

WATAUGA COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD

Minutes

Thursday, July 10, 2025

4:00 p.m.

Present: Cheryl Angel, Martha Gray (ex-officio), Natalie Harkey, Laura Johnson, Margaret Love, Hollis Smith, Mary Stolberg, Patricia Swartzbaugh (chair)

Present for the library: Monica Caruso (Watauga County Librarian); Jackie Cornette (Western Watauga Branch Librarian); Ingrid Hayes (Adult Services), Tammy Holston (Appalachian Regional Library Finance Director & Co-Interim Director), Laura McPherson (Ashe County Librarian & Co-Interim Director)

Absent: Laura Johnson, Emily Greene (Watauga County Commissioner), Wendy Jessen

1. Call to Order & Welcome

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

Patti made two additions to the agenda:

- Guest Donna Breitenstein
- Western Watauga Branch Librarian Jackie Cornette

2. Approval of Minutes – July 10, 2025

Natalie Harkey moved to accept the minutes as presented; Mary Stolberg seconded. Minutes were approved.

3. Correspondence and Communication – None to report

Patti asked Friends member/volunteer Donna Breitenstein to present the renovation committee update. The capital campaign is time-limited to raise a large amount of money for a distinct purpose, after which the committee is dissolved. Part of the campaign involves requesting donations from the Board of Directors, both Watauga and Friends of the Library. Donna is asking for donations from Board members to the extent that they can contribute. The goal is 100% Board participation, which will legitimize the process for other large donors. Donna shared a portion of the request, including speaking positively about the library as a hub of the community; educating ourselves about the planned changes for renovations; participating in events that are sponsored by the Friends and the renovations committee; and donating time as a volunteer at fundraising events - or “Fun-raising.” Donna distributed letters enumerating the request. Donna mentioned that donations can be memorials or honoraria.

Donna then brought the Board’s attention to the flyer about the Watauga County Commemorative Quilt Unveiling, being held on **Saturday, July 26th from 1-4 p.m.** The quilt was funded by [America 250 NC](#). There were five quilters who participated in creating the quilt. Researchers participated by finding images to combine in the quilt. There will be educational materials to describe the images on the quilt, which includes depictions of indigenous people; frontiersmen and early settlers; the Proclamation of 1763; Overmountain Men and the Battle of Kings Mountain; botanists & discoveries; the role of women; the establishment of churches; Watauga County communities; and modern times. Throughout the quilt are images of native flora and fauna.

The quilt will be shown at local schools, with guest speakers.

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

- Circulation assistant Katherine Royal circulation assistant and shelver Kaylie Briggs are leaving the WCL, and Colleen Pepper is starting August 4th as new Youth Services Manager.

- Well over 600 children signed up for the Summer Reading Program. The wrap-up celebration will be on Friday, August 1 from 11 a.m. –1 p.m.
- Youth Services will participate in “Fairy Day” at the Daniel Boone Gardens this Saturday, July 12.
- WCL will be at the Back to School Festival on Saturday, August 9.
- The renovation committee will be meeting tomorrow, July 11.

Jackie added, on behalf of the Western Watauga Branch:

- The Reading and Rolling program is going well, with 60 children enrolled.
- The Patio Project has been completed. All the furniture has arrived.
- Western Watauga Friends will be hosting a community thank you event on September 4th from 4-6 p.m. Boone Mt. Barbecue will be providing food. 150 guests are expected to come.

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

- *Administrative:* Tammy reported that Ashe is fully staffed, other than an Outreach Specialist to be hired in the fall. In Ashe County, the 2025-2026 budget was approved with a 3% increase from the previous year. It enables a 3% cost of living increase.
 - For Watauga, the new Youth Services Manager will start soon. Budget appropriation was a 3.5% increase.
 - Wilkes’s funding *decreased* by 9%, or \$73,000. Wilkes will reduce library operations by 4 hours per week, with corresponding staff hours cut. One employee is taking a 9% pay cut instead to keep her health insurance. The Resource Sharing Assistant, who is paid by all 3 counties, tendered his resignation during the meeting.
 - Director of Libraries candidate Russell Taylor toured the three libraries and met with the regional board. The board will make a hiring decision at the next meeting.
 - All evaluations were submitted by June 30.
- *Grant updates:* Laura reported that the ARL has received the full \$402,000 grant from the N.C. Department of Information Technology and has spent \$377,000 of that funding. The tech department has distributed over 100 laptops to community members affected by Hurricane Helene. A second round of distribution is planned. A status report of grant resource use is due next week, including a monthly expense report. Distributions are made based on referrals from local social services agencies. Laptops are only available to individuals, not to businesses that were affected by the Hurricane. Over 200 laptops remain to be distributed.
- *LSTA Grants:* Ashe and Watauga will receive funding.
- *Ashe* has received a grant for a new outreach vehicle. The current vehicle was totaled from Helene damage.
- *Watauga* received a grant for 3 mini conference room pods (with a 10% match requirement). The pods are technically portable, with technology hookups and soundproofing.
- *Wilkes* was not awarded a grant due to an application issue.
- There is no update about the state legislature’s decisions for the IMLS funding. There is concern about the Institute of Museum and Library Services (iMLS) grant process, with the probability of a federal freeze. The most significant issue would be if funding is removed or if state aid changes. The original Senate budget has reduced state aid by \$500,000 and made a separate line for NC Cardinal for \$1.5 million. Some libraries don’t participate in NC Cardinal, so they may not be pleased. The bulk of NC Cardinal is paid for by IMLS funding – so all the resource sharing outside of ARL would be affected. (*see director’s report*)
 - There are some different options – The ARL system had 3,641 unique users in 2023-2024 and borrowed over 30,000 items, making this library system the fifth highest user out of the 52 systems that use it. This is a very high usage compared to our size. We borrow more than we loan.
 - Option 1) Pause resource sharing (option we would choose)
 - Option 2) Decide who to share and who not – all of cost would fall on member libraries. If they had to divide that money up from state aid, we would lose about \$50,000, but if they split it up between libraries, it would be over \$80,000 on us.
 - Silver lining: This presents a creative opportunity to make the program more sustainable for everyone.

- Question from Mary Stolberg: Would it be useful to send a letter on behalf of the ARL Board to the NC legislature?
- We will know about IMLS funding before we know about the state aid budget.
- Will add the letter proposal to the regional board meeting agenda.
- *Policy & Governance*: No updates
- *Technology*: All analytics are now in one place. Wireless usage reached an all-time high in June.
- The Supreme Court ruled against making changes to e-rate service fund, so that will continue. Kilby is looking forward to replacing servers and disaster recovery systems.

7. Financial Report – Tammy Holston

Tammy reported on the 2025-2026 budget.

- The Town of Boone is not contributing \$2,500 this year, so the Friends of the Library budget will be reduced accordingly, out of youth and adult books.
- Based on EOY actual receipts, copier fees were higher than originally budgeted, so that was increased.
- WCL received a \$250 donation this week.
- Restricted donations not spent - \$22,145 rolled over (\$4,032 from Digital Watauga, funding from Friends, furniture & equipment - \$2,900, more money to adult books, electronic materials was added, more money to professional services, reading and rolling, and VITA)

Report of the Friends of the Library – Martha Gray

- June book sale reported record attendance of over 500 people and raised about \$4,200 in sales and donations.
- At the June Boonerang Festival, the Friends gave away 400 books to kids and provided popcorn & lemonade. They also distributed water bottles with a QR code for donations.
- The Friends now has a new website (<https://www.wataugacountyfol.org/>), launched in May. It features online membership renewals, and opportunities to volunteer online, leave comments, and ask questions.
- Renovation project donations can also be made online.
- The Friends have an in-house book sale room with a new name and logo: *Books & Crannies*; June was a record sales month for book sale room - \$2,000 for one month.

8. Friends of Western Watauga Branch –Cheryl Angel

- The fall raffle will be in early September to coincide with a barbecue event. Tickets will be \$3 each or 2 for \$5. There will be 5-6 themed baskets, and will be advertised through newsletters, signage, and social media.
- The WW Branch received a car donation – a 2016 Honda CRV with 58,000 miles, with a current value of \$17,800. The original thought was to auction or raffle it, but after much discussion, that is not a workable way to dispose of it. Through the charitable organization Quiet Givers, the Friends found a needy family to donate the car to. The Title will be transferred to Western Watauga Friends and the car detailed. A \$100 gift card will be included. The wife is a double amputee with MS and is under hospice care. Her husband is the main caregiver. Their car needs too many repairs. They have agreed to donate their car to Broken Wheels Ministry, which will then distribute it to someone else who is needy.
- The Friends received a \$10,000 grant, which will partially fund the barbecue dinner.
- The community garden project is on hold for now. Jackie had received \$625 grant and bought tools and equipment, but there are no plots being used at this point.
- The Friends still hope to purchase some hotspots with remaining funds in conjunction with the Project on Aging.
- The ASU MPA program offered a small \$500 grant for agencies affected by Helene as part of their grant strategies & preparations course. Students presented grant applications as part of their project and people in the audience voted. Western Watauga didn't win, but did get a nice gift basket.

- The Mary Greene dulcimer project got great coverage in the media. There was a concert featuring the students participating in the Mabel School dulcimer project on May 8th at 1:00. The WW Friends will also be adding \$600 in books on Appalachian Heritage to the Mabel School collection.
- The WW Friends new president is Tom Shessler.
- The dementia support group is meeting over the summer. Three participants have recently passed away; there are two openings now. The support group team was contacted by Beech Mountain to get details on how to start their own program in Newland.
- The next WW Friends meeting is tentatively set for August.

9. Old Business – Patti Swartzbaugh

None to report

10. New Business – Patti Swartzbaugh

- None to report

11. Adjournment – Cheryl Angel moved to adjourn the meeting. Natalie Harkey seconded. Patti Swartzbaugh adjourned the meeting at 4:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret L. Love