



Special Meeting of the Library Board of Trustees
Friday, March 28, 2025 – Central Library Lecture Room
11:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Minutes of Actions and Decisions of the Library Board of Trustees of the Bellingham Public Library as authorized by RCW 27.12.210 and SEC. 7.02 Charter of the City of Bellingham.

Board Members Present:	Rebecca Craven (virtual), Kristy Van Ness, Kendra Bradford, Deborra Garrett, and Shirin Deylami
City Council Library Liaison:	Hannah Stone
Library Management Staff:	Rebecca Judd, Annette Bagley, Katrina Buckman, Bethany Hoglund, Jon McConnel and Jennifer Vander Ploeg
FOBPL Representative:	Carol Comeau
BPL Staff:	Michelle Becker, Alison Kuiken

Call to order and introductions: Special session was called to order at 11:03 a.m. by Vice Chair, Kristy Van Ness. Due to Chair Rebecca Craven attending virtually, Rebecca asked Kristy to chair the meeting. All in attendance introduced themselves.

Approve/modify agenda: Deborah Garrett moved to approve the agenda. Kendra Bradford seconded. Motion carried.

Budget Reduction Proposal:

Library Director Rebecca Judd informed the Board of Mayor Lund's 3% budget reduction exercise for all General Fund departments. Staff's recommendations to achieve the 3% reduction are captured in the Budget Reduction Proposal (*see Attachment #1 at the end of the minutes*).

Rebecca Judd met with Mayor Lund and Deputy Administrators Forrest Longman and Janice Keller regarding potential open hour decreases, a proposed outcome of the 3% budget reduction. They voiced desire to maintain Library open hours. To achieve this, Rebecca shared that the frozen Clerk position, frozen LA position and 2 vacant LA positions would need to be unfrozen/filled. As part of that conversation, Rebecca conveyed that we won't be able to reach a 3% reduction without factoring in vacancies and reducing hours. The Executive team understood and agreed that the Library's reduction will be a lesser percentage. Instead of frontline staff, the Outreach specialist position will need to be frozen as a budget reduction strategy. Rebecca clarified that the Branch Specialist position is already planned to be frozen upon vacancy.

Shirin asked the cost of the four positions currently frozen/vacant needed to maintain open hours. Rebecca J. provided a rough estimate of \$120,000. Kendra asked if the three LA positions are benefitted; they are not. The three frozen/vacant LA positions are 16 hour/week Regular Non-Benefitted positions.

Referencing the Budget Reduction Proposal provided to the Board:

- The Library is planning to bring forward for the budget reduction exercise:
 - o Outreach Specialist freeze
 - o Voluntary staffing adjustments (already planned)
- Reducing the Materials Level of Service (LOS) standard to "low" is still to be determined; doing so would take us to the lowest level of materials service. Rebecca J. noted that the LOS for materials standard factors in an annual increase to account for inflation. This puts our LOS at risk of dipping below "low" in future years, if there are no corresponding increases for inflation.
 - o Carol Comeau re-iterated FOBPL's position of supporting/supplementing the library's materials budget but not replacing the City's responsibility to fund the materials budget.
- The proposed \$10,000 reduction in the General Operating budget is not a sustainable cut. It impacts the Library's ability to provide staff development and education, specifically attendance at national conferences.
 - o Deferring staff development opportunities for too long can be a slippery slope. It is important to provide staff learning opportunities.
 - o Hannah commented that all departments are looking at travel costs this year and that even small cuts collectively add up.
 - o Rebecca noted that there are no plans to send staff to national conferences in 2025. There is a plan to begin implementing a regular rotation for national conference attendance among staff beginning in 2026.
 - o Regional and local conference and professional opportunities remain in the budget.

Rebecca J. shared that the original goal of the Special Meeting was to discuss the Budget Reduction Proposal and decide what to bring forward for the 3% budget exercise. Based on the conversation with the Mayor, the freezing of the Outreach Specialist position is the only expected reduction to bring forward. If additional cuts are required, Rebecca will need the Board's direction on next cuts: lowering materials budget to LOS and/or the \$10K in General Operating budget reduction.

Shirin's asked a clarification question – did Mayor Lund give a new percentage/number to bring forward? Rebecca J. clarified that the only expected reduction to bring forward is the freezing of the Outreach position. The Mayor did not provide a new target number.

Kristy moved, if needed for reductions, to go forward with: freezing the Outreach position, reducing the materials level to the Low LOS level of \$5.78 for materials, and reduce general operating budget by \$10k. Rebecca Craven seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Open Hours Discussion: Rebecca J. shared that having support from the Mayor's Office to unfreeze positions and support maintaining Library open hours is good. This news feels protective in a way, without promises, of library open hours. It is also complicated. The Management Team and Supervisors meet weekly to discuss staffing. This winter has been extremely challenging. The library's current open hours, even at the staffing level we would be at with the unfrozen/filled positions, has proven to be extremely challenging to staff and keep staffed. In particular, the M-Th hours from 6-7pm prove difficult as it is a 9-hour open day rather than an 8-hour day, which requires more staff to be scheduled per day. Additionally, we are holding a particularly challenging public space during that time. Rebecca J. is proposing a re-adjustment of open hours:

- Morning hours at the Bellis Fair branch have been, and continue to be, requested. Taking four hours from the Central Library (Monday – Thursday, 6-7pm) and re-allocating those hours to Tuesday morning hours at Bellis Fair (10am – 2pm) is the proposal.
- The library system would be open the same number of hours overall, but Central would be closed 4 hours per week more than the current schedule, and the Bellis Fair Branch would be open an additional 4 hours per week.

This adjustment won't necessarily result in budget savings but would have a positive scheduling impact as fewer staff are needed to open Bellis Fair than Central. One rationale for this recommendation is the need to re-allocate the duties of Branch Specialist position, which will be frozen upon vacancy this spring. Those duties will remain and Management explored where those tasks are most suited to be completed and absorbed. Additional schedule flexibility will aid in the continuation of this body of work.

Kendra inquired if we have a sense of the number of people served from 6-7pm at Central versus 4 hours at Bellis Fair? Kendra also voiced the need for a community solution for community members who might be getting meals from CAST and coming to the Library to eat during the 6-7pm hour. People need a different resource, other than the library, to have their basic needs met.

In response to Kendra's question, Jon showed door count numbers for Central. The 6-7pm hour is by far the hour of the day with the fewest people entering the building. Jon also showed door counts for Bellis Fair. The busiest times at Bellis Fair are morning hours, including Wednesday mornings which are storytime mornings, and not even regular open hours.

Rebecca Craven commented that when our Central Library renovation is underway, the public will need to start utilizing the branches more as Central will be closed. Making this adjustment will aid with that transition.

Other discussion included how additional morning hours might help bring families to the Bellis Fair branch, as families with young children are often looking for places and spaces to go in the morning hours.

A question was asked about when this change would be implemented. Rebecca J. responded that a date is still to be determined, as more information and work is needed. Shirin asked if there is other

data that would help shed light on the impacts of a 6-7pm closure at Central, and who might be impacted by this change in hours. Jon said that our people counter only gives in/out data rather than "dwell" (how long someone remains in the building) data. We can pull the circulation data for circs per hour for the 6-7pm hour. Rebecca J. agreed to have the stats compiled and shared with the Board at the April Board Meeting.

Service reduction conversation: The proposal is to reduce the number of purchase/ILL requests per month from 10 to 5. If approved, the effective start date can be altered if needed. Kendra asked for clarification about the ask and Rebecca J. clarified: the ask is a reduction from 10 purchase/ILL requests *per person, per month* to 5 purchase/ILL requests *per person, per month*. Jon provided a brief overview of the incoming request/ILL process which has many steps. Bethany shared that collection development during low-materials budget times is extremely difficult. Selectors have the duty to create the most well-rounded, robust collection possible with a very limited budget. We are unable to purchase/borrow every request, and it does not make sense to ask for a greater number of requests than we know we can consider approving. Additionally, we try to Interlibrary loan denied purchase requests. If the number of denied requests increases, it will in turn continue to increase the ILL workload, which Jon shared is currently at capacity. This proposal is a strategy to match service with the staffing resources we have. Discussion ensued about the reduction number and Jon shared that reducing to 8 would not make it a significant change for staff, but a reduction to 5 would make a significant change. There was acknowledgement that this would impact patrons. Hannah wondered how we can work collaboratively with WCLS and other regional libraries to help increase efficiency and eliminate redundancy. Bethany shared that there are already many processes and agreements established and automated to help ease workflow between the systems, but further collaboration is always welcome.

Kendra moved to reduce the number of purchase/ILL requests from 10 to 5 per user, per month. Shirin seconded. Motion carried.

Central Library Building Use/Renovation

Rebecca Judd reported that the state House and Senate Capital Budgets are being released next week. We will learn if the \$2 million Library Capital Improvement Grant and the \$1 million from the Local & Community Projects Programs Grant will be in the budgets.

Rebecca framed the conversation with: "What functions do we want the Central Library to serve, and how is the building design furthering these goals?" She introduced two big ideas to bring forward for conceptual discussion, one impacting the lower level, the other impacting the main floor:

LOWER LEVEL:

- Current design: Open up the hallway, create more open space, incorporate the Teen Area, add ADA accessibility in Children's bookstacks, ensure Children's Services staff have appropriate workspaces,
- Idea: How can we make this building shine for what it is? What if we took the lower floor and dedicated it fully to Children and Teens?

- Changes from schematic design include: Move ground floor lobby activities to the main floor. Move community meeting and gathering functions to the main floor, and consider size of meeting spaces. Create a youth services programming space, which can be used as a dedicated early learning space when not used for programming.
- These changes aren't necessarily cost savings considerations, rather a philosophical question about space utilization and usage on the lower level.
- Discussion ensued – there was a nod to Jon's statistics presentation at the March Board Meeting which reported high storytime and early learning program and attendance numbers. How can we truly make a space that makes kids feel like it is "theirs?". We bring a large number of people into the building for these activities. There are also safety considerations: co-location of age groups and activities can sometimes be and feel unsafe to families with children. Restrooms were also discussed. Rebecca J. to call Miller Hull to discuss public restroom requirements per floor for the Central Library

MAIN FLOOR:

- Current design: relocate the Help Desk, move the public computers to the current Teen Space.
- Idea: Relocate lower lobby functions and meeting spaces to the main floor.
 - Could the Skillshare Space be utilized by installing a closed glass door? The space could be a reservable space.
 - Current Skillshare space has community program and tabling uses; we could maintain both these functions.
 - This space would likely not be able to accommodate upwards of 50 people, as the lower level programming space will be able to.
 - Would we be better served by smaller meeting spaces (for instance Pods), over a larger community meeting room.
- Questions and discussion that emerged:
 - There are very few 1-4 person reservable spaces available downtown, or in our community in general. Larger spaces are more available. This is a trade-off conversation: we are not building additional space/adding square footage to the Central Library. This is also an opportunity to continue looking at our library as a system – if we want a 100+ capacity meeting room, does it have to be at Central? Could it be at the mall or even Barkley? If a large community room is valuable for us, this might be an invitation to think ahead/to the future and outside the Central Library.
- Impacts: Adding additional functions to the main floor will have impacts on the amount of public seating we have available on the main floor.

There are three ideas at play Rebecca J. would like direction on:

1. Dedicating the lower level to a Youth Services focus
2. Moving the lower level lobby functions to the main floor
3. Putting priority on smaller reserved spaces for 1 – 4 people on the main floor

Jen gave examples of "library pods" or "booths" that support meeting spaces for 1-4 people. WCLS currently has a 4-person unit at Blaine. The pods are:

- Private and secure, quite soundproof
- Equipped with power access and ventilation
- Modular
- ADA accessible

The pods also have the option of being installed with a coded entry system to eliminate the staff need to unlock for every use.

Discussion and questions ensued regarding the ability to clean the units, how much floor space is needed for the pods and how much of the open seating would need to be removed?

- Roughly a third of the open seating would need to be removed. Seating could be re-deployed to branches
- There is a community demand for small spaces that are private and soundproof.
- Would we consider having a pod with a computer for things like tele-health appointments?
- To address the need for a larger community use/programming space, would there be a way to combine the two existing study rooms and the Skillshare Space to make a slightly bigger program space?
 - o Yes – the Study Room walls are not structural.
 - o Also, for library-sponsored programming, we could hold our programming after-hours in our public space. Kristy shared that the Vashon Library does this and it is successful.

There was discussion about the role of providing a large public community room for free to the public. Is this a priority for us? Is after-hours use a priority?

- Are there other spaces in the City that could function as community room use?

Discussion ensued about potential pitfalls of not having a large public community room in the Central Library. Could we get a similarly sized room (49 people in current schematic design) on the main floor? Can we have a public meeting space that also serves other functions?

Rebecca J. acknowledged that these are very difficult decisions and trade-offs. The constraints of this building are challenging. Many of these questions also point to how we want to manage and expand our facilities over time. It's hard to try to fit everything we want into the Central Library with the current footprint. We are unable to accommodate all the basic functions our library can and should offer. How do we meet these ongoing community and facility needs? Part of this equation is figuring out a long-term funding mechanism so we can continue to do future planning for spaces, services and facilities.

Key points from the discussion:

- Is it a priority to have a public meeting space for the general community. Is it a useful and meaningful space if it is not accessible after hours?
 - o If the room is not available after-hours, then its public effectiveness isn't high, unless library hours are robust. Discussion ensued regarding the feasibility and cost of offering after-hours access, and how right now it is not realistic. Could we create a space/place

where that service could be expanded/doesn't preclude the after-hours option in the future?

- How we can carve out larger public/group meeting space on the main floor is an area to explore. Rebecca will bring this question/task into the process when re-opened with the architects.
- Children's services spaces and programming bring people to the library, and staff do a stellar job with programming and overall services to youth and their families. Currently, Children's Services has a footprint of 3500 sqft currently, whereas the main floor has a footprint of 10,000 sqft.
- Restroom access is another area to explore. How many restrooms are required for each floor. Rebecca J. to explore this and bring update to April Board meeting.

Robust discussion about the multitude of ways library spaces and meeting rooms are used by so many audiences: children, adults, etc. How do we get back to the library being a space for everyone? We have building challenges, and we also have community challenges.

The Board provided Rebecca J. with the following direction:

1. Engage the architects to explore, on the main floor, possible configurations of community spaces (different room sizes) and look at different options/trade-offs to help narrow in the final focus for the main floor.
2. Designate the lower level for Youth Services. There is concern about having the bulk of the public restrooms on the lower level, especially if it is designated for Children/Teens. Rebecca J. will ask Miller Hull about the number of public restrooms necessary on the lower level and investigate options based upon their answer.

Strategic Directions and Levels of Service (LOS)

Rebecca J. shared that the Level of Service standards were developed within the past 10 years and are used for planning and budget needs. The goal for the conversation today, as the meeting draws to a close, is to outline the questions for future study and consideration.

- Facilities
 - The Facilities Master Plan re-affirmed the level of service for facilities. It also helped identify the need for a North side branch and identified the need for larger branch facilities.
 - Rebecca J. re-affirmed how inefficient staffing a 1400 sq ft facility is. We are able to operate a much larger building without incurring additional staffing expense.
 - Our spaces are important for community climate resiliency.
 - Can we look at our facilities with a more systems lens?
 - As we go into difficult budget times, would we be open to closing a location if necessary? This question is not applicable right now but might be in the future.
- Materials
 - The Board updated the materials LOS in 2024
 - Looking at budgets, are we committed to staying at the lower budget numbers; are we willing to go below low?

- Open hours
 - Rebecca J. hopes we can spend some time updating this standard; it is the most misaligned of all the existing Levels of Service.
 - How is this LOS interpreted and used? Would we be better served to move to a model with more equitable hours and offerings?
 - Answering this question could mean more standardized hours across our four locations. If so, what would those standards be?
 - As it stands, this LOS doesn't give us a useable benchmark.
 - As we go into difficult budget times – how low would we go for hours? Are we willing to cut services so staff could preserve open hours?
 - How can we look at/explore materials access and delivery in new ways? Would after-hours book lockers be a possibility?
- Staffing FTE
 - This standard may also need to be revised. It is useful for us now, but is tied to open hours.

Rebecca J. posed some bigger picture LOS question for the future: How do we raise our Level of Service standards? What will it take to get us to the higher levels? Could we consider a dedicated property tax, similar to Greenways, for the library?

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Outstanding questions will be brought back to the April Meeting, most importantly the public restroom question for the Central Library lower level, meeting room spaces, and the circulation statistics for the 6-7pm hour at Central.

Rebecca Craven wanted to remind everyone of the desire to restore the original windows on the main floor. She encouraged Rebecca J, when talking with Miller Hull about pods and other main floor ideas, to retain the ability to restore the original windows if possible.

Rebecca J. provided the following update: BPL will not get the money that Rep. Rick Larsen was championing for the outer envelope of the building. Additionally, we will need to address the plaza sooner rather than later.

Kristy adjourned the meeting at 2:35 pm.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees

Attachments:

- Attachment #1: Budget Reduction Proposal: March 2025

Budget Reduction Proposal: March 2025

At the end of February, Mayor Lund asked all City departments to identify 3% in spending reductions from budgeted 2025 operating costs paid out of the General Fund. For the Library, this equates to a possible \$230,000 reduction in funding. The plan below has three parts:

- A proposal to reduce spending
- A proposal to reduce open hours
- A proposal to reduce services

Reduce spending: For the proposal to reduce spending, we can reach the \$230,000 target with the following reductions. Of note, this is in addition to the reductions made as part of the 2025 budget process last year.

- Outreach Specialist vacancy. Freeze
- Library Assistant 16-hour vacancy. Freeze
- Library Assistant 16-hour vacancy. Freeze
- Voluntary staffing adjustments (reduced hours in several positions, already planned)
- Materials: reduce to 'Low' Level of Service standard for Materials, adjusted for inflation. \$16,244 reduction
- General operating budget. \$10,000 reduction

Reduce open hours: To address the high number of frozen and vacant positions, this proposal outlines a reduction in open hours, effective the week of May 4, 2025:

- Close Central at 6 pm instead of 7 pm on Monday-Thursday. These hours have the lowest patron use.
- Close Central and Bellis Fair at 2 pm instead of 6 pm on Saturday. This will align Saturday hours across locations.
- Add Bellis Fair hours 10 am – 2 pm on Tuesday and adjust Bellis Fair hours 10 am – 2 pm on Saturday. Bellis Fair Mall has approved the 10 am opening for the Library (the rest of the Mall opens at 11 am)

Reduce services: With the reduction in materials spending, we anticipate that purchase/ILL requests will increase. To mitigate the impact on CS staff and librarian selectors, this proposal includes the following reduction in services:

- Reduce number of purchase/ILL requests per month from 10 to 5, effective the week of May 4, 2025