



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
October 22, 2025

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

ABSENT: Friends of the Library Chair Ruth DeBoer

STAFF: Scott Firestine, Clay Dishon, Attorney Shannan Fitzgerald, Gianna Pack, Cheryl Clarke, Susan Revere, Elizabeth Morris, 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 Hull Street Branch Library located at 1400 Hull Street, Richmond, Virginia 23224. 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.

Chair Peterson welcomed guests attending the meeting.

Agenda	<p>Approve the October 22, 2025, Agenda as submitted.</p> <p><i>Motion: Cynthia Hinds, Second by Emily Altman</i></p> <p><i>AYES: <u>7</u> NOES: <u>0</u> ABSTAIN: <u>0</u> Approved Unanimously.</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Woody was not present for the vote.</i></p>
Consent Agenda	<p>Approve the September 24, 2025, Meeting Minutes, the Current Financial Reports, Statistical Reports, and Donations Report as Submitted:</p> <p><i>Motion: Garrett Sawyer, Second by Sharen Carter-Gunter</i></p> <p><i>AYES: <u>7</u> NOES: <u>0</u> ABSTAIN: <u>0</u> Approved Unanimously.</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Woody was not present for the vote.</i></p>
Public Comment Period	<p>None present.</p>

Reports	
Friends of the Library (FOL) <u>Ruth DeBoer</u> <u>Clay Dishon</u>	<p>Chair Peterson announced October 19–25, 2025, will mark the 20th Anniversary of National Friends of Libraries Week. She asked Mr. Dishon to convey the Library Board of Trustees' appreciation to the Friends for their continued help and support of the library during this important celebration.</p> <p>Mr. Dishon provided an update on the Friends of the Library's activities in the absence of Chair Ruth DeBoer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 23: Annual Meeting at 6-7:30 pm with special guest Dr. Tony Gentry for an author talk of the new biographical novel <i>The Night Doctor of Richmond</i> – Main Library • November 5: Full Board Meeting – Main Library • November 7-9: Book Sale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ November 7: Presale-Members only: 10A-12P and 12P-8P open to all ○ November 8: 10A-4P ○ November 9: 1P-4P
Library Foundation <u>Susan Revere</u> <u>Scott Firestine</u>	<p>Ms. Revere provided an update on the Foundation's recent activities and developments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Foundation received recent grant awards from The Chrisman Family Foundation (\$5,000) and Memorial Foundation for Children (\$10,000). These grants support early childhood literacy and summer intern programs. • Recent increase in donations through Stock Gifts. Three individuals/families have gifted over \$73,000 in stock over the past few months. • H.R.1, formerly called the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" has noticeable changes that will impact charitable end of year giving in 2025 and into 2026: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At the federal level have far-reaching implications for charitable nonprofits, with changes to charitable giving and taxes. ○ Changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, and other federal programs, will put greater pressure on nonprofits to help meet local needs. <p>If you are interested in more information, reach out to Susan Revere at 804-646-5511. Ms. Revere will be happy to share the Analysis of the 2025 Tax Bill and its impact on charitable nonprofits, which is shared by the National Council of Nonprofits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Foundation's year-end full board meeting is December 3 with an Open House from 5-6 pm at West End Branch Library. An invitation will be forthcoming. Save the Date.
Administration <u>Scott Firestine</u>	<p>Director's Report: In addition to the items submitted in this month's written report, Mr. Firestine provided the following updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Library Card Signup Month:</u> Staff conducted outreach events nearly every day throughout September, resulting in 1,088 new library card registrations. • <u>New Graphic for Major Campaign:</u> A new graphic design has been selected as part of a larger promotional campaign. The design will be featured on RPL- branded merchandise available for online purchase, with proceeds benefiting the Library Foundation.

Reports (Continued)	
Administration (Continued) <u>Scott Firestine</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>2025 Library Directors Meeting at the Library of Virginia:</u> The Director attended the statewide meeting, which included discussions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Building and Renovating Public Libraries</i> ○ <i>Unbreakable Libraries: Mastering Resilience in the Era of Uncertainty</i> • <u>Read Up Initiative:</u> Preparations are underway for the upcoming Read Up program. Additional details are included in the Board Packet. • <u>Renaissance Fair at Westover Hills Branch Library:</u> The event exceeded expectations, attracting approximately 1,000 attendees throughout the day. Due to its success, there is strong interest in hosting the fair again next year.
Youth Services Update by LCSM <u>Elizabeth Morris</u>	<p>Elizabeth Morris is the Library/Community Services Manager of Youth Services System wide. She provided an update on the Youth Services Department and the team's activities and accomplishments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Summer Reading Program:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation remained strong, with 3,902 registrations and 3,548 completions. Two programs were canceled due to site closures, but total attendance across all summer reading events reached 4,504. • <u>Summer Intern Program:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ten interns supported the department this summer, contributing to a significant increase in programming—from 1,176 events last year to 2,682 this year. ○ Two interns have transitioned into hired RPL library roles: Shawn Williams (Read with Ripple Technician) and Isabella Freeman-Moore (Library Technician) are both pursuing MLIS degrees. • <u>Early Literacy Initiatives:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Read with Ripple program (formerly RVA Reads) is now led by Management Analyst Adri Newman, and Library Technician Shawn Williams. ○ The newly launched <i>1,000 Books Before Kindergarten</i> program has 217 children enrolled. All branches are also acquiring early learning materials through grant funding. • <u>Young Adult Services:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Four interns are assisting with redesign recommendations for the Media Space, and six additional interns participated through the Youth Engagement Services (YES) program, formally known as the Mayor's Youth Academy. <p>YA Senior Librarian Genevieve Wood will present at the upcoming Urban Library Council Leadership Conference on Youth Services' grant work and outreach to opportunity youth.</p>

Reports (Continued)	
<p>Advocacy Task Force</p> <p><u>Christine Peterson</u> <u>Sharon Carter-Gunter</u></p>	<p>Chair Peterson gave an update on the Library Board of Trustees' advocacy work, focusing on getting ready for a tough Budget Year and coming up with a draft advocacy plan, which covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How the advocacy plan will work with the Budget request. ○ What key messages LBOT should share with Council and when to share them. ○ Any special approaches or techniques should be used to get our points across. <p>Vice Chair Sharon Carter-Gunter, Mr. Yates, and Mr. Firestine met to focus on the preparation of advocacy budget requests ensuring the budget is aligned with the strategic plan. The five core areas discussed, all linked to the Mayoral Action Plan (MAP) Thriving Families, drive the operating request:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access and Extended Hours: Funding supports implanting the 9:00 am earlier opening time at all branch locations. It also establishes a Richmond Room Community Memory Librarian FTE to support "A City that Tells its Stories" and public history efforts. 2. Outreach Expansion: Funding covers the 3.0 FTE staffing for the Mobile Library, purchased with FY26 CIP funds. The mobile unit will deploy programs directly to target neighborhoods, addressing transportation challenges and geographical access barriers. 3. Lifelong Learning: This supports adults with job seeking, advanced education, job certification skills, and senior citizen programming. 4. Young adults Service Expansion: Funding will establish one professional librarian FTE at each location to provide programs tailored for young adult development and success. 5. Childhood Literacy Initiative: This expands staffing and programming for the juvenile department, focusing on early literacy for ages birth to 5, and ages 6-13. <p>Also, the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a necessary investment to close service gaps, modernize essential infrastructure, and ensure city-wide accessibility.</p> <p>The CIP Goals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Correcting Geographic Imbalance: RPL has a significant service deficit with only three locations south of the James River versus five north. The Mobile Library will validate the need for adding more branches, especially in Southside to eliminate this deficit and deliver resources to underserved populations. 2. Modernizing Critical Neighborhood Hubs: The request targets renovation, expansion, or replacement of the Westover Hills, East End, and Belmont Branch Libraries, which surveys show require increased size for resource and program delivery. 3. Resolving the Main Library Crisis: The Main buildings nearly 100 years old and suffers from an ongoing operational crisis impacting safety, access, and patron experience. Given that, the 2022 Master Plan estimated renovation costs at over \$63 million (rising annually due to inflation), RPL recommends a major renovation to fully modernize the facility and upgrade it to 21st Century Standard.

Reports (Continued)	
Advocacy Task Force (Continued) <u>Christine Peterson</u> <u>Sheron Carter-Gunter</u>	<p>After Mr. Firestine presented the additional budget request, Chair Peterson facilitated the development of the Six-Month Advocacy Plan. The discussion focused on strategies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing theme-specific correspondence • Engaging in meaningful, targeted conversations tailored to each district, library, and the specific budget and CIP requests • Scheduling meetings with City Administration, making follow-up phone calls, and attending Council District Town Halls • Other related outreach activities <p>Vice Chair Carter-Gunter will compile and formalize all input into a Six-Month Advocacy Plan to be distributed to the LBOT in November.</p>
Policy Taskforce <u>Emily Altman</u>	<p>No Formal Report.</p>
Chair Report <u>Christine Peterson, Chair</u>	<p>Chair Peterson highlighted the ongoing efforts to improve and expand library facilities. She was pleased to report a <i>unanimous vote</i> in support of the Main Library improvements, as well as the planned expansions of the Westover Hills, Belmont, and East End Branch Libraries. Additionally, there will be consideration of new library locations to better serve the public.</p> <p>Following meetings with professionals experienced in building development, Chair Peterson noted that the group's current messaging needs improvement. She emphasized the importance of developing a clear and compelling elevator pitch, which will also strengthen advocacy efforts.</p> <p>Mr. Firestine is currently collaborating with his management team to refine this new elevator pitch. The LBOT, Friends, and Foundation Directors are also encouraged to begin thinking about developing their own versions, which will later be combined into one cohesive and concise message.</p>
Chair Report (Continued) <u>Christine Peterson, Chair</u>	<p>The LBOT identified three branch libraries for expansion: Belmont, East End, and Westover Hills. Chair Peterson and Mr. Firestine recently met with Director of General Services Gail Johnson from the Department of General Services Administration, who recommended commissioning an Engineering Architect Feasibility Assessment to determine whether these sites can expand up to 15,000 square feet.</p> <p>Mr. Firestine has submitted a request to initiate the study for the three branches, and the Request for Proposals (RFP) is expected to be released in early November.</p>
Finance <u>Bill Yates, Chair</u> <u>Scott Firestine</u>	<p>No Formal Report.</p>

Reports (Continued)	
Facilities <u>Janet Woody, Chair</u> <u>Scott Firestine</u>	No Formal Report.
Governance <u>Garrett Sawyer, Chair</u> Christine Peterson	<p>Mr. Sawyer reported recommended and potential LBOT candidate Antoine Green has been approved by the Education and Human Services Standing Committee on October 9, 2025, during the 2 pm meeting. The last part of the process is to get final approval at the City Council Meeting that will take place on November 10.</p> <p>Should Mr. Green reach final approval, he will become the next LBOT board member to complete the term of Gail Zwirner, which ends on June 30, 2028.</p>
UNFINISHED BUSINESS	
No Unfinished Business was discussed.	
NEW BUSINESS	
No New Business was discussed.	

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:31 p.m. by unanimous consent from the members who were present.

There is no meeting in November. The LBOT's next meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 3, 2025, at the Westover Hills Branch Library located at 1408 Westover Hills Boulevard, Virginia 23223, starting at 11:45 a.m.

Approved: 
 Christine Peterson, Chair

Recorder: *Gianna Pack, CAP*
 Senior Executive Assistant