Westchester Public Library Board of Trustees
Minutes
August 20, 2026
DRAFT

A regular meeting of the Westchester Public Library Board of Trustees was held at the Thomas Branch, located at 200 Indiana Ave. in Chesterton, Indiana on Thursday, August 20, 2026. This meeting was rescheduled from the planned August 13 regular meeting, which had been cancelled due to widespread storm damage and a resulting power outage in the area. It was called to order by Justin Martinson, Board President at 7:01 p.m.

Board members present were: Abbe Trent, Denise Barkow, Kathryn Cochran, Michael Livovich, Michele Corazzo, and Justin Martinson.

Board members absent: N/A

Also present at this meeting were: Library Director Heather Chaddock and Library Assistant Director Jessica Bartz. Library Attorney Lisa Baron and Board Member Chirag Patel attended virtually via Zoom.

Approval of Minutes
A motion was made by Kathryn Cochran to approve the minutes from the July 09, 2026 regular session. Denise Barkow seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Financial and Statistical Reports
A motion was made by Michael Livovich to approve the Financial and Statistical Reports for the month of July. Kathryn Cochran seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Approval of Claims and Warrants
A motion was made by Abbe Trent to approve the Register of Claims and Warrants for the time periods of June 12, 2026 through July 9, 2026 and July 10, 2026 through August 20, 2026 as presented. Michele Corazzo seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Librarian's Report
Service highlights were relayed from the past month featuring positive feedback and gratitude expressed by patrons regarding their Library experiences.

SUMMER READING 2026 – The Library completed another successful seven-week Summer Reading program on July 18. This year's *Game On!* theme featured engaging events and decorations for all ages at both branch locations. Director Chaddock reported positive feedback regarding the new prize structure, which allowed participants to enter tickets throughout the summer toward their preferred prize package.
A total of 1,179 active Summer Readers participated, including 562 children, 227 tweens and teens, and

390 adults. While participation was slightly lower than last year's total of 1,187, the Library continues to see strong participation following significant growth in 2024 and 2025. Director Chaddock noted that planning for the 2027 Summer Reading program will begin in January.

OFFICE PROJECTS UPDATE – Construction for the office projects is officially underway, beginning with the Thomas Children's Department office. Necessary asbestos abatement was completed and protective plastic sheeting installed. Hasse is now waiting on a delayed brick delivery to add windows to the back storage area to turn it into a new office. Their current schedule states that the Thomas Branch work will be completed by the end of August, and the Hageman Branch work will be finished by the end of October. The first A & C for payment was received for this project, in the amount of $7,398.60, which was included in the Board Documents.

Denise Barkow asked about the asbestos abatement and Director Chaddock explained that asbestos found was removed using proper protocols.

APRA REQUEST – On July 21, Director Chaddock received an Indiana Access to Public Records Act (APRA) request from Cate Charron, a First Amendment Reporter with the IndyStar, seeking the Library's current policy regarding requests for the removal of library materials, as well as any material removal or relocation requests, petitions, and related documentation since August 1, 2022. Director Chaddock worked with Library attorney Lisa Baron to fulfill the request. The Library had not received any formal material removal requests during the requested period, but had received emailed complaints regarding a few books. Director Chaddock provided the relevant email correspondence, Board meeting minutes, and the current policy in response to the request. The Library has not received any further communication or seen any resulting coverage to date, and Director Chaddock will provide updates if needed.

DUNELAND HISTORY CENTER GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY – The groundbreaking ceremony on Thursday, July 30th was very successful, with 101 people in attendance. The marketing director from Berglund shared that it was one of the most well-organized and "aesthetically pleasing" groundbreaking ceremonies she had ever been a part of. Director Chaddock again thanked each Board member for their dedication, especially the Museum Committee, whose work has helped make this exciting project possible.

Chirag Patel joined virtually via Zoom at this point in the meeting.

Denise Barkow said the marketing director also told her it was the best turnout for a groundbreaking she had seen in awhile. The Board members applauded Director Chaddock's efforts in organizing the event, stating it was very well done and the speeches from everyone were very nice.

Curator Serena Ard and Director Chaddock attended the DHC construction kick-off meeting virtually on July 23rd. The primary update from the meeting was that Millies Engineering and the Town of Chesterton were still working through a few permitting matters. The remaining issues are expected to be resolved soon, with construction anticipated to begin by the end of August.

STATISTICS – In July, 18,215 people visited the Library, and 45 in-person programs were created with 791 attendees. The library answered 55 reference questions and 122 tech help questions; 178 people utilized library meeting rooms, and there were 171 reservations for individual study rooms. The Library registered 130 new library cards. Included in the Board Meeting documents were graphs showing materials circulation statistics from the past month.

STAFF CHANGES – Joined: Leah Brown, P/T HR Generalist, Mary Nicholson, P/T Clerk
Separated: Julie Marino, P/T Clerk
Other: N/A

OLD BUSINESS

DUNELAND HISTORY CENTER COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY – ACTION ITEM
This was a tabled item from last month's Board meeting. Director Chaddock took the Board's feedback from the discussion in July and made some additional edits to the proposed mission statement and policy, which were then shared with the August meeting materials. Director Chaddock asked if there were any additional questions or comments and for a subsequent vote on the action item.

Abbe Trent asked if the Library's insurance coverage was sufficient on all high value items owned by the History Center, or if a rider was needed on our insurance policy. Director Chaddock stated that the high value items were already included in our policy.

A motion was made by Michele Corazzo to approve the Duneland History Center Collections Management Policy. Abbe Trent seconded the motion. A roll call was taken, all voted in favor and the motion was passed.

EXTERIOR PROJECTS UPDATE – The exterior projects at the Thomas and Hageman Branches, which began approximately one year ago, are nearing completion. Punch-list items at the Hageman Branch and Baugher Center have been addressed, and window cleaning has been completed at all locations. Director Chaddock expects to conduct the final punch-list walk at the Thomas Branch next week.

The primary remaining issue is the front doors at the Hageman Branch, which continue to have problems latching properly. The issue has been ongoing since the doors were installed in May, despite multiple attempts by experts from three separate vendors to repair the locking mechanism. The repairs have only been temporary, requiring staff to periodically secure the doors with a chain and padlock until additional repairs can be made.

Due to these ongoing issues, Berglund is currently soliciting proposals to replace the existing residential doors with a commercial set featuring a different locking mechanism. The original doors were specified as residential doors with commercial hardware, due to the size of the building and the residential specifications of the Hageman windows. A replacement proposal was initially received in the amount of $13,300, and Berglund is seeking additional proposals. The replacement will likely be submitted as a

Change Order for the project. Additional Appropriation funds previously set aside for project contingencies will be sufficient to cover the cost of this addition to the scope. A & C #10 for the project, in the amount of $14,111.93, was included in the Board documents.

STEEL SCULPTURE AT THOMAS – ACTION ITEM Director Chaddock met with Hannah Hammond Hagman, Executive Director of the Chesterton Art Center, on July 14 to discuss the proposed installation of a Corten steel sculpture at the Thomas Branch, fabricated by local artist Chad Copeland. The sculpture would be one of several similar pieces installed throughout the downtown area to designate the Chesterton Railside Arts and Cultural District, with additional sculptures planned for Thomas Park, 3 Moons Fiber Works, and locations along Calumet Avenue.

The proposed location at the Thomas Branch would be in the grassy area near the corner of Indiana and 2nd Street, where a sweetgum tree was previously removed due to its seed pods creating a tripping hazard. Director Chaddock suggested that the sculpture be elevated rather than installed on a flat concrete base to discourage climbing. The Town of Chesterton Street Department will provide the labor for installation, and ownership will remain with the Town and the Chesterton Branding Leadership Team, so the Library will not be responsible for ongoing maintenance. The sculpture will naturally develop a rust-colored patina over time. The sculpture at Thomas Park is expected to be installed soon, and Board members will have an opportunity to view it before making a final decision on the Thomas Branch installation. Director Chaddock expressed support for the project as an opportunity to contribute to the beautification of downtown Chesterton. Director Chaddock invited the Board to discuss the proposal and vote.

The Board discussed the proposal, asking questions regarding the sculpture's appearance, overall height including the pedestal, its potential impact on the Library signage, and concerns about people climbing on it. Michele Corazzo suggested waiting until the sculpture planned for Thomas Park is installed so interested Board members can see how it looks in person before making a decision. Abbe Trent also suggested an alternative location for the sculpture. Director Chaddock expressed support for including the Library in the community's sculpture installations, and said she would obtain answers to the trustees' questions. The Board decided to table this discussion for now, and planned to revisit it in October after the Thomas Park sculpture has been installed and viewed.

NEW BUSINESS

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK SECTION 5.6 – ACTION ITEM Following the severe storm and widespread power outage on July 27, the Thomas Branch was closed early that evening, and scheduled staff were paid for the remainder of their shifts, in accordance with the current Emergency Closure Policy. The following morning, Director Chaddock instructed managers to have staff remain available and prepared to report to work within 30 minutes of receiving notice that power had been restored. The Thomas Branch and Baugher Center reopened at 11:00 a.m., followed by the Hageman Branch at 1:00 p.m.

Following the incident, several managers reported that part-time staff had expressed concerns regarding the current policy, which provides pay for scheduled shifts when the Library closes early but does not provide pay when the Library has a delayed opening. In this instance, part-time employees were asked to remain on-call and ready to report to work on short notice, despite not being compensated for that time. This differs from a full-day emergency closure, when part-time employees are not paid but are also not expected to remain available for work.

Director Chaddock stated she thought the policy should be amended to provide pay for scheduled part-time shifts when employees are required to remain on-call during a delayed opening and are expected to report to work once the Library reopens. Compensating employees in these circumstances would encourage staff to remain available and allow the Library to restore full public service as quickly as possible. Without this, the Library may need to rely primarily on salaried staff during delayed openings, resulting in reduced staffing and service to the public.

Director Chaddock asked the Board to discuss and vote on amending Employee Handbook Section 5.6 to provide compensation for scheduled part-time employees required to remain on-call during a delayed opening and subsequently report for their scheduled shift.

Michael Livovich said the proposed change sounded reasonable. Denise Barkow asked whether the Library experienced a high volume of visitors when the buildings reopened, and Director Chaddock explained how the reopening of the two buildings went after the August 11th storm. She also noted that during the more recent storm and extended power outages, she had to make daily decisions regarding whether staff should remain on call.

A motion was made by Michael Livovich to approve amendment of the Emergency Closure Policy, section 5.6 of the Employee Handbook, to provide pay for part-time staff when they are required to remain on-call and expected to report to work upon reopening. Kathryn Cochran seconded the motion. A roll call was taken, all voted in favor, and the motion passed.

APPROVAL OF CORRECTED FINANCIAL REPORTS – ACTION ITEM While preparing the 2027 Budget and reviewing the 2026 monthly Appropriation Reports for the Operating Fund, Director Chaddock discovered that the “Annual Appropriation” amounts listed on the reports reflected the approved 2025 budget amounts, rather than the approved 2026 amounts. Director Chaddock immediately contacted AVC to determine the cause of the error and how it could be corrected.

AVC confirmed that these Appropriation Reports are internal reference documents used by the Library and Board to track monthly spending against approved budget amounts. They are not submitted through Gateway and do not reflect the Library’s actual bank balances. AVC prepared corrected Appropriation Reports for each month of 2026 to date, with the correct 2026 budget amounts for each fund line. The corrected reports have been included together in this month’s Board packet for review. Following Board approval, individual corrected copies will be added to the Library’s digital and printed Board meeting archives for each respective month.

Director Chaddock apologized for the error and noted that she was glad it was identified and corrected. She also noted that the Library’s bookkeeping service contract with AVC concluded on July 31. Director Chaddock stated that she has been pleased with the accuracy and attention to detail demonstrated by the Library's new bookkeeper.

Because the incorrect reports were previously included as part of the Board-approved Financial and Statistical Reports for 2026, Director Chaddock asked the Board to approve the corrected Appropriation Reports as a whole.

A motion was made by Abbe Trent to approve the corrected Financial and Statistical Reports for January through July 2026. Michele Corazzo seconded the motion. A roll call was taken, all voted in favor, and the motion passed.

DRAFT OF 2027 BUDGET PRESENTATION – Director Chaddock announced that she would be presenting a draft of the 2027 Operating Budget to the Board and indicated that she planned to address any changes from 2026 point by point. Director Chaddock noted that this was just the initial presentation, and that the Board would not vote to accept this version tonight. If there were any recommended changes, she would make them before the September Budget Hearing meeting and share them with the Board. Director Chaddock stated she had participated in her DLGF Budget Review meeting today, and that the Library's local representative seemed satisfied with the budget as it was presented.

The Board discussed several aspects of the proposed 2027 budget. Michael Livovich asked what Director Chaddock had heard regarding potential upcoming budget reductions. Director Chaddock referenced the Gateway website and showed the Board the predicted tax cap shortfalls. Michael asked how long the Library could continue at its current spending trend, and Director Chaddock explained that, without additional income, the Library could continue at the current pace for approximately four years. She noted, however, that the Library's investments would provide additional income.

Denise Barkow asked about the large amount budgeted for Other Office Supplies and what types of items were included in that category. Bookkeeper Carissa Domonkos explained that she was following the same classifications used by former bookkeepers, and that the category was used for items that did not fit under standard office supplies. Denise asked to meet with Carissa separately for further clarification, which Carissa agreed to.

Chirag Patel asked whether cameras for the Duneland History Center had been included in the original project quote, and Director Chaddock confirmed that they had not, explaining that a local company, Ellis Electric, had installed the cameras at other WPL locations, and she wanted to wait to use them again after the renovation was complete, so the new cameras could be tied into the existing security camera system and show up on the same dashboard.

Michael Livovich asked how the Library advertises its Board meetings, and Director Chaddock explained that they are advertised on the Library's website.

Michael also asked about the significant increase in payroll taxes compared to the previous year. Director Chaddock explained that some of the increase was attributable to additional personnel and asked the bookkeeper if she was aware of any other factors. The bookkeeper explained that when she began as Administrative Assistant, the Library was receiving numerous tax notices from the IRS regarding missed or late filings and overpayments, which she believed may have been related to errors by AVC, and have since been resolved.

The Board then discussed potential wage increases for part-time and salaried employees. Michael Livovich said he was comfortable with the proposed increase for part-time employees but was leaning toward a smaller increase for salaried employees, considering the substantial raise given to professional staff in 2024. Denise Barkow agreed that exercising caution was reasonable. Abbe Trent noted she believed the Library's wages and salaries remained within a reasonable range compared to other libraries and felt that increases for both hourly and salaried employees were important. She also noted a statistic shared in Director Chaddock's budget presentation, quoting an ILF report that staff compensation should typically come to 65-70% of a public library's total annual budget, or up to 75% if there are multiple locations. The total staff compensation in the presented draft budget was calculated at 58% of the total. Justin Martinson stated that staff are the Library's greatest asset and that it is important to compensate them accordingly, noting that staff turnover can be costly and place additional stress on remaining employees. Kathy Cochran added that the staff are what makes it possible for community members to love their libraries. Chirag Patel agreed with Justin's comments regarding the importance of Library staff, stating they are what keeps the Library going.

Michele Corazzo then asked if the Library would need to hire someone to run the Library of Things, to which Director Chaddock explained that regular Library circulation staff would absorb that work, and she was confident they were up to the task.

Director Chaddock said she would provide a spreadsheet to compare different wage increase options at the next meeting. Michael Livovich also requested comparable salary and wage information for library staff, and Director Chaddock said she would provide those figures as well.

Chirag Patel asked about potential funding caps that he had heard about and Director Chaddock said she would send him a recap of significant legislative changes over the past couple of years.

Denise Barkow moved to approve the Librarian's report and Abbe Trent seconded the motion. A roll call was taken, all voted in favor and the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

The next regular meeting of the Board of Trustees will be held on Thursday, September 10, at 7:00 p.m. at the Thomas Branch, located at 200 W. Indiana Ave, Chesterton.

Kathryn Cochran made a motion to adjourn the meeting. No one seconded the motion. Justin Martinson adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

______________________________ Justin Martinson, President

______________________________ Abbe Trent, Vice President

______________________________ Kathryn Cochran, Secretary

______________________________ Michael Livovich, Treasurer

______________________________ Michele Corazzo, Board Member

______________________________ Chirag Patel, Board Member

______________________________ Denise Barkow, Board Member

Respectfully submitted,
Carissa Domonkos, Minutes Recorder for Kathryn Cochran, Secretary