine if YS staff can issue library cards when they visit schools. Christine replied that they likely have the ability but not the time during these visits. All Whatcom County School district students (and Lynden Christian School students) have ConnectED accounts, which allow their student IDs to function as modified library cards.

Outreach work is very time-consuming for YS staff, but it is worth it to connect more youth with library services in Whatcom County.

Staff Reports: Community Relations Manager

Mary said that the 15th season of Whatcom READS was a great success. Attendance was strong at the author events featuring Jess Walter, two of which were sold out. The 2024 Whatcom READS title is *Red Paint: The Ancestral Autobiography of a Coast Salish Punk* by Sasha taq^wšəblu LaPointe.

Christine commented that Whatcom READS is an interesting program because each yearly book selection attracts different community partners and readers. The goal is to inspire people to keep engaging with the program each year. Mary noted that she has never seen a Whatcom READS announcement shared on social media as much as the announcement for *Red Paint*.

Holly asked Mary how the yearly title is selected. Mary answered that anyone can suggest a book online at the Whatcom READS website. The selection committee reads the suggestions and chooses a title based on specific criteria, including that the book must relate to the Pacific Northwest and have an author that the program can afford to have speak at several events. Another significant selection factor is thinking about the kinds of programming that could be developed relating to the book.

Over the past few months, the Community Relations team has been working to evolve the Power of Sharing campaign. The campaign is now focusing on specific messages of how people can use and benefit from library services. From March through May, the Libby app is being highlighted with the headline "Free Audiobooks!" In addition to advertisements featuring this message, staff are wearing lanyards prompting patrons to ask them about Libby and eAudiobooks.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Performance Measures

Michael said that in February increases in the use of digital materials offset decreases in the circulation of physical materials. He also commented that it is great to see patrons returning to Sumas Library. South Whatcom Library's circulation increased from February 2022 to 2023. The total number of new borrowers registered also increased from February 2022 to 2023.

A great number of programs were hosted at WCLS branches in February and use of meeting rooms was up across the System. To Michael, it's beginning to feel like we're getting back to where we were in 2019. However, work to help patrons re-establish their pre-pandemic habits is ongoing.

Holly commented that she would rather know the number of people volunteering for WCLS each month than the total number of hours people volunteered in the Performance Measures Report. Christine said she will let branch manager know to take count of the number of volunteers they have, in addition to their hours.

Discussion followed about how most WCLS volunteer hours represent the work of the Friends of the Library groups. The hours that the Friends put towards their projects directly supports WCLS.

Lisa shared that unique users of Overdrive continued to increase in February. The top lists on the Overdrive landing page were for magazines and eAudiobooks, and it appears that people are engaging with what is suggested on the landing page. The eAudiobook titles with the highest circulation in February were *The Cold Millions* and *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

Kanopy experienced a large decline in use last month. Lisa is trying to figure out if the content on this platform has changed. Digital content is invisible to patrons unless we keep talking about it. Use of the database Creativebug decreased 75% when the campaign promoting it concluded. Use of NewsBank and Value Line also decreased in February.

Lisa noted that behind the graphs representing patron engagement with digital content are stories of how people are using library services to inform and change their lives.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Personnel Committee

Although there is not currently a vacancy on the board, the Personnel Committee is beginning to look for a community member interested in joining the board to fill in for a trustee who may no longer have the capacity to fully participate. The Committee would like to introduce some diversity to the board, and Christine asked the group to contact her if they know of anyone who may be interested.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Whatcom County Library Foundation

No report.

Announcements and Adjourn

Christine presented the new Sumas Library plaque to the group, which honors everyone who contributed to the library repair process following the historic 2021 Nooksack River flooding. The trustees are included on the plaque. It will be installed at the Sumas Library soon.

Rodney adjourned the meeting at 11:26 a.m.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be April 18, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. online via Microsoft Teams and at Administrative Services.

Address: 5205 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226

/s/
Rodney Lofdahl, Chair

04/18/2023
Date

/s/
Em Olpinski, Admin. Assistant