

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES**

Tuesday, September 23, 2025

**Central Library
Rotary Club of Milwaukee Community Room
814 W. Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53233**

PRESENT: Mark Sain, Michele Bria, Teresa Mercado, Ald. Milele Coggs, Matthew Kowalski, Felicia Saffold, Ald. Scott Spiker, Venice Williams, Joan Johnson

EXCUSED: Michael Morgan, Ald. Larresa Taylor, Sup. Kathleen Vincent

STAFF: Kelly Bolter, Kristina Gomez, Dan Keeley, Yves LaPierre, Tammy Mays Wilder, Jennifer Meyer-Stearns, Karli Pederson, Brett Rohlwing, Rebecca Schweisberger, Heather Smith, Emily Vieyra, Kelly Wochinske

OTHER: Budget & Management Division: Nathaniel Haack

Acting Chair Bria called the meeting of the Milwaukee Public Library Board of Trustees to order at 4:10 p.m. on September 23, 2025. Trustees Sain, Mercado, Coggs, Saffold, and Williams participated by phone/virtual conference.

Chair Bria remarked on the success of the Martin Luther King branch grand opening, gave kudos to all involved, and reminded Trustees that the October meeting will be held at the new Martin Luther King branch.

Deputy Library Director Jennifer Meyer-Stearns introduced Emily Vieyra, Temporary Public Services Area Manager – Central Library. Ms. Vieyra formerly served as Library Services Manager – Acquisitions & Serials before agreeing to act as interim Manager for Central Library.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. **Regular Board Meeting Minutes July 22, 2025**
2. **Committee Reports**
 - a. Finance & Personnel Committee Meeting Minutes – July 22, 2025
3. **Administrative Reports**
 - a. Financial Report
 - b. Library Director's Reports
 - c. Statistics
4. **Revised MPL Board Meeting Schedule.**

Chair Bria asked the Board if any items should be removed from the Consent Agenda presented as attachment A, pages 4-49 of the agenda. Hearing no objection, the Consent Agenda was approved.

ATTACHMENT A - P. 1 of 25
MPL CONSENT AGENDA

2. Regular Board Meeting Minutes - 09/23/2025
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REPORTS

5. **Milwaukee County Federated Library System (MCFLS) Board Meeting.** Library Director Joan Johnson reported on the September 9, 2025 meeting. The Library Directors Advisory Council (LDAC) received a presentation about the new Welcome Card pilot program. MPL is partnering with Wauwatosa Public Library to implement the program, which will begin in October. The pilot will be evaluated after 6 months. MPL received kudos on the new Martin Luther King branch. MCFLS mailed nearly 12,000 postcards from patrons to Congress in support of the national 'Speak Up for Libraries' advocacy campaign. MCFLS Executive Director Steve Hesser has developed a webinar about MCFLS governance, which will be shared with all MCFLS member Trustees on October 23rd. Informational item.
6. **Urban Libraries Council (ULC) Executive Committee.** Trustee Bria reported on the July meeting. ULC continues to focus on advocacy and building bi-partisan support for libraries at local and national levels. ULC is launching a virtual training course for members to build leadership skills and support the pathway to library leadership and management. An upcoming course will focus on the basics of data analytics. The Business Value Calculator helps members quantify the economic impact of library use in the surrounding areas. The ULC Data Hive prepared several whitepapers on the economic impact of library branches. The Development Task Force has been created to recommend advocacy methods to reach donors at the national level. Trustee Bria is chairing this committee. Member libraries are facing some of the same challenges and working together to identify scalable solutions. ULC discussed conducting research on outcomes of the connection between reading and movement. Informational item.
7. **Building & Development Committee.** Trustee Kowalski presented the action items from the September 4, 2025 meeting.
 - **Contract Award Request – Central Library Fire Alarm System.** Deputy Library Director Jennifer Meyer-Stearns reviewed the status of the current fire alarm system, which is very outdated and in need of replacement. Replacing this critical safety system is a priority. The Committee discussed the selection process and concerns that only one bid was received. Deputy Director Meyer-Stearns confirmed all RFP and selection processes were followed. President Sain noted other projects and some redevelopment projects have been approved with only one bidder response. The vendor will be responsible for meeting the specifications of the RFP and City inspectors will review the finished product.

Trustee Kowalski moved to award the fire alarm system replacement contract to Wil-Surge Electric, Inc. for \$2, 986,150.00. Trustee Williams seconded. Motion passed. Trustee Taylor abstained.
 - **Martin Luther King Branch Proposed Room/Area Naming.** Library Director Johnson presented a recommendation for naming areas and rooms in the new Martin Luther King branch. The list is on page 52 of the agenda. The recommendations were developed with MPL Foundation leadership and follow the existing Board policy related to naming. Spaces will either be named in acknowledgement of donors or a plaque recognizing the donation will be placed outside the area.

Trustee Mercado moved to approve the list of donor-named spaces as presented. Trustee Spiker seconded. Motion passed.
8. **Board Photo.** This item was held for a future meeting.

9. **Approval of Agendas as Corrected.** Revised agenda items from July 2025, listed as Attachment C of the agenda, were presented for approval. Trustee Spiker moved to approve the corrected versions; Trustee Kowalski seconded. Motion passed.
10. **2026 Budget.** Library Director Joan presented an update on the 2026 budget. The budget summary is attached at the end of these minutes. MPL is sustaining a 3.3% reduction from the cost-to-continue request, resulting in the loss of 10 positions. Due to additional miscellaneous staffing and funding changes, there are 16 fewer positions total. However, MPL is holding vacancies as needed and there will be no layoffs. MPL is reviewing changes in funding sources and updates to the staffing model. Current library hours, including Drive-up, will be retained and year-round service on Sundays will continue at Central Library only. A new, more equitable Sunday staffing rotation will be implemented. The staffing study findings will be presented at the November Board meeting. Staffing will be realigned to meet patron needs and support library goals. To support investments in youth and all-ages 21st century learning, 2 librarian and 2 Library Customer Service Representative (LSCR) positions will be converted to Connected Learning Specialists to staff all four MPL makerspaces. As part of the investment in staff and patron safety, 1 LSCR position will be converted to a Library Communications Assistant position. Additional realignment includes converting 4 LCSR and 1 Library Circulation Services Supervisor (LCSS) positions from Central Circulation to Technical & Collection Services and shifting 1 Librarian from Central Library Children's Room (CLCR) to Technical & Collection Services. MPL continues to advocate for designation as the statewide Resource Library. Capital projects include masonry, roof, and dome repair at Central Library, upgrades to IT and security infrastructure, and planning for construction of a new Capitol branch. 2026 Priorities include:
- Implementation of OneMPL, a system-wide realignment of roles, reporting structures, workflows, and culture.
 - Maintaining Education and Outreach Services, including delivery service, college prep, workforce development, and creating a pipeline to youth employment.
 - Economic and Digital Inclusion - focus on workforce development, continuation of the Entrepreneur-in-Residence program, and expansion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) instruction.
 - Community Engagement - using the community engagement report findings and other feedback to guide decision-making and planning. Branch workplans will be updated for 2026.
 - Technical Services and Collections - acquisitions, management and access for all materials including books and media, hotspots, laptops; database management and maintenance and IT support for all network services, online resources, desktops and wi-fi; interlibrary loan for County and State.
 - Maintaining Virtual MPL Services including: CountyCat/Holds pick up; downloadable and streaming video and audio content; research databases and online journals; online courses, tutoring and homework help; online reference via chat and email; selected virtual live and recorded programming; social media accounts on multiple platforms; 24/7 access to the aforementioned.
 - Environmental Investments – working with the Environmental Collaboration Office to install electric vehicle charging stations at select locations.
 - Administrative Services, Facilities and Fleet - Executive Leadership team vacancies to be filled as quickly as possible, HR, Business Office, Communications, Security Services at most locations, Maintenance Services for buildings and grounds at 13 locations and other operations. Security staffing moved in-house this year and recruitment and selection, onboarding, and training is ongoing—hope to fully stabilize in early 2026.

Director Johnson will send Trustees a copy of the narrative report, statistics for Sunday usage, and the executive summary of the staffing study (when available). Informational item.

11. **Art Loan to Milwaukee Public Museum.** Deputy Library Director Jennifer Meyer-Stearns presented information about the provenance of a portrait of Solomon Juneau and a request to loan the piece to Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM). The memo is attached at the end of these minutes. If approved, MPL will make a recommendation for replacement with another piece. Deputy Director Meyer-Stearns noted the Ben Franklin statue at Central Library is currently on loan from MPM and it is being appraised as well. A request for permanent transfer of the portrait and statue may be presented to the Board at a future meeting. Trustee Spiker moved to approve the 2-year loan of the Solomon Juneau portrait to the new Nature & Culture Museum of Wisconsin (Milwaukee Public Museum). Trustee Kowalski seconded. Motion passed.
12. **Closing Remarks.** Library Director Joan Johnson shared details on upcoming events:
 - September 30th – *I Live Underwater*: a Max Nohl Book Event with Maritime Archaeologist Tamara Thomsen. Milwaukee Public Library welcomes Wisconsin Historical Society Maritime Archaeologist Tamara Thomsen to discuss the newly published memoir of Max Nohl, a Record-Breaking Diver and Deep-Sea Explorer. The original manuscript is part of MPL's collection. It was borrowed by the Wisconsin Historical Society, who annotated, enhanced, and published the work. MPL receives proceeds from the sale of the book.
 - Chair Bria gave a reminder about the upcoming Ben Franklin Awards Ceremony.
 - The October meeting will be held at Martin Luther King branch.

With no further business, the Milwaukee Public Library Board of Trustees meeting of September 23, 2025 was adjourned at 5:23 p.m.
