Brooklyn Public Library

Board Meeting Action Items

September 30, 2025
Brooklyn Heights Library

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Brooklyn, NY 11238-5619
bklynlibrary.org

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
CENTRAL LIBRARY

Minutes of the Board Meeting of June 25, 2025

The regular meeting of Brooklyn Public Library was held at Library for Arts and Culture on June 25, 2025, commencing at 5:50 PM. Nina Collins, Chair, presided.

The following Trustees were present: Jordan Barowtiz, Madeline Carson, Nina Collins, Anthony Crowell, Taiwo Danmola, Chad Dickerson, Hank Gutman, Claire Hoffman, Brooke Jones, Miriam Katowitz, Michael Liburd, Susan Marcinek, Sarah Mallory, Brian O'Neil, Sandra Schubert, Christina Tettonis, Erin Texeira and Patrick Train-Gutiérrez.

The following Trustees attended via Zoom: Milo Blair, José Claxton, Xochitl Gonzalez, Tim Ingrassia, Eddie Joyce, DeWayne Louis, Steve Mei, Seble Tareke-Williams and Dom Williams.

The following Trustees were absent: Alice Fisher Rubin, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Johari Jenkins-Taylor, Jerry Lee, Cassandra Metz, Jason Otaño, Michelle de la Uz, Kamy Wicoff and David Womack.

The following staff were present: Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO; Karen Sheehan, CFO; Nick Higgins, Chief Librarian; Robin Lester Kenton, EVP of External Affairs; Lexy Mayers, EVP, Center for Brooklyn History; Lauren Arana, VP and Chief Development Officer; David Giles, Chief Strategy Officer; Selvon Smith, VP of Information Technology; LaChonne Walton, Chief Human Resources Officer; Chloe Wasserman, General Counsel; Michele Bonan, VP of Government and Community Relations; Jakab Orsos, VP of Arts & Culture; Kristie Maduro, VP of Capital Finance and Real Estate; and Eliana Miller, recorder.

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CHAIR'S REPORT – N. Collins
Chair Collins welcomed the Board to the last meeting of Fiscal Year 2025. She presented the meeting schedule for the coming year and announced details of the next round of branch visits and Whitman Circle events. She also shared that Randy Peers stepped off the board in May and Hank Gutman will step off at the end of the month after 11 years as a trustee. Chair Collins thanked them both for their service to the Library.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – L. Johnson
President Johnson updated the Board on the budget. Negotiations are ongoing and the Library is pushing for increased expense and capital funding. To date, patrons have sent more than 5,000 letters to city leaders in support of our city funding requests. Meanwhile, the state budget passed and included a $2.5 million increase statewide for Library Operating Aid and continued investment in Library Construction Aid. The State Assembly Delegation funded our request for $13.2 million in capital for emergency infrastructure repairs at 20 libraries across Brooklyn, our largest ever state capital delegation request. We also received an allocation of $100 thousand in operating funds for CBH, which was listed for the first time as a line in the state budget alongside other research libraries.

President Johnson also shared a recap of the June gala, which exceeded our goal and raised $1.41 million (and counting). She thanked trustees for their leadership and support. Over 380 guests came to celebrate the 20th anniversary of our Teen Techies internship and our Summer at the Library partnership with the New York Liberty, including new limited-edition Liberty library cards. We have already distributed nearly 7,000 Liberty cards, a third of which came from new patrons. At the gala, Google announced a $1 million investment in BPL to help address the growing need for AI literacy and job-relevant digital skills in our borough with a two-pronged program, helping staff and patrons build both AI and career skills.

President Johnson relayed updates on the transition to Workday, as well as details for an upcoming exhibition at Central about the life and work of author Tove Jansson, a queer Finnish artist and author. Lastly, she announced that Chief Librarian Nick Higgins will be stepping back from his role at the end of the summer.

SECRETARY'S REPORT – M. Liburd
Secretary Liburd presented the minutes of the meeting on April 29, 2024, for approval. Trustee Jones **MOVED** that the minutes be accepted **SECONDED** by Trustee Train-Gutiérrez. The Board **VOTED** unanimously, and the **MOTION** carried.

FINANCE COMMITTEE – B. O'Neil
Treasurer O'Neil invited Chief Financial Officer Karen Sheehan to present for the Finance Committee.

CFO Sheehan recapped potential funding from the Mayor's Executive Budget, the state budget, federal funding for Adult Literacy & E-rate initiatives and endowment spending. The Fiscal Year 2026 budget, totaling $160.5 million, has been balanced and modeled. This budget includes salary support for 1,167 positions, including 65 roles held in budget reserve, and incorporates contractual and union cost of living adjustment increases. This budget supports the maintenance of six-day service at branches and provides seven-day service at nine branches, including the Central Library.

We are hopeful the City's Adopted Budget, to be released at the end of June, will include additional funding. If there are material changes in revenue assumptions, we will adjust the budget accordingly and seek necessary approvals in September. The Finance Committee reviewed the proposed budget and recommends it to the full Board for final approval.

Treasurer O'Neil asked for a motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget. Trustee Katowitz so **MOVED**, **SECONDED** by Trustee Train-Gutiérrez. The Board **VOTED** and the **MOTION** carried.

CFO Sheehan presented the proposed insurance premium for Fiscal Year 2026 of approximately $2.78 million, reflecting a 1.2 percent increase from the previous year. With the assistance of our insurance broker, Alliant Insurance Services, we obtained quotes from various carriers. Key changes include increases in coverage for: directors and officers, commercial property and general liability, commercial automobile use, excess liability and umbrella policies. There was a slight decrease in the worker's compensation premium. The Finance Committee reviewed the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 insurance premium and coverage and recommends it to the full Board for approval.

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Treasurer O'Neil asked for a motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2026 Insurance Premium. Trustee Danmola so **MOVED**, **SECONDED** by Trustee Gutman. The Board **VOTED** and the **MOTION** carried.

COMMITTEE ON TRUSTEES — P. Train-Gutiérrez

Trustee Train-Gutiérrez presented one potential new trustee, Camilla Velasquez. Camilla is an accomplished senior product and growth leader who currently serves as the Senior Vice President and General Manager of New York Times Cooking. She previously worked at Justworks, Etsy and American Express. Camilla serves as an independent director on the Board of Porch Group. She is a longtime friend of the Library and a member of the Digital Strategy Committee. The Committee on Trustees reviewed her bio and recommends electing Camilla to the Board.

Secretary Liburd **MOVED** to elect Camilla Velasquez to the Board of Trustees. Trustee Marcinek **SECONDED**. The Board **VOTED** and the **MOTION** carried.

Trustee Train-Gutiérrez also presented a non-trustee committee candidate for the Digital Strategy Committee: Gene Liebel. Gene is Co-Founder of Work & Co, an international award-winning design and technology company. Throughout his career, he has led the development of transformative digital solutions, including AI-powered tools for Planned Parenthood. He also co-founded Huge, a digital agency, and is a Whitman Circle member. The Committee on Trustees reviewed Gene's bio and recommends appointing him to the Digital Strategy Committee.

Trustee Tettonis **MOVED** to appoint Gene Liebel to the Digital Strategy Committee. Trustee Barowitz **SECONDED**. The Board **VOTED** and the **MOTION** carried.

Finally, Trustee Train-Gutiérrez discussed the current roster of trustees and shared that, based on their previous involvement, support and expertise, the Committee hopes to add Sarah Wheeler and Gabe Pizzi to the Board at a future Board meeting.

LIBRARY OPERATIONS COMMITTEE – N. Higgins

Chief Librarian Nick Higgins updated the Board on several recent initiatives including Summer at the Library, presentations at the annual American Library Association conference, and the re-opening of Beford Library.

He also shared that the Boody Fund Committee reviewed thirteen applications from staff members seeking financial assistance under the Boody Fund Program. The Committee recommends that all be approved for monetary awards of various sizes.

Chair Collins asked for a motion to approve the 2025 Boody Fund allocations. Trustee Train-Gutiérrez so **MOVED**, **SECONDED** by Trustee Marcinek. The Board **VOTED** and the **MOTION** carried.

AUDIT COMMITTEE – T. Danmola

Trustee Danmola shared that the Audit Committee met with our independent tax preparer, Eisner Advisory Group, LLC, to review and approve their engagement letters and audit plan for

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Fiscal year 2025. Because BPL is a component unit of the City, we must submit a copy of the audited report, including any findings, to the Comptroller's office by September 12, 2025. The Committee is tentatively scheduled to meet with the auditors to receive and approve their audit report on September 9, 2025. In addition, the Committee asked EisnerAmper LLP to review, as a subsequent period exercise, the installation of BPL's new ERP system, Workday, paying particular emphasis to the security setups.

INVESTMENT AND ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE – J. Claxton

Trustee Claxton shared that the Library's portfolio balance as of May 31, 2025, was $50.6 million, after adjusting for total cash withdrawals for operations of $6.4 million (since inception). For the calendar year (to May 31, 2025), the portfolio was up 4.92 percent, net of fees, versus the custom blended benchmark returns of 4.55 percent. Since its inception date (July 1, 2022), the Fidelity portfolio has been up 9.78 percent (net) versus the custom benchmark's performance of 10.6 percent. Fiscal year-to-date, the portfolio returned 9.07 percent net of fees, compared to the custom benchmark's return of 8.92 percent.

DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING COMMITTEE – M. Liburd

Secretary Liburd updated the Board on the latest fundraising numbers. As of June 4, the Library has raised $8.9 million toward our $9.2 million Fiscal Year 2025 goal. Since then, we've exceeded the goal. With gifts still coming in, we'll report final numbers in September. Secretary Liburd thanked trustees for coming to the gala, and then highlighted recent major gifts including $1 million from Google, $5 million grant from New York State Council for the Arts for New Lots Library, and $150 thousand from Amazon for Red Hook Library.

He shared details on how the Library will message fundraising efforts given the national landscape, and new peer-to-peer fundraising efforts to cultivate more relationships via the Whitman Circle. Secretary Liburd asked trustees to consider hosting events or suggest authors for future partnerships.

On the marketing front, he shared that BPL is working to increase library card sign-ups while proactively and creatively promoting the extraordinary array of services we offer.

CAPITAL PLANNING AND FACILITIES OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE – J. Barowitz

Trustee Barowitz provided updates on the capital portfolio, including projects managed by DDC, BPL, and EDC. There are 60 active capital projects at our branches totaling $532 million. For Fiscal Year 2026, BPL received our largest ever allocation from the State Assembly Delegation, including funding for 12 roofs and 6 HVAC, BMS, and fire safety upgrades across the system.

Trustee Barowitz also explained a new proposed co-location site for the City's Living Libraries initiative, which seeks to partner library locations with significant capital needs with affordable housing developments. The New Utrecht Library has twice been slated for a large capital project managed by DDC, and it has twice stalled due to issues with the architectural firms. BPL currently has $23 million for that renovation, which we are now planning to put towards a redevelopment at the branch in partnership with Housing Preservations & Development. While still early in the planning phase, staff have begun discussing potential co-location plans with elected officials and the local community board.

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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE – L. Walton
Chief Human Resources Officer LaChonne Walton provided updates on Pathways to Leadership. Last month, the Institute of Museums and Library Services grant that supports Pathways was reinstated. Programming will continue as planned. Nonetheless, staff are continuing to seek out other funding sources for Pathways, and we recently received a grant from the Marguerite Casey Foundation, thanks to an introduction from Trustee Gonzalez. The current Pathways cohorts are shadowing BPL librarians and getting more hands-on experience in the branches. They also completed a business writing course and visited both BookOps and Pratt this spring. By the end of the summer, the first full cohort of scholars will have graduated, and we are excited to celebrate their achievements.

Chief Human Resources Officer Walton highlighted that access and belonging is one of the four pillars of the upcoming Strategic Plan. She also encouraged trustees to visit CBH's new exhibition, *Trace/s: Family History Research and the Legacy of Slavery in Brooklyn.*

CENTER FOR BROOKLYN HISTORY COMMITTEE – L. Mayers
Executive Vice President Lexy Mayers updated the Board on three upcoming exhibitions at CBH:

- *Centering Collections: New Work at CBH*, opening in August will showcase newly acquired or processed collections
- *Brooklyn Politics*, will open in October, coinciding with the Mayoral election
- *Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence*, opening in early 2026

She also shared that the Committee voted in favor of the acquisition of "Mildred Jones Portrait and Sketch." Mildred Jones, whose portrait and story was featured in *Trace/s*, has donated the portrait to CBH. The painting will be the first oil portrait of a Black woman in the collection. The Committee agreed to loan several items to the Museum of the City of New York for an exhibit on the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. They also voted to allow Greenwood Cemetery to display the Bernard Ratzer map titled "Southern Portion, plan of the City of NY in North American," provided Greenwood can show that the map will be appropriately transported, cared for and insured.

EVP Mayers announced that since January, CBH's education team has hosted 17 schools with 300 students. Next year the plan is to increase significantly to at least 50 visits per year. CBH has also enhanced our collections management system with a new database for art and artifacts collections. Additionally, new exterior signage with information about upcoming exhibits and programs will be installed in the fall, making CBH more welcoming and accessible.

DIGITAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE – C. Dickerson
Trustee Dickerson updated the Board on the progress of our mobile app, which has over 60,000 total downloads and has been well-received by patrons, especially after a round of recent improvements. He also shared details of the Decoded Futures AI project, a program backed by TechNYC that helps nonprofits prototype ways to adopt AI. BPL is part of a cohort with 10 other NYC-based nonprofits, and we are designing a custom AI solution to help solve language access issues. Staff are just beginning to test the prototype internally.

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PRESENTATION: STRATEGIC PLAN – D. Giles
Chief Strategy Officer David Giles presented on the Library's new strategic plan. He took feedback from trustees which will be incorporated into the plan before it is finalized this fall.

EXECUTIVE SESSION
The Board discussed a staffing matter during executive session.

ADJOURNMENT
The regular meeting adjourned at 7:35 PM.

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Action Item 6a
September 30, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: **Walt Whitman Capital Construction Grant Resolution**

BACKGROUND:

The Library is managing the Walt Whitman branch renovation as a "pass through," that is, to self-manage the project rather than use the City's Department of Design and Construction (DDC) as its project management agent. The $15.10 million project is supported by $12.70 million in City Capital and $2.40 million in grant and expense funds.

In FY 2019, BPL staff allocated $6.5 million from the Brooklyn Heights capital proceeds to fund a renovation at Walt Whitman Library. BPL added an additional $6.2 million of its own Capital funds to ensure adequate funds are available to complete the project.

In addition to the Capital funds, BPL received a $1.25 million competitive grant from New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative, and a $0.50 million State and Municipal Facilities grant from Assembly Member Phara Souffrant Forrest. BPL is contributing $0.60 million in expense funding, and BPL also requested and received $1.00 million from Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso to be used for the furniture and fixtures purchase as part of the initial outfitting. These funds are maintained in a separate capital project and will be used as BPL gets closer to finishing the renovation of Walt Whitman Library.

STATUS:

The project is fully designed, and construction began earlier this spring. The Board has previously authorized a contract with Benchmark Builders to perform construction management services.

In order to finalize the capital grant award with the City, the City requires a Board resolution affirming its intent to enter into such an agreement. The agreement stipulates that the City's contribution is fixed at $12.70 million and requires that the Library set aside a minimum reserve fund totaling 10% ($1.27 million) of the City contribution. This reserve fund was previously approved as part of Library's Board-designated funds for building renovation. The balance in the Board-designated funds currently stands at $10.0 million, and it includes $5.64 million previously set aside for other capital projects. h

ACTION RECOMMENDED:

The Finance & Budget Committee recommends the Board approve a resolution to enter into a capital grant contract with the City of New York.

Action Item #7a
September 30, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: **Approval of Non-Trustee Committee Member**

BACKGROUND: The Digital Strategy Committee would like to welcome the following non-Trustee committee member:

Ben Darnell
Ben Darnell was the co-founder and former CTO of Cockroach Labs where he worked on the distributed consensus protocols that underpin its transactional model. He started his career at Google and then went on to a series of startups where he saw firsthand the need for better scalable storage systems. He has worked at FriendFeed, Facebook, Brizzly, Tornado, Viewfinder and Square. Ben lives in Cobble Hill and when he's not working, he likes to travel the globe in search of food and adventure.

STATUS: The Committee on Trustees proposes that the Board approve the addition of Ben Darnell to the Digital Strategy Committee.

REQUIRED ACTION: The Committee on Trustees recommends that the Board approve the addition of Ben Darnell to the Digital Strategy Committee.

Action Item 7b
September 30, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: **Election of Trustee Emeritus: Alice Fisher Rubin**

BACKGROUND: The Committee on Trustees has developed guidelines for determining the election of a Trustee Emeritus. Each candidate must have provided exemplary service as a Trustee on the Board for at least 12 years and served as an Officer of the Corporation, an At-Large member of the Executive Committee, or the Chair of a Committee. Once elected as a Trustee Emeritus, the trustee must resign from their position on the Board.

On September 22, 2025, the Committee on Trustees considered and approved the election of Alice Fisher Rubin to Trustee Emeritus.

Alice Fisher Rubin has served on the Board of Brooklyn Public Library for 50 years. She served as Chair of the Board in the mid 1990s and has been an active member of many board committees. Judge Fisher Rubin's service spans the entire civic landscape of Brooklyn and New York City—she is a retired New York City Civil Court Judge, former NYC Commissioner, advisor to both a Mayor and Governor, trial attorney, and committed educator as an adjunct professor at CUNY Technical College and Long Island University. She also played a pivotal role in the creation of the Cortelyou Library in Prospect Park South in the early 1980s, expanding educational and cultural access in our borough. Judge Fisher Rubin is a fierce advocate for justice, education, and access to information for all.

STATUS: The Committee on Trustees has reviewed Alice Fisher Rubin's candidacy and approves his election as a Trustee Emeritus.

REQUIRED ACTION: The Committee on Trustees recommends that the full Board approve the election of Alice Fisher Rubin as Trustee Emeritus.

Action Item #8a
September 30, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: **Approval of the State Reports**

BACKGROUND:

Brooklyn Public Library carries two designations from the State of New York. The first is a designation as a system library, which has a central library with its own specific funding and a network of branch libraries across the system. The second is a designation as an association library with a board of trustees and a charter, and which is required to meet specific requirements as dictated by the state's education mandates.

Every year, the Strategy Department submits general information about BPL's operations, branches, budget, and Board members to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) in the form of two State Reports. The Board must approve these two reports for submission.

STATUS: Upon review, the Library Operations proposes that the Board approve the State Reports.

REQUIRED ACTION: The Library Operations Committee recommends that the full Board approve the State Reports for submission to NYSED.