

WATAUGA COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD

Minutes

Thursday, March 6, 2025

4:00 p.m.

Present: Cheryl Angel, Laura Johnson, Margaret Love, Mary Stolberg, Patricia Swartzbaugh (chair), Candice Trexler

Present for the library: Monica Caruso (Watauga County Librarian), David Goldston (Friends of the Library treasurer), Ingrid Hayes (Adult Services), Tammy Holston (Appalachian Regional Library Finance Director & Co-Interim Director), Laura McPherson (Ashe County Librarian & Co-Interim Director), Abraham Williams (Youth Services)

Absent: Claire Olander (ex-officio), Emily Greene (Watauga County Commissioner), Natalie Harkey, Wendy Jessen, Hollis Smith (Hollis tried to get in virtually, but we had technology trouble)

1. Call to Order & Welcome

Patti Swartzbaugh called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes – January 9, 2025

Minutes from January 9 were reviewed. A correction was noted: Jackie Cornette (Western Watauga Librarian) was present. In the section regarding donations for Christmas bags for the Friends of Western Watauga Branch Christmas drive through event, it was noted that the Banner Elk resource Center contributed a tremendous amount and were very generous.

Minutes were approved as amended (Mary Stolberg moved/Cheryl Angel seconded)

3. Correspondence and Communication – None to report

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

- Watauga County Library is still recruiting a Youth Services Manager. Abe Williams is still serving as an interim. Monica will repost the job listing at the state library websites.
- The VITA tax assistance program has been very busy.
- Monica, Laura McPherson, and John Arnaud, architect, attended the Town of Boone budget retreat to request funding during the public comment section of the meeting, for one small piece of the renovation – double glass doors and picture window at the patio, which would be approximately \$47,000 (estimate provided by VPC Builders).
- The architect for the renovation created two posters with concept designs for the project.
- Watauga County Commissioners held their two-day budget retreat. WCL requested \$250,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan (and included the concept design). Budget requests are due at the end of January.
- The Downtown Boone Development Association approved funding for the shred truck event, offering half the cost at \$950. The event will take place on April 25, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- There will be a presentation with the concept posters on March 26 for the Town of Boone Council meeting. Board members are welcome to attend. One purpose of the presentation is to explain to the Council the pivot from expansion to renovation modes.
- National Library Week will be April 6-13. A small staff committee is starting to meet to plan activities. There will be guest readers for story time, and posters.
- The new renovation concept plans include improved visibility from all parts of the library. The meeting rooms will be at Main Street. Adult services and digital resources will expand and increase the number of computer work stations, electrical systems will be updated, Digital Watauga will be moved, and study rooms will be

reconfigured. The adult services desk would be facing out to the computer stations. The youth services desk would be where the youth services manager office is currently located. The castle in the children's area will go away, but it will open up the space and welcome more to the patio space. The staff work room will be improved.

- *Ingrid Hayes reported on a few events:*
 - Tai chi with Nicole Heigl (seated for fall prevention / arthritis) will take place every Monday at 11 a.m. through May 26. The class will also be offered live online. The in-person class will have a limit of 18 people. Participants are encouraged to attend at least 11 sessions to maximize program benefits.
 - The VITA tax assistance program has averaged 35 participants per weekend. Comments from grateful participants include: "Beyond expectations"; "saved me \$100"; and "Helps those of us who are financially challenged."
 - The High Country's new poet laureate Hilda Downer will be holding a free poetry workshop, *Telling About Trauma While Thinking About Flowers*, on March 8 at 3 pm. The workshop is designed to help process the experience of Hurricane Helene.
- *Abe Williams reported on youth services events:*
 - March 15 – Abe will be attending MountainCon to represent the library on Saturday, March 15. He is also planning a Mario Day celebration with a screening of the 2023 Super Mario Brothers movie, as well as an Oreo Taste testing event. The first Dungeons & Dragons program will be March 29. He is also working on a chess club program. Several schools have planned field trips as well.

6. Report of the Interim Co-Directors – Tammy Holston & Laura McPherson

- Tammy Holston reported on administration and personnel updates: the Ashe County Public Library is recruiting a temporary adult services assistant. Their new adult services manager starts in May. As previously mentioned, Watauga County is still looking for a permanent youth services manager. The Wilkes County Public Library has all services filled.
- Revised 2024 evaluations were sent out to managers, and new workforce development plans that have been changed to cover the fiscal year have been released. All evaluations are due to Tammy no later than June 30.
- A former Wilkes employee has filed an unemployment claim.
- Tammy reported on the progress of the *ARL director search*. So far there are 8 applicants. Three interviews have been conducted, with two more scheduled on March 10. All advertisements for the position have been posted on free sites.
- *Grants Update:*
 - NCDIT Digital Champion grant is continuing. The ARL has received \$361,000 to date, with \$357,000 spent. Kilby is working as quickly as he can getting new computer labs set up. ARL staff are working to secure a list of contacts to get laptops distributed to victims of the hurricane.
 - The NC Department of Commerce Downtown Development Grant has been approved & awarded. Watauga County Commissioner Braxton Eggers signed the contract on Monday. Now the grant goes to the County and is funded in the county's name. Some small documentation is still necessary, including financials for 3 years, specific purchasing/procurement policy, etc.
 - County approved a resolution in August to match 5% of whatever funding is received - \$6,250 should be in their budget.
 - LSTA grants have been written for next fiscal year. ARL staff should know by June 5 whether they were awarded.
- Laura McPherson reported on *personnel updates*: County librarians have been revising the meeting room policy and will submit a draft to the governance committee of the ARL board. If the committee approves the revision, it will go to managers and county librarians, then back to the board in May for full approval. The section in the personnel policy regarding adverse leave has been presented to the personnel committee to review, to be approved in May.

- In *technology news*, Kilby is installing new patron computers as part of the Digital Champion grant. A handful of issues related to software compatibility have been troublesome, but Kilby is a good sport. All new PC's and all new monitors will be installed.
- The E-rate application, which Kilby submits, has been reviewed. Preliminary approval has been received.
- Lastly, Tammy reported that the all-staff training day did not pan out, but 2-3 employees did attend NC Cardinal training.

7. Financial Report – Tammy Holston

- In the Watauga County budget, several restricted donations are reflected, as well as a miscellaneous unrestricted donation of \$1.75. Western Watauga Friends donated an additional \$2,800 for the dulcimer program, which will go in supply line item for dulcimer kits.
- \$138.40 was contributed towards North Carolina Capital Management Trust building fund. Interest rates are down slightly, but the funds are still invested better than money market.
- Counties will send letters to request 2025-2026 budget needs. The ARL regional board will approve. The ARL is asking counties for a 3.52% increase from last year's budget for salaries. Tammy warned that the state could be making changes to retirement funds and state health insurance plans. Premiums may increase to employees, and probably to employers. The new treasurer seems to think that new funds will not last. With retirement funds, we know that they pre-approved to go up ¾% increase every year. All counties will know that the state retirement fund will change. Watauga County is not on the state health plan. Even though the total increase is 3.52%, the request is calculated for a 4.5% COLA increase.

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

- The FoL annual meeting will be held on May 17 at the WCL. The Junaluska Heritage Association will be present as guest speakers, including Susan Keith & Roberta Jackson. Doris Isaacs (book sorting coordinator) has been nominated for the Hugh Hagaman Volunteer Service Award and will receive the award at the meeting.
- The book sale room is being renovated. The Friends are asking for name suggestions and will announce the winning selection at the annual meeting. Braxton Eggers will do the ribbon cutting.

8. Friends of Western Watauga Branch –Cheryl Angel

- The Friends of the Western Watauga Branch will decide about the timing of the fall raffle when they meet next week.
- The dulcimer grassroots grant starts March 19. Kits have been ordered. The grant was the largest awarded in grassroots grants in Watauga. The grantors are allowing the Friends to match some of the funding in volunteer hours.
- Cheryl emphasized that the Christmas drive-through held in December had the best gift bag donations ever, courtesy of the Mast Store and the Banner Elk resource center.
- Thank you cards have been sent to everyone who donated.
- The Western Watauga Friends have renewed membership in the Friends of North Carolina Public Libraries association.
- Jackie Cornette provided an update on the library patio project. \$12,000 has been spent on new grading, gravel, gates, solar lighting, and locks. \$7,825.75 is left to spend, which will probably be used for furniture. Jackie procured the solar lights, which consist of 12 small lights along the wall, then larger motion sensor lights for security.
- The FWWB participated in the 21st Century Packhorse Librarian free book distribution on February 28 and March 1. Lots of books were given away.
- Second book outreach was to the Valle Crucis School, but the event was delayed.
- Outreach programs for Avery and elsewhere are planned for April 25, but Yancey County outreach has been indefinitely postponed.

- The dementia support group has hired a project coordinator, and new ASU students are helping.
- The Friends are pleased to announce a donation for \$10,000 check restricted to the dementia project!
- The next meeting is being held next week, and officers will be elected in June.
- The Corps of Engineers is offering volunteer services in Watauga County only.

9. Old Business – Patti Swartzbaugh

- Natalie Harkey is officially on the regional board.

10. New Business – Monica Caruso

- Appalachian State is putting together a digital archival collection for images from Hurricane Helene – documents, photos, etc. They are applying for a mini grant to fund a part-time coordinator for that project. They would like the library to promote the project.

11. Adjournment – Patti Swartzbaugh adjourned the meeting at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret L. Love