

WATAUGA COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD

Minutes

Thursday, November 7, 2024

4:00 p.m.

Present: Natalie Harkey, Wendy Jessen, Margaret Love, Hollis Smith, Mary Stolberg, Patricia Swartzbaugh (Chair), Candice Trexler

Present for the library: Monica Caruso (Watauga County Librarian), Deanna Evans (Youth Services Manager), Monica Gowan (Seed Library Volunteer), Ingrid Hayes (Adult Services), Tammy Holston (Appalachian Regional Library Finance Director & Co-Interim Director), Laura McPherson (Ashe County Librarian & Co-Interim Director)

Absent: Cheryl Angel (ex-officio), Claire Olander (ex-officio)

1. Call to Order & Welcome

Patti Swartzbaugh called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. She introduced staff members and guests attending the meeting (Ingrid, Monica Gowan, Deanna, and Laura).

2. Approval of Minutes – September 5, 2024

Minutes from September 5 were reviewed - Margaret Love moved to approve the minutes as written/Hollis Smith seconded. Minutes were approved.

3. Correspondence and Communication – None to report

4. Report of the Watauga County Library/Five Year Plan Progress –

- Monica Caruso began her report by giving a brief update post-Hurricane Helene, given that this was the first WCL Board meeting since the floods. The WCL was closed for 4 days, then re-opened on shortened hours. The library was “flooded” with patrons. Staff helped with accessing FEMA assistance; in the first week, 2,410 Wi-Fi sessions were logged, with Western Watauga reporting 1,000 sessions. 1,100 DVDs were rented during the month of October. In the Western Watauga branch, the National Guard used the library as a staging ground for assistance. Adult Services assisted many with accessing relocation services.
- In community engagement news, Monica was on the radio on Thursday, November 7.
- A volunteer appreciation breakfast will be held on Friday, November 15 at the Jones House.
- The library will be closed for a half-day on Tuesday, November 19 for staff training day, which will include CPR training. Lunch will be sponsored by the Friends of the Library.
- In grants & foundation news, the Friends Endowment approved \$10,000 towards the patio improvement project. The Adult Literary grant applied for earlier this year was declined by the Appalachian Regional Library Board, given the uncertainty of staffing amid the extra workload implementing the grant would entail. Staff are in the process of searching for other grants available. The LSTA grant is due on March 1, 2025.

5. Report of the Co-Interim Regional Directors – Tammy Holston and Laura McPherson

- Tammy reported on personnel updates:
 - The annual reviews usually due by the end of the year have been postponed until the first quarter of 2025, to maintain consistency across the region, as well as to line up more by the fiscal year.
 - Half-day staff trainings are being planned.
- Laura reported on policy updates:
 - The most pressing challenge remains updating meeting room policies. Given that libraries are “public forums” and protected by First Amendment designation, the language and implementation of consistent policies is important. Librarians can set behavior-based restrictions. The uses of library

meeting rooms have changed since the pandemic, and it is important to update policies to meet these changing needs.

- Tammy provided an update on grants:
 - Previous Director Jacob Stark recommended not moving forward with the NCDIT grant, but with the devastation the region has faced since Hurricane Helene, grant makers have offered to change the focus of the grant. Work could be channeled through the High Country Council of Governments and the purpose shift to replacing technology for local citizens. The WCL will be working with other agencies to distribute equipment, with a due date of November 12th for prices of needed equipment.
 - Department of Commerce Rural Economic Development Division grants are still outstanding and will need to be re-submitted by January or April 2025.

6. Financial Report – Tammy Holston

- Tammy's report on finances showed the restricted donation from the Endowment of \$10,170 for patio upgrades, and a small amount received to go towards the building expansion project and chair cushions for the adult services area.

7. Report of the Friends of the Library – Monica Caruso on behalf of Claire Olander

- The Friends now have 268 members.
- The semi-annual Friends Book Sale will be held the first week in December.
- Social media posts and engagement have increased.
- The 50th Anniversary Party on September 21 was a success.
- Hurricane Helene destroyed Little Free Libraries in many places, including at the Valle Crucis Park. Wink Winkelman is building three replacement Little Free Libraries.
- Progress has been made to implement an online payment button.
- David Goldston will be filing IRS Form 990 on behalf of the Friends, as well as researching the use of Venmo for books sales, and applying for a sales solicitation license.
- The Boone United Methodist Church donated all leftover books from their Bazaar for the Friends Book Sale.

8. Friends of Western Watauga Branch – Patti Swartzbaugh on behalf of Cheryl Angel

- Patti reported that the planned basket raffle was postponed because of the devastation caused by the Hurricane and the need to re-direct attention
- The Watauga County Arts Council have been awarded \$3000 to continue the dulcimer arts programming at local schools, but implementation will be delayed because of storm/flooding concerns.
- Christmas Drive-Through has also been changed due to the conditions in our area following the hurricane. More info is to come regarding the plans for the re-vamped event, but it will most likely be a 3 day drop-in event and occur on December 17, 18, and 19th.
- The Dementia Group is planning to offer a support group on the first Sunday of each month, without a peer group. Two returning students are working with the peer group, and the plan is to hire one additional person, as well as a part-time coordinator. The group has hired a new IT manager to manage the web site and Facebook page. The WW Friends who volunteered to conduct peer groups during the summer were recognized and thanked for their excellent work.
- The Community Center (and by extension the WW Branch) and its staff have worked tirelessly to support storm relief efforts, including hosting the National Guard and becoming a distribution center for needed goods for the community.
- *On behalf of Jackie Cornette (WW Branch Librarian):* The Community Center is still a drop-off and pickup distribution center for the surrounding area.
- The 4 County Outreach program that Jackie oversaw, and that was scheduled for October 16th in Avery County, was cancelled and hopes are to have Amazing AI in April or May of 2025.

- The decision has been made not to have the Senior Drive-through Christmas this year. We are co-sponsoring a 3-day hot chocolate refreshment table with gift bags available for seniors to pick up December 17th, 18th and 19th. There will be a special picture day with Santa.
- Great library statistics for October. Wireless Sessions totaled 6,051. Prior to this, the highest wireless usage was 2,420 for June of 2024.

9. Old Business – Monica Caruso

- A Watauga representative for the regional board is still needed, to replace both Roberta Jackson and Sandi Basel. Mary Stolberg volunteered, but the appointment needs board approval. Natalie Harkey moved to accept the appointments; Margaret Love seconded. There were resounding cheers all around.

10. New Business – Monica Caruso

- Dates were presented for 2025 WCL Board meetings. Mary Stolberg moved to accept the dates as presented; Natalie Harkey seconded, and the dates were approved.
- Monica Gowan, the Seed Library volunteer, introduced herself again and encouraged the Board and staff to discuss ideas for grant funding for the seed library.

11. Adjournment – Patti Swartzbaugh adjourned the meeting at 4:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret L. Love

DRAFT