

# WATAUGA COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD

## Minutes

Thursday, March 5, 2026

4:00 p.m.

**Present:** Natalie Harkey; Tom Shessler, Ex Officio; Mary Stolberg; Patricia Swartzbaugh (chair); Candice Trexler; Martha Gray, Ex Officio

**Teams:** Margaret Love, Cheryl Angel

**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

Guest: Monica Gowan (seed library)

### 1. Call to Order & Welcome

Patty Swartzbaugh called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. Patty added the minutes from November 6, 2025 to approve to the agenda.

### 2. Approval of Minutes –November 6, 2025 and January 8, 2026

- Mary Stolberg moved to approve the minutes from November 6. The November minutes were approved.
- Natalie Harkey moved to approve the January minutes. Martha Gray offered a correction to the January minutes. The January minutes were approved as corrected.

### 3. Correspondence and Communication – None to report

**4. Guest Monica Gowan, Seed Library Volunteer Coordinator:** The seed library program is introducing an educational component with a “gardening chat” at the library. The first topic will be how to start seeds.

- Richard Boylan, Area Specialized Agent in Agriculture from Cooperative Extension and the Watauga Seed Library, is ready to help farmers and gardeners on this journey with a free, two- part Saving Workshop Series on the evenings of Monday, April 21 and 28.
- More of the community is using the seed library. Volunteers have repacked over 3,000 packets. Paige Patterson (county horticulturist) has organized a seed & plant swap for March 22. Seeds are collected from Lowe’s, Be Natural, Mustard Seed, Millers Hardware.
- The Library can be a source of heirloom community seeds.
- The seed library needs to provide an EIN to these donors to classify donations as a charitable donation.
- The seed library always needs more volunteers and educators (Mary Stolberg suggested Sharlie Sigmund) with an eye towards leadership sustainability.
- There are speakers scheduled for every month until September.
- Monica suggested a special event calendar, in addition to the public calendar.

### 5. Report of the Watauga County Public Library –Monica Caruso

- We are moving into spring with 'Books give us wings'. The bulletin board will have fairies, butterflies, bees, and flowers with a couple of shamrocks and a bunny. We will recreate a book walk using the story of the *Mud Fairy*, turning it into a scavenger hunt. We will also have an outdoor scavenger hunt using

items that were used for the front Gardens. These are flower fairies that will be placed in the front gardens, and the kids must hunt for the correct fairy. Our teen/tween scavenger hunt will be riddles, cyphers, and clues for the number of items that are needed to make a cake. We have also ordered new posters and have refurbished and displayed some posters that were previously used

- I gave my annual report to the County Commissioners and to the Town Council last month. There was some coverage in the Wat Democrat from the County meeting.
- Tax Appointments are filled up, and we have a waiting list of 25 people. I'm hoping that the volunteers can give a bit more of their time on a Friday, earlier in the day, to accommodate some of these people.
- Our Shred truck will be here on April 24, a Friday, from 10-1 in the back parking lot.
- National Library Week is the week of April 19 (the theme is "Find Your Joy")
  - We are planning daily story times with guest readers, lunch for our staff on National Workers' Day, and regular social media posts for each themed day
  - The Renovation Committee will be selling their merchandise from 10:30-12 that week.
- We're also planning a poetry event with young people, as it's National Poetry Month
- On June 27, with Donna, library staff, and folks from the Southern Appalachian Historical Association, we are planning a Quilt homecoming celebration from 10-2, since it will be returned to its permanent spot, the library. They are planning on readings from the time of the revolution, period costumes, crafts, and more. Jenna, Ingrid, and I are involved in the planning.
- On a facility note, we are planning on painting the meeting room within the next two weeks (light gray with cream trim) and getting our carpeting cleaned on April 3.
- We're also measuring to potentially get shades on our back 4 windows, on the left and right as well as my office.
- The Endowment will fund a new commercial-grade patio door with two windows.
- The mini-conference rooms have been well-received so far! Lots of positive feedback.

## **6. Report of the Director – Russell Taylor**

- *Renovation Updates:* John Arnaud has been approved by the Watauga County Commissioners as the architect for the library renovation. He will act as liaison between the library, the county, and the contractors while the project is underway.
- At present, we are meeting to discuss details of the renovation and the timetable for the project. Additional drawings will be needed before the project can be let out to bid.
- ARL Staff training day is scheduled for Thursday, April 16th, at the Ashe County Public Library. An NC Cardinal training specialist will offer refresher training. Training on mental health assistance and de-escalation will also be offered, as well as a fun staff activity. We will also have time for the library staff to meet in departmental meetings during the afternoon.
- The administrative team will hold an in-person meeting on Monday, March 23rd to discuss several items, including revisions to several sections of the personnel policy, changes to job descriptions, strategic planning, and other items.
- Budgets for the next fiscal year have been set up by the Finance Director, Regional Director and County Librarians and will be presented to the Local Boards and the Regional Board for approval.
- The counties have different times that they require the library to submit their budget requests, but all should be submitted to their respective counties by the first of April.
- We also plan to ask the Towns of Boone, Wilkesboro, and North Wilkesboro for some funding for library services. County Librarians and the Regional Director will attend budget work sessions in each of the counties.

- Ashe and Watauga County Libraries are currently fully staffed. Due to the uncertainty regarding the Wilkes County Budget, the two part-time positions at Wilkes are being held pending the county's budget allocations. We will reassess these positions in July.
- Our federal funding request for 2026-2027 has been through the review process and is "wave ready," which means we should receive an official notification in the next 2 months. We typically try to file on the first day of the window to receive our notification before the funding year begins.
- E-Rate funding covers 90% of our broadband and WAN bills when we file monthly reimbursements, in addition to providing funding for special projects like wireless systems and wiring. This funding is only available to public schools and libraries.
  - This funding request is related to the newly signed 5-year contract for broadband and WAN services provided by Skyline/Skybest and River Street Networks.
  - A reminder that all 5 libraries will see at least a doubling in the bandwidth available at a reduced monthly cost compared to recent years.
- The number of users for our mobile app with myLibro has been growing at an improved rate over the last couple of months. We hope to see that continue as we review the numbers when it's time to renew our licensing in December.
- Wireless usage continues to grow year-over-year.
- We ended our license for PDQ Deploy, a tool that I used to automate some public lab tasks. The continued increase in licensing made it less appealing, even if it increases the time spent on some tasks.
- The updated circulation policy with additional information will be presented to the governance committee for their approval and then to the entire Board for their consideration and approval.
- A committee of library managers and a county librarian will be formed in April to review the collection development policy. Depending on the depth of the revisions, the revised policy may come before the Board in July or September.
- The LSTA grant to fund the strategic planning process for 2026-2027 was submitted to the State Library at the end of February. All LSTA proposals will be reviewed by a committee of librarians, and those who are selected for funding will be notified by June 1st. We will be required to draw up a contract with the State Library before any spending can take place.

## 7. Financial Report – Tammy Holston

*Revenue changes:* WCPL received the following **restricted** donations:

- \$4,423.52 from Watauga Historical Society for Digital Watauga salaries
- A \$50 donation for Western Watauga professional services
- \$497.50 from the Downtown Boone Development Association towards the shred truck event
- \$600.00 donation for Adult books for Women's Health
- **Unrestricted** donations:
  - \$73.05 from the Friends of the Library for cake at the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce event
  - \$1,000.00 from the Western Watauga Friends of the Library for Professional Services
- *Other Grants:* \$23,000.00 from VITA Grant for 2025-2026 Award
- *Budget Transfers:*
  - \$3,648.74 Transfer Endowment-allocated funds to Building renovation project for patio door
  - \$100 transferred from Adult Professional Services to Adult Supplies for the seed library
  - \$30 transferred from Contracted Services to mileage for staff training day
  - Note: NCCMT - Watauga Building Fund earned \$121.01 for a new balance of \$44,143.75.
- Each county has to present 2026-2027 preliminary budgets. We're reviewing current budget performance. Watauga County has pledged 3% COLA and additional funds for health plans in salaries. The request to the Friends of the Library remains at \$30,000. Request to the Western Watauga FOL is \$1800, and \$10,000 to the Endowment Fund.

## 8. Report of the Friends of the Library – Martha Gray

*Renovation Project Update:* We have received donations/pledges/grants of \$1,270,198 (or 85%) towards our goal of \$1.5 million. We are very grateful for several very generous donations/pledges over the past month that have moved us closer to our goal.

- We hope to have final architectural drawings by the end of summer, and then the county architect will reach out for contractor bids in late summer/early fall.
- We have partnered with the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce to help us send over 4,000 emails to local businesses/Chamber members to inform them of the Renovation and request financial support.
- To thank our business and organization supporters, we offer five levels of partnership, each with meaningful recognition opportunities tied to their level of giving. More info is available on the renovation website: <https://www.wataugacountyfol.org/business-partner-ops>.
- The Renovation Project Committee meetings are on the first Friday of each month at 10 AM in the library meeting room. All are welcome.
- *Friends Books & Crannies Used Bookstore & December Used Book Sale Event:* The Bookstore December sales were \$2,028. The biannual used book sale event in December was attended by about 400 customers and brought in \$3,379. Combining these sales with the books we sold to McKay's Used Books brings us to 81% of the budgeted book sales income for the fiscal year ending June 30.
- *Friends of the Library Annual Event:* The Friends Annual Meeting will be on April 18th, 10 AM – 12 PM in the Library Meeting Room, and is open to the public. An update will be shared on the organization's activities and financial health. The 2026 Hugh Hagaman Volunteer Service Award will be presented, and a presentation on the Renovation Project will be given by Donna Brietenstein and John Arnaud (Project Committee Chair and County Appointed Architect)

*Upcoming Friends Events:*

- Spring into Books: May 2, 2026, a free readers and writers event
- Summer Book Sale Event: June 4 – 6, 2026
- America 250: Watauga County Commemorative Quilt Event: June 27, 2026, with speakers and activities to celebrate the return of the quilt to the library for permanent display

**9. Western Watauga Branch & Friends of the WW Branch– Tom Shessler**

- Jackie is continuing to work with Mark Coltrane who works at Appstate's Belk Library; they're conducting outreach interviews with patrons of Western Watauga to record memories they have of the previous big flood, etc.
- Friends will meet later this month; we're hoping to have some communication with the Parks & Recreation Department regarding the status of Cove Creek Park.

**10. Old Business – Patty Swartzbaugh**

- Monica has designed a social media advertisement to recruit board members.
- Martha Gray suggested Cheryl Keller as a new board member.

**11. New Business – Patty Swartzbaugh**

- None to report.

**12. Adjournment – Patty Swartzbaugh adjourned the meeting at 5:02 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret L. Love