

WATAUGA COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD

Minutes

Thursday, January 8, 2026

4:00 p.m.

Present: Cheryl Keller (for Martha Gray, ex-officio), Margaret Love, Tom Shessler, Patricia Swartzbaugh (chair)

Teams: Cheryl Angel, Natalie Harkey, Mary Stolberg

Present for the library: Monica Caruso (Watauga County Librarian); Tammy Holston (ARL Finance Director), Russell Taylor (ARL Director)

Absent: Wendy Jessen, Martha Gray, Emily Greene, Candice Trexler

1. Call to Order & Welcome

Patty Swartzbaugh called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes –November 6, 2025

- Due to a lack of quorum, approval of minutes will be postponed to the next meeting.

3. Correspondence and Communication – None to report

4. Report of the Watauga County Public Library –Monica Caruso

- Monica reported that WCL is still awaiting word from Carolina Furnishing and Design regarding installation of the three modular rooms. The current delivery estimate is the first or second week of January, with installation taking place within the library. Two rooms have booth seating. The ADA-compliant unit will be in the adult services area. Three laptops will be purchased for in-house use instead of mounted computers within the rooms.
- Monica has received a second estimate on the patio door; she is waiting for County approval to move forward and will request funding from the WCL Endowment. The second estimate was roughly \$3,600 for materials and installation, with insulated glass and a push-style exit bar.
- Monica was on the radio this morning with Lisa Reynolds to discuss the renovation ribbon cutting and the WCL Friends of the Library Murder Mystery Fundraiser.
- Tomorrow, 58 children from Parkway School (2nd grade) are visiting for a field trip. Staff will share information about youth services programming, give small groups tours of different areas, and end up in the conference room for activities and lunch.
- On behalf of Jackie Cornette, Monica mentioned that the Western Watauga Branch is working with a new book lease program with 10 books per month (adult & juvenile).
- The Jane Austen 250th Birthday celebration was a success.

5. Report of the Western Watauga Branch – Cheryl Angel

- Cheryl passed along from Jackie Cornette that the Western Watauga Branch is hosting a rescheduled outreach program in May 2026. They are networking with [Intermountain Children’s Services](#), a program of Head Start in Bakersville, NC. The program will be held at Williams YMCA of Avery County, and lunch will be served for 150 Head Start children at the Avery County Cooperative Extension Center, provided by EFNEP ([Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program](#)). This will be the second outreach program in partnership with Head Start outside of Watauga County.
- A new project is beginning, in partnership with an Oral Historian with the Special Collections Research Center at ASU, who will collect local Watauga stories. They will conduct interviews and recordings. Topics range from

agriculture to the 1940 flood to Hurricane Helene. Outreach book delivery program participants will be participants as well.

6. Report of the Director – Russell Taylor

- *Administrative Updates:* The regional staff training day has been scheduled for Thursday, April 16th, at the Ashe Public Library. Details about the training will be forthcoming as they are worked out.
 - Budget season is here. The County Librarians, Russell and Tammy, will be working together to develop our budget requests for each county. The county budget work sessions are at different times in the next four months.
 - There is an issue with the HVAC cooling tower at the Wilkes Public Library; the whole thing needs to be replaced. It is in imminent danger of failing, which means that the lower floor of the library would not have heat or air conditioning. The estimate for repairs has come in at \$58,000. Russell is working to schedule a meeting with Wilkes County Manager John Yates to discuss the repair.
 - Russell and Tammy are working with Deron Geouque, Watauga County Manager, to have John Arnaud named the architect of record by the Watauga County Commissioners for the Watauga Public Library Renovation Project. This will make him the Project Manager, with authority to negotiate and hire contractors and to handle all issues related to the project.
- *Personnel Updates:* Ashe currently has one 19-hour Circulation Assistant position open.
 - Watauga is currently fully staffed.
 - Wilkes is currently fully staffed, though Technical Services Manager Nicole de Bruijn is scheduled to retire as of January 23rd. Youth Services Specialist Brigett Adams will be promoted to the Tech Services Manager position effective January 24th. The current plan is to refill Brigett's position with one Part-Time Tech Services Specialist and one Part-Time Library Assistant.
- *Technology Updates:* We're rolling out self-check units purchased with the Digital Champion Grant at all locations. These self-checks have touch screens and operate with the existing open-source Evergreen self-check feature, so there are NO ongoing costs associated with the project.
 - We've signed a new contract for broadband and WAN services across all 5 buildings that will begin on July 1, 2026. The costs for our broadband and WAN services will decrease in monthly fees compared to our previous contracts, while increasing speed at all locations. The federal E-Rate program reimburses 90% of these monthly costs when we file our monthly invoices.
 - Our firewall vendor (Sonicwall) recently released an update that improved our content filtering.
 - We finished up the final steps of the grant-funded replacement of our server and disaster recovery equipment. We have also updated our disaster recovery plan that details how we would recover from a major issue at any of our buildings, or if something happened to the Technology Manager.
- *Policy updates:* The second reading of the revised Circulation Policy will be presented to the Governance Committee of the Regional Board for their approval. Pending committee approval, the proposal will go to the full Board for its approval.
 - Work on the revisions to the Collection Development Policy was paused in the Fall due to several issues. The Collection Development Policy Committee will be reformed in late January or early February to have a draft ready for the Board in either May or July.
- *Strategic planning updates:* The administrative team reviewed the three viable proposals presented by companies or individuals with the knowledge and experience to assist the ARL with the upcoming strategic planning process. A recommendation will be made to the Regional Board and, pending approval by the Board, the company or individual will be approached about their willingness to work with ARL on the

project. The information will be used to complete the LSTA funding application due to the State Library by March 1st.

7. Financial Report – Tammy Holston

- *Revenue changes:* \$84.00 in restricted donations were received - \$3 for books, \$81 for Adult Supplies. The 2024-2025 reimbursement for the VITA grant was higher than the amount accrued by \$15.66.
- *Budget transfers:* \$500 was transferred from Contracted Services to Adult Professional Services; \$300 was transferred from Contracted Services to Adult Supplies.
- The 2025-2026 VITA grant has not been received yet, so it cannot be added to the budget until that has been received. Tax season is supposed to start in the next couple of weeks; nothing can be spend towards that program without confirmation – including laptops, supplies, paper, cartridges, printer, etc. While previous laptops can be reused, consumable supplies such as printer ink cannot.
- The NCCMT - Watauga Building Fund earned \$139.20, for a new balance of \$43,888.03.

8. Report of the Friends of the Library – Cheryl for Martha Gray

- The FOL Renovation Committee has received \$660,000 in renovation funding, or about 40% of the funding goal.
- A Kick-off will be held next Tuesday, January 13th, from 12-1 p.m., with a ribbon cutting in collaboration with the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of the event is to bring the campaign to the public and raise awareness. Architect John Arnaud will give tours, and there will be light refreshments.
- A fundraising event, Murder in the Stacks, will be held on Friday, January 23, from 5-7 p.m. in the library. Guests will interact with costumed actors and solve a crime using clues that they will hear and see along the way. Refreshments will be provided. High Country Writers wrote the basic script.
- Mugs, tote bags, and notebooks are for sale as a fundraiser.
- Renovation Planning Committee meetings are held on the first Friday of each month at 10 a.m.
- The November 2025 “Giving at Potlucks” gathering was successful; over 35 people attended, and \$3,152 was raised.
- The used book store earned \$1674 in November and a little over \$1,600 in December; this is an increase from about \$1,200 in 2025.
- The Big Books Sale in December sold over 5,000 items, as well as merchandise. \$4,600 was raised.
- The Friends hosted the WCL staff luncheon on Thursday, December 18. \$20 gift cards were presented to each library employee.

9. Friends of Western Watauga Branch – Tom Shessler

- The Christmas party was held on Wednesday, December 17, with Santa & Mrs. Claus. Guests were presented with gift bags from the Council on Aging and the Library. The basket raffle drawing raised a little over \$1,800, which was good, considering it wasn't benefiting from the traffic of an election year.
- The Friends donated \$1,000 to programming costs.
- The Friends presented staff with thank-you gifts for the holiday season.

10. Old Business – Patty Swartzbaugh

- Patty, Monica, and Natalie will convene to discuss new board members and recruitment toward the end of January.

11. New Business – Patty Swartzbaugh

- Cheryl Angel mentioned that there is a water contamination problem at the Western Watauga Branch. The County found bacteria in the water. Hand washing is fine, but they are not drinking the water. It will be resolved soon. Shall we donate a pallet of water? Monica stated that she would call Jackie after the meeting.

12. Adjournment – Patty Swartzbaugh adjourned the meeting at 4:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret L. Love