

Library Board of Trustees Regular Meeting

October 21, 2025

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; Matthew Santos, Vice Chair; Danielle Gaughen, Secretary; and John Miller. Absent: Jes Stugelmayer with prior notice.

Staff: Christine Perkins, Executive Director; Jackie Saul, Director of Finance and Administration; Thom Barthelmess, Youth Services Manager; Mary Vermillion, Community Relations Manager; Lisa Gresham, Collection Services Manager; Ryan Cullup, Facilities Services Manager; Beth Andrews, Human Resources Manager; Dianne Marrs-Smith, Birch Bay and Lynden Library Manager and Friends of the Birch Bay Library (FOBBL) President; Maggie Mae Nase, Learning Coordinator; Mary Kinser, Collection Development Librarian; Emma Radosevich, Collection Development Librarian.

Guests: None.

Call to Order

Rod determined quorum and called the meeting to order at 9:04 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 September 16, 2025, Board of Trustees Regular Meeting as well as the following:

Expenditures:

General Fund:

- Aug 16-31, 2025 payroll: check nos. 1044280039-1044280042 and voucher nos. 563781-563927 totaling \$240,726.89 and September 1-15, 2025 payroll: check nos. 1044449143-1044449149 and voucher nos. 563932-564079 totaling \$239,216.94.
- ACH transactions for employee benefits, telecommunication services and monthly sales/use tax filings totaling \$83,693.46; \$48,230.61 of this is for employee-funded contributions to dental and vision insurance premiums, Health Savings Accounts, and PERS and deferred compensation plans (made via payroll deduction).

- Claim 2025-35G: warrant nos. 1263168-1263185 totaling \$42,628.85
- Claim 2025-36G: warrant nos. 1263283-1263291 totaling \$134,712.02
- Claim 2025-37G: warrant nos. 1263587-1263617 totaling \$30,461.73
- Claim 2025-38G: warrant nos. 1263987-1264008 totaling \$226,958.29
- Claim 2025-39G: warrant nos. 1264471-1264490 totaling \$52,804.96

Capital Fund:

- Claim 2025-15C: warrant nos. 1264491-1264493 totaling \$5,268.35

Authorization to Void Warrants:

- Resolution 10/21/25-15 voiding warrants that are more than one year old
- Resolution 10/21/25-16 voiding warrant 1263182

Danielle moved to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Seconded. Unanimous board approval.

Administrative Services Easement Agreement

Ryan provided a status update for this project. Two electric vehicle (EV) charging stations have been installed at Administrative Services. In accordance with the PSE grant funding, we have purchased two electric vehicles that will be delivered in March 2026. The new EVs are Chevrolet Blazers and will replace a Toyota Prius and a Dodge Grand Caravan. The easement shared today is necessary for PSE to install a pole for the power provided to the charging stations.

Rod moved to approve the utility easement agreement as presented. Seconded. Unanimous board approval.

Policy Update

Services to Students and School Staff Policy 4.05 – Thom explained that this policy was last reviewed 28 years ago. The model of how WCLS works with schools has changed since then and is reflected in the update. Christine noted the prior intent of the policy was to support school librarians. Since many of those positions have been eliminated the new focus is to promote students' literacy and love of reading.

Danielle moved to approve the updates Services to Students and School Staff Policy 4.05, as presented. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Christine provided an update on the ConnectED agreement with the Ferndale School District. The agreement was originally signed in 2023 by an administrator on behalf of the superintendent. The school district believes this did not follow their process, as the agreement should have been signed by the superintendent after review by the School Board. They requested that ConnectED services be suspended temporarily while the agreement is considered again, following their process. We have provided a copy of the agreement to the district and it is currently under review. We have complied with their request to pause services, providing an explanatory notice to students and canceling previously scheduled school visits. We have provided the district with data about the ConnectED program and its use in Ferndale, and are available to meet with district administration and/or the School Board upon request.

Rod made a motion to move the Closed Executive Session to 10:25 a.m. and continue with the meeting agenda until then. Seconded and approved unanimously.

Financial Report and Resolutions: Finance Committee Report

Jackie reviewed her report, including the September Notes and Highlights section. Property taxes continue to lag as is normal for this time of year and we will see an influx in October and November. Printing services are being heavily used, demonstrating this is a need in the community. Jackie reported that the e-Rate program funding will be in the form of discounted internet service bills rather than reimbursement. Today's budget amendment adjusts this. Jackie also noted that because this is a federal program, the billing discounts may be delayed by the shutdown.

On the expense side, salaries and wages are just slightly below budget. We are filling vacancies that were held open prior to the Levy Lid Lift election. Benefits are under budget due to a reduction in PERS contribution rates in July, reducing this year's cost by approximately \$120,000. This is also addressed in the budget amendment. Small tools and equipment expenses are also underspent.

Jackie reported that the Levy Lid Lift election cost was \$196,000, paid to the County Auditor's Office in September. We originally estimated the cost to be \$250,000 but did not include it in the budget until we had the final cost. This expense will be offset by the PERS savings mentioned above. Jackie explained that the PERS rate reduction was the result of eliminating the subsidy charged to PERS 2 and 3 employers to offset the unfunded PERS 1 liability. Current PERS rates are set through July 2027 and Jackie does not believe the subsidy will be reinstated.

Utility costs are also running above budget and will be addressed in the budget amendment.

Jackie then presented an amendment to the 2025 General Fund Budget. As mentioned above, benefits are reduced to offset the increase to Professional Services. In addition to the election costs, the Professional Services increase includes funds for additional Microsoft Office licenses for public computers. Small Tools and Equipment costs are reduced and utilities costs are increased.

Overall this amendment reduces revenue by \$4,000 and increases expenses by \$21,000, for a net decrease to the fund balance of \$25,000.

Danielle moved to approve Resolution 10/21/25-17 amending the 2025 General Fund Budget as presented. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

2025 Strategic Action Plan Update and Preparation for 2026

Christine provided a brief review of 2025 action items and status updates on various projects.

The Service Needs Assessment project was included in the 2025 Action Plan in the event the Levy Lid Lift was not approved by voters and service adjustments were needed to reduce costs. As an alternative, WCLS will conduct an assessment in 2026 to guide strategic planning. Danielle suggested including it in next year's All Staff Learning Day.

Christine then shared the 2026 Action Plan. She noted that the current Strategic Plan covers 2022-2025 but we would like to extend it into 2026 and adopt a new plan for 2027. This will allow sufficient time for surveys and planning, including the assessment discussed above.

Christine discussed other projects and action items planned for 2026, including backfilling the Facilities Planning Coordinator position that was vacated a few years ago when a staff member entered partial retirement.

A marketing plan has been developed for 2026, after input received during Levy Lid Lift presentations that many community members are not aware of all the services WCLS has to offer. While not included in the draft budget, Christine proposed adding an entry level communication generalist position to assist with this. Trustees support implementing this position next year rather than waiting until after Strategic Planning.

Trustees are supportive of the plan as presented. Beth noted that implementation of a new Learning Management System should be added to the 2026 Strategic Action Plan as it is likely this project will carryover into next year.

Break

Rod adjourned for a break from 10:04-10:15 a.m.

Staff Reports: Executive Director

In addition to her written report, Christine discussed a recent *Bellingham Herald* article indicating Bellingham Public Library is facing significant budget cuts and will be eliminating Sunday hours and reducing their collection materials budget. Lisa explained that their reduced collection budget will impact WCLS patrons due to our shared collection. WCLS has a lower holds ratio, resulting in a service discrepancy that will be difficult for WCLS selectors to navigate. BPL's collection is further impacted by the closure of Baker & Taylor, a library materials supplier.

Staff Reports: Deputy Director

Christine shared Michael's report, highlighting the Village Books gift registry established for the jail library collection.

Closed Executive Session to Discuss MOU to 2025-2029 Bargaining Unit Contract and 2026 Wage & Benefit Negotiations

At 10:25 a.m., Board Chair Rod Lofdahl moved the meeting to Closed Session, as per RCW 42.30.140(4)(a), to discuss an MOU to the 2025-2029 Bargaining Unit Contract and the 2026 Wage and Benefit Agreement. He stated that the Closed Session would end at 10:50 a.m.

At 10:50 a.m., Rod reconvened Open Session for final action on the MOU to the 2025-2029 Bargaining Unit Contract and the 2026 Wage and Benefit Agreement.

2026 MOU to 2025-2029 Bargaining Unit Contract and 2026 Wage & Benefit Negotiations

John joined the meeting.

Christine shared her appreciation for the negotiations teams and for the collaborative process. Rod and John, who participated in negotiations, agreed. Dianne expressed the Union team's thanks as well. She reported that the Union membership approved the agreement unanimously.

Rod moved to approve 2026 Wage and Benefits Agreement, Contract MOU, and holiday calendar. Seconded. Unanimous Board approval.

Financial Report and Resolutions, continued

Jackie presented a draft of the 2026 General Fund Budget. She noted this is for informational purposes only and no action will be taken today.

The 2026 property tax levy calculations will not follow the complicated 1% increase and new construction model as in other years. The 2026 levy will equal \$0.42 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, as

approved by voters. Jackie anticipates an increase to investment interest, and most other revenue sources will remain flat.

Salaries and benefit costs reflect the wage increases approved above, reduced PERS rates, and increased health insurance rates. The collection materials budget, which has been flat for the past few years, is increased to equal approximately 13% of operating expenses. Jackie noted that collection spending may be impacted by reduced circulation resulting from Bellingham Central Library and Ferndale Library construction projects; this will be addressed next year as needed.

Small tools and minor equipment spending is increased as we anticipate deferred replacement of fixtures, furnishings and equipment. Travel costs are increased to allow staff to attend conferences and participated in professional development opportunities. This has been on hold for the past few years.

Funds are budgeted for the strategic planning process, including a professional survey of community members. Funds are also budgeted for a classification and compensation study, as agreed upon during union negotiations. WCLS last conducted such a study in 2017.

This draft budget will result in a net income of \$4.8 million and an ending fund balance of just under \$14 million. A portion of these funds will be designated for the Levy Stabilization Fund and other designated funds. This will be discussed at next month's meeting.

Trustee Education: Freedom to Read

Collection Development Librarians Mary Kinser and Emma Radosevich gave a presentation on WCLS's Freedom to Read training. They are part of the WCLS Right to Read team and have trained over 190 WCLS staff members. The training is intended to teach staff to think with nuance and thoughtfulness about big library ideas and professional ethics, particularly those staff who do not have a library background. The training ensures WCLS staff are grounded in library values and understand what makes library work different from other professions. The training is required for all WCLS staff, and they are encouraged to attend at a different location from their regular work location so they interact with others in the system. At the end of the training staff are provided with tools and resources to have conversations with patrons.

Staff Reports, continued: Youth Services Manager

Thom shared his written report and highlighted the mock Caldecott award committee program for staff. He invited Trustees to join as well.

Danielle noted that she recently shared information from the Not If But When booklist with a family member.

Staff Reports: Community Relations Manager

Mary noted that a copy of *Solito: A Memoir*, the 2026 Whatcom READS selection, was given to each Trustee. She highlighted in her report a new WCLS podcast episode featuring Deming Cultural Liaison Marty Jimmy and artist Jason LaClair discussing Jason's mural that was recently installed at the Deming Library.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Performance Measures

Christine shared that our program attendance, database usage, and circulation numbers will be impacted by the pause of ConnectED services in Ferndale as discussed above. We also anticipate that

the construction of the Ferndale Civic Campus will affect Ferndale Library statistics over the next two years.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Personnel Committee

Rod's term as a Trustee ends in January and recruitment for a new Trustees will begin soon. Christine hopes to hold interviews in November. Support of intellectual freedom is a critical qualification for the position.

A survey was sent to Trustees and staff members as part of Christine's annual evaluation. The survey deadline is October 31.

Beth will route the Bargaining Agreement MOU and Wage and Benefit Agreement for signature via DocuSign.

Performance Measures & Committee Reports: Whatcom County Library Foundation

The annual All-Friends and Foundation Gathering is Wednesday, October 22, 2:00-4:00 at the Blaine Library. Friends of the Blaine Library are generously providing cupcakes for the event.

Announcements and Adjourn

Maggie Mae reported that our next All Staff Learning Day has been scheduled for Friday, March 20, 2026.

John shared an enthusiastic recommendation of *The Book of Wilding: a Practical Guide to Rewilding Big and Small* by Isabella Tree and Charlie Burrell.

Rod adjourned the meeting at 11:39 a.m.

Next Meeting

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held on November 18, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. online via Microsoft Teams and at Administrative Services, 5205 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226.

/s/	11/18/2025	/s/
Danielle Gaughen, Board Secretary	Date	Jackie Saul, Director of Finance and Administration