

Library Board of Trustees Regular Meeting

May 16, 2023

Location

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

In Attendance

Trustees: Rodney Lofdahl, Chair; Lori Jump, Vice Chair; Matthew Santos and Holly Robinson. Absent: Erika Lautenbach, Secretary.

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; Geoff Fitzpatrick, IT Services Manager; Beth Andrews, Human Resources Manager; Dianne Marrs-Smith, Lynden Library Manager and Friends of the Birch Bay Library (FOBBL) President; Jennifer Rick, Foundation Development Director; Maggie Mae Nase, Learning Coordinator; Em Olpinski, Administrative Assistant; Christopher Phillips, System Engineer; Mike Earle, Desktop Support Technician; Jonathan Jakobitz; Blaine Library Branch Manager.

Guests: Paul Schissler, Madrona Community Development; Michael Boanta, Moss Adams; Grace McCarthy, the Northern Light; Alex Wenger, City of Blaine; Connie Taylor, Sharman Burnam, Ruth Higgins, Brian Bell, Keith Alesse, Doralee Booth; Friends of the Birch Bay Library.

Call to Order

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

Open Public Comment

No public comment.

Consent Agenda

The Consent Agenda included minutes of the April 18, 2023 Board of Trustees Regular Meeting as well as the following:

Expenditures:

General Fund:

- April 1-15, 2023 payroll: check nos. 1033944374 - 1033944378 and voucher nos. 554759-554908 totaling \$216,604.16 and April 16-30, 2023 payroll: check nos. 1034127540- 1034127543 and voucher nos. 554915-555062 totaling \$209,941.27.
- ACH transactions for employee benefits, telecommunication services and monthly sales/use tax filings totaling \$93,687.04; \$31,305.87 of this is for employee funded contributions to dental insurance premiums, PERS and deferred compensation plans (made via payroll deduction).

- Claim 2023-14G: warrant nos. 1166315-1166335 totaling \$28,868.35
- Claim 2023-15G: warrant nos. 1166571-1166590 totaling \$113,928.76
- Claim 2023-16G: warrant nos. 1167038-1167065 totaling \$94,178.88

Capital Fund:

- Claim 2023-05C: warrant no. 1166336 totaling \$271.50
- Claim 2023-06C: warrant nos. 1166769-1166770 totaling \$15,408.72

Jackie said that on page three of the April meeting minutes, Ruth Nail, WCLS Accountant, found a mistake in the Finance Report section; Jackie has been working on the 2022 State Annual Report, not the 2023 Annual Report. Em commented that they will make this change.

Holly 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, including the April Notes and Highlights section. She shared that the payment due date for property taxes this year was on May 1. At end of April, we had received \$4,435,095 in property tax revenue. In the first week of May we received another \$453,049. We have now received about 50% of our property tax revenue for the year. The Cash Flow reserve fund has been replenished following its utilization in February and March.

In 2022 revenue from investment interest lagged because of the national economy. Because of this, we have budgeted conservatively in this area this year. We are currently on track with expenses for salaries and benefits for 2023 thus far. Utility rates have been increasing in recent months, which Jackie is monitoring. Currently, only 15% of the 2023 fuel budget has been spent. This is because the County has only billed us for two months of our fuel use this year. Overall, our current expenses come to around one third of the 2023 budget, meaning we are currently on track for this point in the year.

Jackie shared some additional updates with the group from April, including that new roofs are currently being installed on the Deming and Sumas library buildings. Jackie will be attending the Government Finance Officers Association Conference in Portland later this month, and the 2022 State Annual Report will be ready to submit once it is reviewed by Christine.

Jackie then presented Resolution 05/16/23-05 amending the 2023 General Fund Budget to the trustees. This amendment reallocates expenses and does not impact the ending fund balance. Changes to the General Fund Budget in the resolution include moving funds originally budgeted for professional services for hosting speakers at All Staff Learning Day (ASLD) to operating rentals and leases to cover the cost of renting charter busses for ASLD. The resolution also updates the General Fund to retain \$15,000 originally budgeted to be transferred to the Capital Fund for the Sumas Library renovation; it will be paid to the City of Sumas in support of the Community Center roof replacement project.

Holly moved to approve Resolution 05/16/23-05 amending the 2023 General Fund Budget, as presented. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

Jackie informed the trustees that she will be presenting another budget amendment at the June board meeting. This amendment will help account for the costs of an upcoming fourth quarter event and will have minimal impact on the 2023 General Fund bottom line.

Following the Financial Report and Resolutions portion of the agenda, the meeting was running about 20 minutes ahead of schedule. To avoid beginning the scheduled executive session early, Christine suggested amending the agenda to move item 11, Management Benefits and Leave Policy Update before item 5, the Executive Session to Discuss WCLS' Cybersecurity Audit Report.

Holly moved to re-order the meeting agenda, as described by Christine. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

Policy Updates

Christine presented the update to Management Benefits and Leave Policy 12.20, which will now include the new Facilities Services Manager position as part of the management team. Lori asked when the new Facilities Services Manager will start. Christine responded that the new manager, Ryan Cullup, will begin on June 5.

Rod moved to approve the updated Management Benefits and Leave Policy 12.20, as presented by Christine. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

Executive Session to Discuss Cybersecurity Audit Report per RCW 42.30.110 (1)(aii)

At 9:17 a.m., Board Chair Rodney Lofdahl moved the meeting to an Executive Session, as per RCW 42.30.110(1)(aii), to discuss WCLS' cybersecurity audit report prepared by Moss Adams with the IT Committee and Michael Boanta of Moss Adams. It was announced that the Executive Session would end at 10:00 a.m. Rodney reconvened Open Session at 10:00 a.m.

Trustee Education – ConnectED

Tamar Clarke, Teen Services Coordinator, gave a presentation to the trustees about ConnectED, a partnership between WCLS and public and private school districts in Whatcom County.

Tamar began her presentation with an anecdote about visiting an English Language Learners (ELL) class at Blaine High School. The class has a variety of students with different first languages. Many of the students need support with English, and the school library has a limited collection of materials in languages other than English. Tamar was invited to the class to introduce the ConnectED program and materials available at WCLS. This was many of the students' first experience with a U.S. public library.

As Tamar was presenting to the class, some of the students had Google Translate open to read what Tamar was saying. Tamar came to the class with a selection of books from WCLS' collection for the students to check out, which included titles in Russian, Spanish, and English.

Melissa Menti, a school librarian for the Mount Baker School District, was one of the original champions of the ConnectED program. Before the creation of ConnectED, the process of getting WCLS materials to Whatcom County students was significantly more complicated. ConnectED now allows students to use their school ID number and a standardized PIN to check out WCLS materials. Library books are delivered directly to several schools in the county to make these materials more accessible to students. ConnectED participants are not penalized for losing WCLS materials and begin each school year with a clean record.

Lori asked Tamar how many books students usually lose in a school year. Tamar responded that Carmi Parker, ILS Administrator, knows the exact number, but the amount is minimal. Holly asked Tamar if students with ConnectED accounts have the same access to WCLS materials as a regular patron. Tamar replied that the students can check out up to four WCLS items at a time, excluding DVDs or other special formats. Students also have 24/7 access to digital content with their modified accounts. Parents or guardians can choose to opt their child out of the program but most allow their child to participate. The ConnectED program includes every school district in Whatcom County, including the Lummi Nation School and Lynden Christian School.

Lori asked if home school students can have ConnectED accounts. Tamar replied that they cannot, but can instead get a standard library card. YS provides resources for homeschool students and educators via WCLS.org, though.

Tamar shared that circulation of materials has been high for ConnectED accounts this year. Circulation increases when YS staff go to classrooms to talk about the program. The schools with the highest circulation have WCLS materials delivered onsite. Sam Wallin, Mobile Services and Distribution Manager, is currently working to find sustainable ways to offer holds delivery to more schools. Several schools also have book returns onsite, and there are plans to install these facilities at additional schools.

Holly asked if there are other library systems offering programs like ConnectED. Tamar responded that some systems offer student access to digital materials, but she is not aware of a program as comprehensive as ConnectED. Lori asked if students get a full access card when they graduate from high school. Tamar responded that WCLS wants to encourage people ages 18 to 24 get a library card, but YS is only working to serve patrons 18 and under.

Matthew asked if reductions in school district funding could impact ConnectED. Tamar replied that for the holds delivery program to function, we need to have an advocate at each school willing to help distribute books. Therefore, reductions in school district resources could impact ConnectED. To be able to maintain this program, it is important to show people the value that the library is bringing to students in the County.

Christine commented that the Bellingham School District recently laid off several media specialists. This could happen at other schools in the county. In the past, there has been some concern that the ConnectED program could disincentivize schools from providing library services onsite. However, it is now clear that ConnectED is a necessary response to diminishing library services in schools.

Tamar concluded by saying that school libraries are essential and that ConnectED cannot fully serve as a replacement. The trustees thanked Tamar for her presentation.

ConnectED Contracts

Thom presented the updated ConnectED Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template to the trustees. In the new template, the initial term of the agreement with schools has been increased from three to five years. All schools will now be on the same schedule. An option for auto-renewal has also been added to the agreement template, in addition to a section that covers how holds delivery, if implemented, would operate. A minor change to the template is that Carmi Parker is no longer collecting the middle names or emails of students. Thom noted that our legal counsel has signed off on these updates.

Holly asked if the template should refer to “parents or guardians” at the mentioning of parent email addresses. Thom commented that he is happy to make this change to the template but will need to have this wording legally reviewed first.

Lori moved to approve the updated ConnectED MOU Template and to authorize the Executive Director to execute MOUs with school districts based on the template, as presented by Thom. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

Holly commented that ConnectED is an excellent program.

Break

Rodney adjourned for a break from 10:29-10:40 a.m.

Birch Bay Library Update

Michael gave the group an update on recent progress that has been made towards the Birch Bay Library project. Michael gave a summary of the history of this project, beginning in 2016 with a library feasibility study and the acquisition of a property in Birch Bay. A community design process followed, and we were awarded a \$2 million Library Capital Improvement Program (LCIP) grant for the project in 2019. Phase two of the project followed, with work being done to inform the project’s cost estimates. Fundraising efforts also began, and we became aware that a LEED certification is required for this project.

Two ballot measures to establish a Library Capital Facility Area in Birch Bay narrowly failed passage in 2021 and 2022, meaning we could not move forward with our original vision for the library. In response to these failed elections, we modified the project scope from a full-service library to a smaller express location. We submitted a

project Scope Change Request in August 2022, requesting use of the grant towards the modified project scope. This was denied in December 2022 but later approved in April 2023.

The next step for this library will be to complete a contract with the Washington State Department of Commerce. Requirements for a contract include a LEED declaration certification, EO21-02 findings from the Department of Archaeology and Historical Preservation (DAHP), and committed funding for the completion of the project.

Michael shared a \$2.6 million budget for the project that was drafted in June 2022. Michael commented that the estimated budget for the new library has changed since then, as some expenses for the project are ineligible for grant reimbursement, such as sales tax. Once we get under contract, we will be able to officially update the project budget. Until then, everything we submit to the Department of Commerce will reflect the project budget from when our Scope Change Request was submitted in August 2022.

Michael then presented a comparison of funding requests for the project from both 2019 and 2022. Our Scope Change Request originally said WCLS would contribute \$381,396 towards the project. Based on updated estimates and considerations, we are now asking the board to approve WCLS contributing up to \$438,000 towards the project. Michael commented that he would explain this amount later in his presentation.

Lori asked Michael if there are any stipulations associated with our \$2 million grant. Lori also asked if we can we modify the project scope again, if necessary. Michael replied that we have to remain consistent with the initial goals of this project; we cannot modify the project to offer fewer services at this location without submitting an additional scope change request.

Rod asked Michael if there is a reason why cost escalation was not accounted for in the 2022 project budget. Michael replied that this choice was made because we have healthy contingencies on this project and are actively trying to complete this project now, not in the future. Not including cost escalation in the project budget shows our commitment to moving forward with this project immediately.

Michael then discussed financial risks that could impact the project moving forward. When we were awarded our LCIP grant in 2019, this grant was in its first cycle and did not require that we contribute a 50% match towards the project. However, every grant cycle since 2019 has required a 50% match. Though we are not positive if it will be required in the future, we need to consider how we would respond if a 50% match becomes required for our grant.

Michael then presented a “worst-case” scenario budget where the Birch Bay project receives no funds from community fundraising and a 50% match is required for our grant. In this scenario WCLS would need to contribute \$438,000 towards the new library, and we would not necessarily expect to have these funds reimbursed. Based on this projection, today we are asking the board to make a formal motion identifying \$438,000 within the Facility Ownership and Library Services Fund Reserve to commit to the Birch Bay Library project.

Christine said that we will not be able to get under contract with the State until we can show that we have funding for this project secured. Once we are under contract, we will know if we have to contribute a 50% match towards our grant. Overall, we have strong community support for the Birch Bay Library, but the larger community might not understand the nuances of this project and why the library isn’t farther along yet. To sustain the community’s support, we need to take the step of securing funding for the project.

Lori commented that she is curious if a Library Express will be able to adequately serve Birch Bay. Christine said that she recently visited the former Vogt home, which will house the new Library Express, and came to the realization that this library will be only slightly smaller than Island Library or the Point Roberts Library. The location also has a large outdoor space, which will be great for library programming. Our dream was to provide Birch Bay with a full-service library, but based on the circumstances, this is the next best option.

Holly commented that the library will also have a small indoor meeting space. Christine explained that we are calling this location a Library Express because it will not be staffed during all open hours, and patrons will be able

to scan their cards to enter the building. Dianne commented that this location will be a hybrid between our full-service libraries and other Library Express locations.

Lori asked the other trustees what their feeling are on committing nearly \$500,000 towards a Library Express.

Holly believes that this library will meet a tremendous need in the Birch Bay community. Even though the browsing collection at this library will be small, 30% of WCLS' circulation comes from holds, and this location will meet that need. Rod is of the same thought and believes that given our constraints, this library will serve the community well. Our current expectation is that we will not have to contribute a 50% match of the \$2 million grant towards the project, which makes what we're committing to less daunting.

Holly mentioned that the small community of Point Roberts was able to raise more than \$500,000 to construct the Point Roberts Library. There are people out there to advise the Friends on fundraising, and it is likely that a significant amount of WCLS' contribution to the project can be recouped.

Rod said that in an environment where people are using more online services, it might not be necessary for all library facilities to be as large as they traditionally have been. Matthew said that he appreciates Lori's questions about this project. For him, the advocacy it took to get the Scope Change Request approved by legislators makes the potential risks worth it. He also appreciates that this library will have opportunities for programming and feels that this space will be important to the youth of Birch Bay. Holly commented that the majority of students in the Blaine School District actually live in Birch Bay.

Lori asked the Friends of Birch Bay Library in attendance if they will continue their fundraising efforts once the library has opened. Connie Taylor replied that the Friends want to fully reimburse WCLS and plan to continue fundraising after the library has opened. Dianne Marrs-Smith commented that the Birch Bay community is ready to help fund the library, but they need to know with certainty that the project is moving forward.

Doralee Booth said that the Friends had to turn away a \$25,000 donation because the project was in flux, but they are still in communication with this donor. The Friends have plans to begin asking each household in Birch Bay to commit \$38 a year towards the Library. Doralee also shared that the median age of a Birch Bay resident is 53.7. The Library will offer a great resource to the seniors of this community.

Matthew asked if libraries WCLS has opened in the past have had a good return on investment for both WCLS and the communities they're serving. Christine responded that we have had success working with local community groups in the past.

Rod moved to approve earmarking \$438,000 within the Facility Ownership and Library Services Fund Reserve for the Birch Bay Library project. Seconded. Unanimous board approval.

Christine thanked the Friends of Birch Bay Library for attending the meeting and advocating for this project.

Blaine Library Update

The Kulshan Community Land Trust (KulshanCLT) has voiced interest in partnering on the construction of a mixed-use facility in Blaine that would house a new library on the ground floor of the building and affordable housing units on the floors above. Christine shared that the KulshanCLT has access to funds to conduct a feasibility study for the project, but they need to know that WCLS is interested in this project before they can move forward with the study. Today we are asking the board to voice our interest in this project and the outcome of the feasibility study with a formal motion.

WCLS already had an MOU with the City of Blaine and the Friends of Blaine Library for the design process of a new library. The Friends helped fundraise for these efforts, and the design process for a 10,000 square foot library was conducted in 2019. This work should be considered while exploring the new mixed-use vision.

Christine commented that the KulshanCLT has a lot of experience and expertise, and the City of Blaine has shown interest in this project. There are many factors that need to be considered for the mixed-use library model, such as having adequate parking onsite and soundproofing between the library and housing units. Christine has included other items for consideration in the May agenda packet.

Holly commented that the success of this mixed-use library model has already been observed across the country. Lori and Rod believe this model is a great idea, and Matthew commented that as a Blaine resident, he thinks this is an exciting opportunity.

Over Microsoft Teams, Alex Wenger with the City of Blaine said that he is excited about this project, and it would be great to have support for the feasibility study from WCLS. He also commented that the new mixed-use library project will be discussed at the May 22 Blaine City Council meeting. Also over Teams, Paul Schissler of Madrona Community Development said that he will be assisting KulshanCLT with this project. This mixed-use library model is not common in Washington, and he believes the project will attract funding.

Matthew moved to approve the KulshanCLT moving forward with a feasibility study and/or the initial design work for a proposed mixed-use library facility in Blaine. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

Christine said that she will be attending the May 22 Blaine City Council meeting and suggested that the trustees attend if they are able. Matthew commented that he will attend in-person, and Holly said that she will attend the meeting virtually.

Staff Reports: Executive Director

In addition to her written report, Christine highlighted “Third Thursdays Trustee Conversations For and About Libraries” now being offered virtually for library trustees and directors by the Washington State Library. These events can be attended live, or recordings of the conversations can be viewed asynchronously.

Holly asked Christine if she knows why the State Library has begun facilitating these conversations. Christine is not certain, but she knows that Secretary of State Steve Hobbs is passionate about libraries. There have also been multiple challenges to library materials across the state in the past year, and the State Library may want to make certain that library trustees know how to support libraries in these situations.

Staff Reports: Deputy Director

In his May report, Michael discussed printing services and fees at WCLS. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we developed a process where patrons could email us print requests. This printing system allows staff to focus their time on assisting patrons with information needs, not on collecting funds. Michael concluded his report by sharing some data about the types of documents being printed at the library. Holly commented that she loves the story that this data shows about how the library is helping patrons.

Staff Reports: Youth Services Manager

Thom shared his written report, highlighting the 2023 Summer Reading program. This year the program is structured around a community goal with the Whatcom Million Trees Project (WMTP). If Summer Reading participants complete a total of 5000 activities, the WMTP will plant 200 trees in Whatcom County forests this fall. There will be an abundance of tree-themed programming this summer and visual displays in branch libraries to track our progress towards the community goal. Thom thanked the Whatcom County Library Foundation (WCLF) and the Whatcom Educational Credit Union (WECU) for supporting WCLS’ 2023 Summer Reading program. He also thanked Sarah Lavender for her work as chair of the Summer Reading Committee.

Christine thanked Mary for applying for funding from WECU and working to steward a relationship with this organization. Mary commented that WECU believes in libraries and the Summer Reading program.

Thom announced that the 2023 edition of the county-wide teen poetry anthology A Forest of Words just arrived. This year’s anthology is 112 pages long and features 97 teen poets. It was designed by Cynthia French. An event to celebrate the poetry collection and those who contributed to it is being hosted at the Ferndale Library on Thursday, May 18.

Staff Reports: Community Relations Manager

In the interest of time, Mary asked everyone to read her report, which discusses retention of borrowers at public libraries. Holly thanked Mary for bringing this topic to the trustees' attention.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Performance Measures

Michael shared that circulation of electronic materials continued to increase in April, but total circulation of materials was down year-to-date from April 2022, which is the first time this has occurred since the emergency closures of branch libraries at the beginning of the pandemic. Holly asked Michael if increases in electronic circulation did not counteract decreases in physical circulation in April. Michael said that this is correct.

Michael shared that the South Whatcom door counter has logged lower than average door counts the past two months. There are plans to check this door counter to make certain it is operating correctly, and we are still working to set up daily door count reports in the new Microsoft 365 environment.

Holly commented that there is a disconnect for her between the decrease in circulation and the increase in new borrowers observed in April. Michael responded that circulation and new borrowers are not always directly related. Library programming is also continuing to expand, which could account for people getting library cards but not necessarily checking out materials.

Lisa said that with the recent iteration of the Power of Sharing campaign, which focuses on free audiobooks available on the Libby app, she expected there would be a jump in new Overdrive users. This trend has not been observed, but March and April had record highs in eAudio checkouts, showing that the campaign may have re-energized pre-existing users.

Christine said that she has seen the Power of Sharing advertisements on busses across the county, including while on a drive with Washington State Librarian Sara Jones.

There was a small increase in Kanopy use in April, and aggregate database use has remained steady. Lisa concluded by announcing that the Power of Sharing will switch to highlighting the database Creativebug in June.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Personnel Committee

No report.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Whatcom County Library Foundation

Lori gave a summary of the WCLF report, and commented that she has enjoyed her role as WCLF liaison thus far. Library Giving Day donations have come to over \$18,500, and the Foundation recently received a \$3,000 grant from the Whatcom Community Foundation for the upcoming Summer Jazz Series. The Airolodi Innovation Fund has received \$9,500 in donations since it was founded late last year. Lori also shared that Branch Out will be held on September 8, and there are currently two vacancies on the WCLF board.

Jennifer commented that Mary's report has inspired her to think more about retention. WCLF averages a 46% retention rate for yearly donors, which is above the national average. This is something she feels good about.

Announcements and Adjourn

Lori informed the group that she will be absent from the June and July board meetings.

Rodney adjourned the meeting at 12:01 p.m.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be June 20, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. online via Microsoft Teams and at Administrative Services.
Address: 5205 Northwest Drive, Bellingham.

<u> /s/ </u>	<u> 06/20/2023 </u>	<u> /s/ </u>
Rodney Lofdahl, Chair	Date	Em Olpinski, Admin. Assistant