



**Richmond Public Library**  
**Library Board of Trustees**  
101 E. Franklin Street  
Richmond, VA 23219  
(804) 646-4256 / fax: (804) 646-7685



**Library Board Meeting Minutes**  
**May 28, 2025**

**PRESENT:** Chair Christine Peterson, Vice Chair Sheron Carter-Gunter, Emily Altman, Brent Graves, Cynthia Hinds, Janet Woody, William Yates

**ABSENT:** Garrett Sawyer, Friends of the Library Chair Ruth DeBoer, Cheryl Clarke

**STAFF:** Scott Firestine, Clay Dishon, Attorney Shannan Fitzgerald, Gianna Pack, Susan Revere, Phil Shephard, Heather Montgomery

The Richmond Public Library (RPL) Library Board of Trustees (LBOT) meeting was called to order by Chair Christine Peterson at 11:45 a.m. at the Main Library located at 101 E Franklin Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219. The meeting was posted, and the public could attend in person or by viewing the Richmond Public Library YouTube channel <https://bit.ly/2VfKL9U>, where it was live-streamed. A quorum was established.

<b>Agenda</b>	Approve the May 28, 2025, Agenda as amended to reschedule Elizabeth Morris' presentation.  <i>Motion: William Yates, Second by Sheron Carter-Gunter</i>  <i>AYES: <u>7</u> NOES: <u>0</u> ABSTAIN: <u>0</u> Approved Unanimously.</i>
<b>Consent Agenda</b>	Approve the April 23, 2025, Meeting Minutes, the Current Financial Reports, Statistical Reports, and Donations Report as Submitted:  <i>Motion: William Yates, Second by Sheron Carter-Gunter</i>  <i>AYES: <u>7</u> NOES: <u>0</u> ABSTAIN: <u>0</u> Approved Unanimously.</i>
<b>Public Comment Period</b>	None present.
<b>Reports</b>	
<b>Friends of the Library (FOL)</b>  <u>Ruth DeBoer</u> <u>Clay Dishon</u>	No formal report.  Mr. Dishon mentioned that the next Friends Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 4.
<b>Library Foundation</b>  <u>Susan Revere</u> <u>Scott Firestine</u>	No formal report.

## Reports (Continued)

### Administration

Scott Firestine  
Genevievre Gray

No formal Administration Report.

Mr. Firestine introduced Ms. Genevievre Gray, Youth Services Young Adult Senior Librarian, to give an overview of the Young Adult Department:

Ms. Gray began by reflecting on the profound impact that the new Young Adult space at the Main Library has already had on the community. She shared the story of a teenage girl who has become a regular visitor since the space opened. This young patron recently confided that she had moved to Richmond within the past year and, being homeschooled, had found it difficult to meet peers her age.

The Young Adult space has provided her with a welcoming environment where she can connect with others, engage in enriching activities, and feel a genuine sense of belonging. Still unfamiliar with the city and lacking access to transportation or funds for extracurricular outings, she expressed that the library has become one of the few places where she feels comfortable and included.

She shared with Ms. Gray how the library's teen programs have helped her feel more involved and less isolated, offering her a meaningful way to participate in the community. Even when no formal programming is scheduled, she often spends time in the space working on school assignments, exploring take-home activities such as writing prompts, coloring sheets, and rotating crafts.

While this account highlights just one individual, it is indicative of a larger trend. The library has observed a steady increase in teen visitors utilizing the space for studying, socializing, reading, and participating in a variety of programs. The Young Adult space has quickly proven to be a transformative addition, one that fosters connection, creativity, and lifelong learning for the city's youth.

With this in mind, we are continuing to work on building an audience of teens in the library through increased school outreach efforts across the city with our Young Adult Team. We have successfully established relationships with middle and high schools throughout the Richmond Public School system and are increasing our engagement through outreach at community events as well as connecting with librarians and classroom teachers to reach students directly in the classroom.

We are working to build a vibrant future for young adults in our city by informing them through the teaching of new skills, enriching their lives, expanding their access to both recreational and educational opportunities, and empowering them to make positive changes in their lives.

- **Engaging YA Programs:** Building engaging and educational young adult programs is a huge priority. For example, our Teen Anime Manga Association, which allows teens to come together and engage with an activity they love, while also tying into young adult literacy skills, connecting young adults to the library's collection, cultivating their interests in a social setting, and supporting lifelong learning by introducing them to new cultural concepts and language skills. Other after-school clubs like our Level Up video game club might sound like they are just for fun, but they connect teens to literacy by encouraging reluctant readers to follow game plotlines, often connecting to books in our digital collection.

## Reports (Continued)

### Administration (Continued)

Scott Firestine  
Genevieve Gray

It also supports young adults learning critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as social-emotional skills, in a positive and safe environment. Programs like our popular Get Crafty Together events allow young adults to develop new arts and crafts techniques as they explore new mediums of art, which they may not have access to outside the library. Other events, like some of our Teen STEAM programs allow teens to learn educational topics in a fun and engaging way. For instance, Ms. Gray recently hosted a Brown Sugar Boba Milk Tea STEAM workshop at both Main and Hull Street where teens got to practice precise measurements, learned about chemical reactions, and developed an understanding of the gelatinization process all while learning to make one of their favorite treats from scratch.

- **Wellness:** To continue educational opportunities for our youth, we are prioritizing health and wellness as a topic. For example, period poverty and stigma are serious health issues that impact countless women and girls. Today is recognized as Menstrual Hygiene Day, and later this afternoon we are hosting an event with the Period Education Project where teens will be learning about menstrual health from VCU School of Medicine students and working together to build menstrual health packs to stock our new mini menstrual health pantry for teen girls, which is in the young adult space. We are also prioritizing health and wellness by offering Young Adult Yoga and workshops promoting mindfulness and lyric writing as a means of coping with stress this summer.
- **Programs for Opportunity Youth:** Ms. Gray has built partnerships with several youth organizations in the city as a means of prioritizing opportunity youth and setting them up for success. She has already begun hosting a series of workshops with our Young Adult Team at Peter Paul where we have taught them about self-care (this also ties into our focus on wellness and will be repeated later at Main), meal prepping on a budget, and navigating transportation using the GRTC bus system to better connect them with opportunities around the city. This summer, we will be hosting a series of workshops with Urban Baby Beginnings, which focus on maternal health and wellness as well as educational and workforce development. We are also beginning a workshop series this summer called Future Ready, which focuses on preparing youth (with an emphasis on outreach towards opportunity youth) to be set up for success in career exploration and resume development as well as interview preparation. Another initiative we have begun is connecting with the International Rescue Committee to host digital literacy workshops for refugee young adults who are not yet connected to school or work. These initiatives are all made possible through a grant from the Urban Libraries Council.

Ms. Gray extended an offer to the members to stop by the Young Adult space.

Reports (Continued)	
<b>Advocacy Task Force</b>  <u>Christine Peterson</u> <u>Sheron Carter-Gunter</u>	<p>Chair Peterson provided an update on the Library Board of Trustees' (LBOT) advocacy efforts for the year:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Quarterly Council Meeting Attendance</b> Chair Peterson attends City Council meetings quarterly to deliver brief presentations highlighting LBOT's accomplishments and the ongoing impact of Richmond Public Library (RPL). These updates emphasize the library's essential role in supporting and improving the community.</li> <li><b>Engagement with New Council Members</b> The LBOT facilitated introductions between new City Council members and their local library branches to build relationships and foster support.</li> <li><b>Participation in Council Member Town Hall Meetings</b> Throughout May and June, LBOT members are attending City Council members' town hall meetings to promote the Summer Reading Program and library activities. Each library team typically includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Library/Community Services Manager of the hosting branch</li> <li>○ The branch's Youth Services Librarian</li> <li>○ A representative from RPL Administration</li> <li>○ One or two LBOT members</li> </ul> <p>Additional efforts at these meetings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Capturing group photos of the team in attendance to share with the respective Council member for potential inclusion in newsletters.</li> <li>○ Following the completion of all scheduled town halls, the LBOT will evaluate and determine advocacy activities for July through September.</li> </ul> <p>Chair Peterson expressed her appreciation to Jenn Deuell, Library/Community Services Manager of Outreach and Engagement, for her key role in coordinating the meetings and securing spots on the Council members' agendas.</p> </li> </ol>
<b>Policy Taskforce</b>  <u>Emily Altman</u>	<p>Ms. Altman reported that Mr. Firestine submitted revisions to the policies previously discussed for updates. She reviewed the edits and subsequently met with Mr. Firestine to discuss the changes. Following their meeting, they approved the submitted revisions.</p> <p>Mr. Firestine will provide a complete draft of the revised policies to Ms. Altman in advance of the June 25 meeting. This will allow the LBOT to review the draft and determine whether to vote on the policies at that meeting or defer the vote to the July meeting.</p>
<b>Chair Report</b>  <u>Christine Peterson, Chair</u>	<p><b>Chair Peterson reported the following updates:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Former Richmond Public Library Director Harriot Coalter is currently ill. Chair Peterson sent a card on behalf of the LBOT extending well wishes and support.</li> <li>Gail Zwirner resigned from the Library Board of Trustees effective May 5, 2025. During her tenure, Ms. Zwirner expressed that her most meaningful contributions included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Serving on the committee that selected the new Library Director</li> <li>○ Participating in the committee that chose Ripple as the new RPL mascot</li> <li>○ Contributing significantly to the development of the Main Library Master Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

Reports (Continued)	
<b>Finance</b>  <u>Bill Yates, Chair</u> <u>Scott Firestine</u>	<p>Mr. Yates reported that the library's financial outlook remains positive, with both revenues and expenditures tracking as expected. The FY26 Library budget proceeded through the approval process smoothly, without any changes.</p> <p>Mr. Firestine added that the library's operational budget for FY26 increased by approximately \$1,300 compared to the previous year. The personnel budget includes a 3.2% adjustment. He noted that the Administration is actively managing spending to stay within budget, including reducing part-time extra hours and adopting a more strategic approach to hiring. This proactive effort aligns with guidance being applied across all City departments in response to elevated year-end expenditure projections.</p> <p>Despite these measures, Mr. Firestine indicated that the library will likely exceed its budget due to several key factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rising Personnel Costs:</b> Health and retirement benefit costs have increased more than anticipated, particularly due to the conversion from RRS to VRS.</li> <li>• <b>Security Contract Increases:</b> The Library's system-wide security contract has experienced a significant rate increase, with hourly wages for unarmed guards rising by approximately \$6 and for armed guards by about \$8.</li> <li>• <b>Expanded Operating Hours:</b> Additional service hours have contributed to higher-than-planned operating expenses.</li> </ul> <p>The Administration will continue monitoring these budget pressures closely and make adjustments as needed to maintain fiscal responsibility.</p>
<b>Facilities</b>  <u>Janet Woody, Chair</u> <u>Scott Firestine</u>	<p>Ms. Woody reported that the Next 100 Community Forums have officially begun. These meetings are designed to gather feedback from Richmond residents about their vision for the libraries, including desired spaces, improvements, and other suggestions.</p> <p>Schedule of Meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 29: Main Library at 10A and West End Branch Library at 6P</li> <li>• May 31: North Avenue Branch Library at 10A and Ginter Park Branch Library at 3P</li> <li>• June 1: Broad Rock Branch Library at 2P</li> <li>• June 2: Hull Street Branch Library at 10A</li> <li>• June 3: East End Branch Library at 6P</li> <li>• June 4: Westover Hills Branch Library at 4P</li> <li>• June 7: Belmont Branch Library at 10A</li> </ul>
<b>Governance</b>  <u>Garrett Sawyer, Chair</u> Christine Peterson	<p>Governance Committee Report – Presented by Chair Peterson:</p> <p><b>Action Item: Appointment to Fill Gail Zwirner's Unexpired Term</b></p> <p>Chair Peterson provided an update on behalf of Mr. Sawyer regarding the process of filling Gail Zwirner's unexpired term on the LBOT. The Governance Committee continues to prioritize geographic diversity in board representation, with a particular focus on identifying potential candidates from currently unrepresented districts.</p> <p>Mr. Sawyer has been actively working on this initiative since last month's meeting and has been engaged in identifying and vetting prospective candidates for consideration.</p>

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Chair Peterson opened the discussion under Unfinished Business with an update on the upcoming 3-Board Gathering.

She announced that the event is scheduled for **Thursday, June 5**, from **5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.**, at the **Main Library, Gellman Room**.

There are currently **33 confirmed attendees**. The guest speaker will be **Reagen Thalacker**, Public Library Consultant from the **Library of Virginia**. The presentation will focus on **advocacy**, as well as defining the **distinct responsibilities of the Library Board of Trustees (LBOT), the Library Foundation, and the Friends of the Library**. **The goal is to explore how these three boards can effectively work together in support of the library's mission.**

Chair Peterson also reviewed meeting expectations for members of the LBOT, the Foundation, and the Friends of the Library, emphasizing the importance of participation, collaboration, and shared understanding of each group's role.

### NEW BUSINESS

No New Business was discussed.

### FINAL COMMENTS

Ms. Sheron Carter-Gunter shared her recent experience attending an event at the Peter Paul Development Center, where she also engaged with a group of approximately 60 senior citizens who meet regularly in another program. Ms. Carter-Gunter spoke with the seniors about the services offered by the library, including the ability to check out laptops.

She noted that many of the seniors were unaware of the library's available resources and expressed interest in learning more. Ms. Carter-Gunter asked whether there were any existing outreach efforts specifically designed to engage senior residents within the city.

In response, Mr. Firestine acknowledged the importance of senior outreach and noted that Jenn Deuell, the Library/Community Services Manager for Outreach and Engagement, is actively exploring multiple channels to connect with the community. These efforts go beyond social media and include purchasing advertisements in *Richmond Family Magazine* to promote various library programs.

Ms. Carter-Gunter suggested that developing targeted outreach for seniors could be a valuable addition to the library's engagement strategy.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:44 p.m. by unanimous consent from the members who were present.

The LBOT's next meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 25, 2025, at the West End Branch Library located at 5420 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23226.

Approved:   
Christine Peterson, Chair

Recorder: *Gianna Pack, CAP*  
Senior Executive Assistant