



Regular Meeting of the Library Board of Trustees
Tuesday, May 19, 2026 – Fairhaven Library Branch
3:30 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, Kristy Van Ness, Kendra Bradford, and Shirin Deylami
City Council Library Liaison:	Not present
Library Management Staff:	Rebecca Judd, Annette Bagley, Jon McConnel, Jennifer Vander Ploeg and Madeline Rosenvinge
FOBPL Representative:	Carol Comeau, Friends of BPL Board Liaison
Guest Presenter:	David Pethik, Assistant Chief, Bellingham Fire Department

Call to order and introductions: Regular session was called to order at 3:33 p.m. by Chair, Rebecca Craven.

Approve/modify agenda: Kendra moved to approve the agenda. Shirin seconded. Motion carried.

Public comment: None.

Consent agenda: Kristy Van Ness moved to approve the April 21, 2026 Regular Meeting minutes and the April 2026 Performance and Activity measures and financial reports. Shirin Deylami seconded. Motion carried. In reviewing the monthly reports, it was noted that all grants awarded since 2020 were IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services) grants, that physical holds continued to increase (we don't report on digital holds), and that Friends of the Library volunteer hours were notably strong and appreciated.

Board Chair report:

- None.

Board member reports: Kristy Van Ness recognized the Friends for their significant effort preparing for the upcoming sale.

City Council liaison report: Not present.

Friends of BPL report: Carol Comeau reported that the four-day book sale begins tomorrow at 10 a.m. She noted ongoing interest in the cost of digital materials and asked about state-level support for digital book purchasing. Library Director Rebecca Judd shared that advocacy efforts are underway, here and nationwide, but no WA state funding mechanism exists yet.

Mayor's Office: Deputy Administrator Forrest Longman provided an overview of the City's upcoming budget process. Budget development begins June 1, with departments submitting requests over the following 4–6 weeks. Revenues remain flat while expenses continue to rise due to inflation, COLA, and healthcare costs. Public safety accounts for approximately 70 percent of the City's budget, prompting evaluation of a Regional Fire Authority (RFA). If pursued, an RFA could be approved in February 2027 and established in June 2027, though next year's budget would remain largely unchanged. Discussion included the potential redirection of general fund capacity, long-term financial impacts, and anticipated costs associated with the proposed community day center.

Library Director report: Rebecca Judd reported that the recruitment for the Administrative Assistant position is underway, with a planned July hire allowing for transition time. Budget will return to the agenda as a standing item beginning next month. A work session on the gap analysis is scheduled for June 1 from 3–5 p.m.

Regional Fire Authority Presentation: Assistant Chief David Pethik presented information on the proposed RFA (*see attachments 1 and 2 at the end of the minutes*). He reviewed the funding model, including the fire tax levy and fire benefit charge, and described current cost structures and long-term financial sustainability. He outlined potential impacts on the City's general fund, capital planning, and service capacity. Transition details, asset transfers, and EMS levy interactions were also discussed.

Open Hours Level of Service draft revision – Action Item (see packet materials): Kristy Van Ness moved to approve the Open Hours Levels of Service revision. Kendra Bradford seconded. Motion carried.

Central Library Renovation Update: Rebecca Judd and Jennifer Vander Ploeg reported continued progress on casework planning and staff feedback sessions. Architectural reviews of kitchen areas, lockers, hardware, and restrooms are underway. The Bellis Fair temporary space is nearing readiness, with new carpet, paint, plumbing repairs, and keycard access. Photos of the space were shared (*see attachment 3 at the end of the minutes*). Federal appropriations totaling \$850,000 have been awarded for Central exterior renovations and planning work for this will begin soon. Staff continue evaluating collection placement, service relocation, and operational needs during renovation. Trustees discussed community outreach, including opportunities to communicate changes related to holds and services to patrons.

Fundraising Committee Update: Kristy Van Ness reported that the first donor engagement event will be held on May 26. Additional events are planned for June, July, and August. A new fundraising handout has been developed (*see attachment 4 at the end of minutes*). The campaign has raised over \$2.5 million, with less than \$1 million remaining to reach goal.

Director Review Process: Shirin Deylami presented two options for the Director review process assessment questions. Trustees decided to include both scaled responses and required comment fields to provide quantitative and qualitative feedback.

Day Center Update: The Board discussed the recent article included in the packet. Forrest Longman clarified that individuals will be free to come and go, and that the space will include offices for service providers. The City is coordinating with WTA on transportation considerations. Trustees noted the need for clear public communication, an FAQ, and a broader outreach strategy.

New Business:

- None

Agenda items for next meeting:

- Budget added as a standing item.

Meeting adjourned at 5:09 p.m.

Next Regular Library Board Meeting – Tuesday, June 16, 2026 – Central Library Lecture Room – 3:30 p.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees

Regional Fire Authority 101 Bellingham Public Library Board of Trustees

May 22, 2026



1

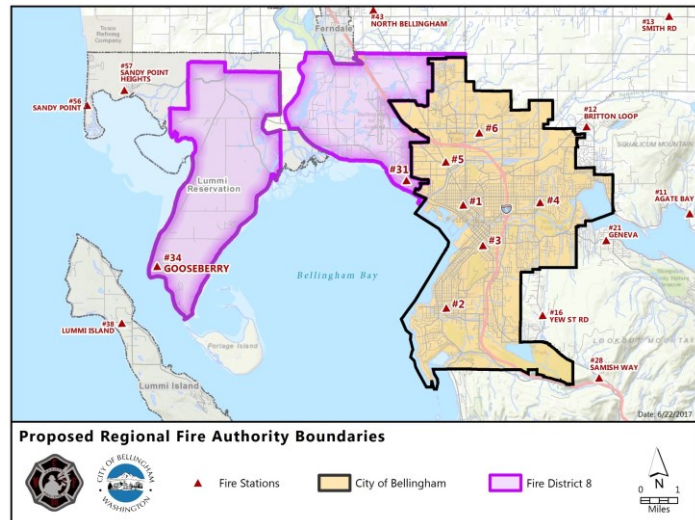
What is a Regional Fire Authority

- A voter approved, independent fire/EMS district
- Authorized by RCW 52.26
- 18 RFA's in Washington State
 - Renton RFA (Renton and FD 25)
 - West Pierce (Lakewood/FD 2, University Place, FD/3)
- We would be the second in Whatcom County

2

2

Proposed RFA Service Area



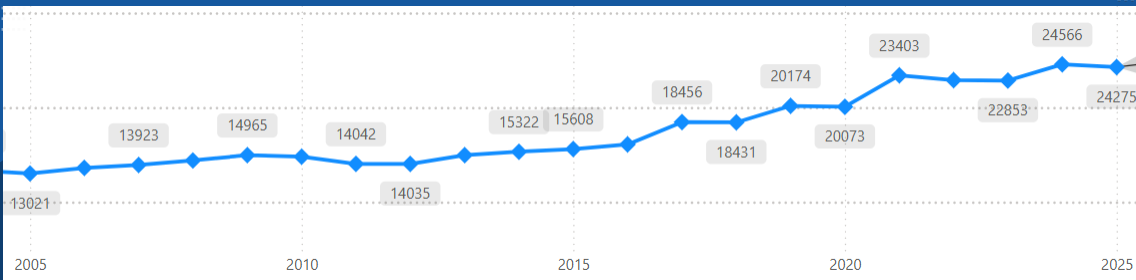
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Why a Regional Fire Authority

- General fund revenue shortfalls
- Call volume increases
- Provides long term sustainability

4

4



Call volume and growth

5

When a Regional Fire Authority



6

6

Where to find more information

- Website: bellinghamrfa.org
- E-mail: fire@cob.org
- QR Code:



7

7

Regional Fire Authority 101 Bellingham Public Library Board of Trustees

Presented by: Dave Pethick
Assistant Fire Chief
360.778.8466 dpethick@cob.org



8



Bellingham Library Board Regional Fire Authority Presentation May 19, 2026

May 19, 2026
Meeting Minutes
Attachment #2



Why This Matters to the Library and Other City Services

The Library depends on stable, reliable fire and EMS response for the safety of patrons, staff, and facilities. Just as importantly, the Library relies on the City's general fund. If Fire/EMS move to an RFA, the City frees up general-fund capacity—relieving budget pressure that affects hours, staffing, and services across all departments.

This is not a proposal about the Library, but it directly intersects with the City's ability to sustain Library services in the future.

Service demand has surged, but fire/EMS resources have not kept pace.

- Calls for service increased 35% from 2015–2025—about 9,000 more calls per year, or 25 additional calls each day. The previous decade saw only 17% growth.
- Despite this demand, the Fire Department has operated with the same number of core fire response units since 1976.

Why this matters to the Library:

Strained fire/EMS systems create longer response times for medical emergencies or fire alarms at public facilities, including library branches.

The long-standing engine–ambulance cross-staffing model is no longer sustainable.

- When a cross-staffed ambulance transports a patient, the engine it is paired with becomes unavailable.
- Nearly 8 out of 10 calls today are medical calls—meaning engines are going out of service more often.
- Ideal fire company availability is 90–92%. Some of Bellingham's cross-staffed units have now dropped to 86% availability.
- The current model cannot meet Bellingham's future needs.

Why this matters to the Library:

Reduced engine availability leads to slower responses from farther stations—directly affecting public-safety coverage for all city facilities.



Bellingham Library Board Regional Fire Authority Presentation May 19, 2026



The City's general fund cannot absorb the cost of expanding fire/EMS services.

- The general fund pays for libraries, parks, police, fire, EMS, and many essential services.
- Public safety already makes up 64% of the City's general-fund budget (Fire 32%, Police 32%).
- Even with no expansion, Fire and Police costs are projected to grow \$20 million in five years.
- The general fund cannot keep pace with these rising costs across all departments.

Why this matters to the Library:

Without relief, continued general-fund pressure could mean further reductions to other services—including Library hours, staffing, programming, and facility maintenance.

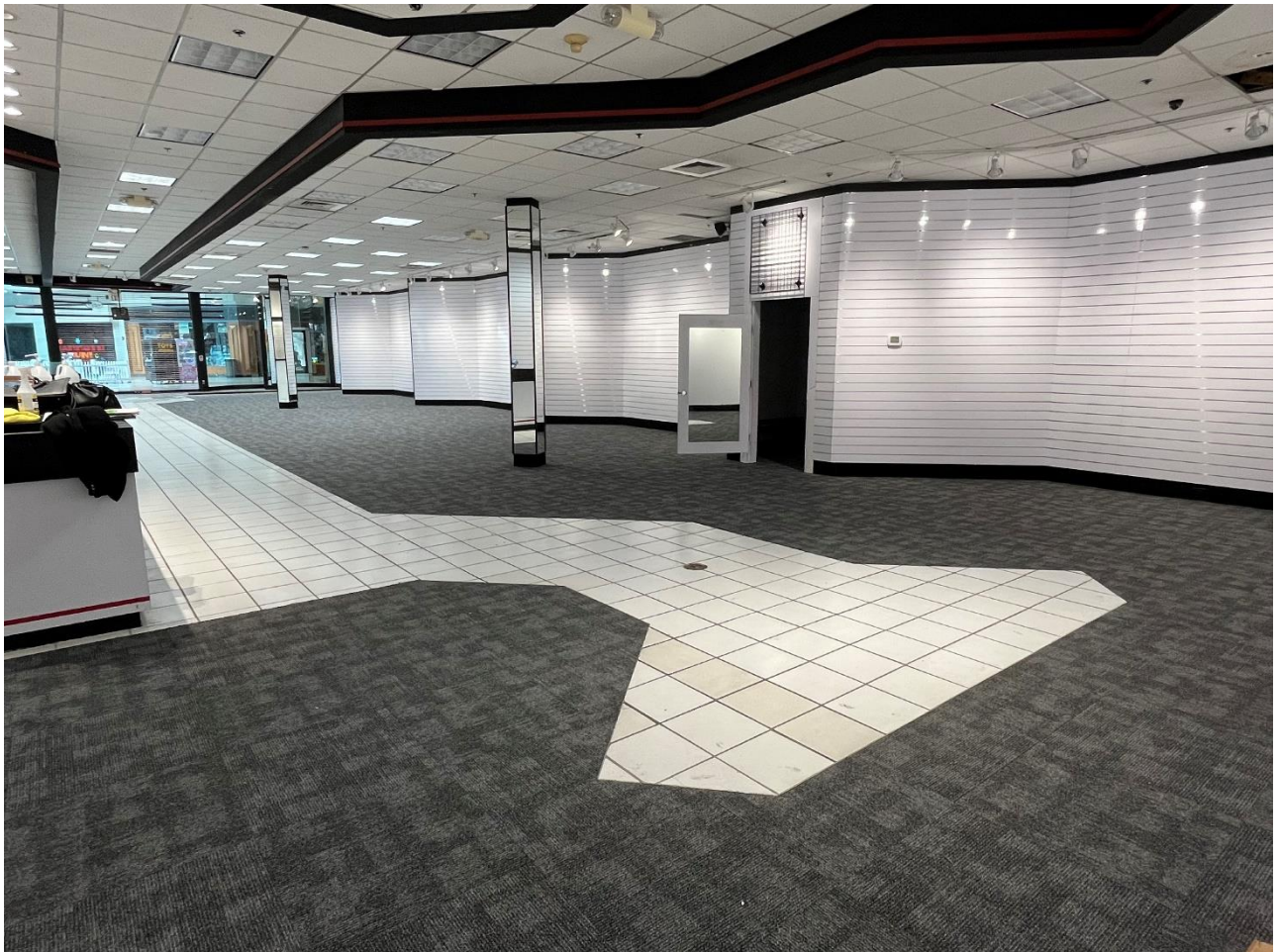
A Regional Fire Authority provides a more stable, flexible funding structure.

- An RFA is a separate taxing district dedicated solely to fire/EMS.
- Moving Fire/EMS into an RFA frees up general-fund capacity for:
 - Other public safety needs
 - A potential community recreation center
 - City facility maintenance
 - Stabilizing Library services and other core programs
 - Strengthening reserves or reducing taxes
- It provides long-term financial stability for both the Fire Department and the City.

RFA Planning Timeline

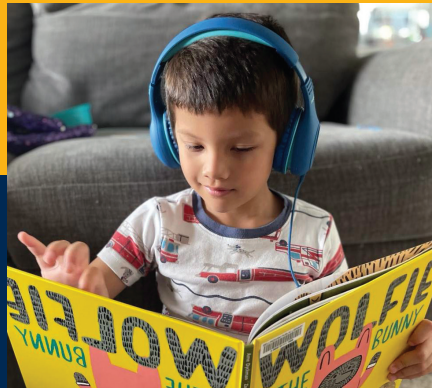
- May 22: First Planning Committee meeting
- May–September: Service plan and financial modeling; community outreach
- Fall: City Council and District 8 Board review the plan
- If approved: Potential February ballot
- If passed: RFA formation July 1, 2027
- General-fund relief for the City beginning in 2028







Together, We Can Inspire Young Minds!



AN INVESTMENT IN KIDS AND OUR COMMUNITY



BellinghamPublicLibrary



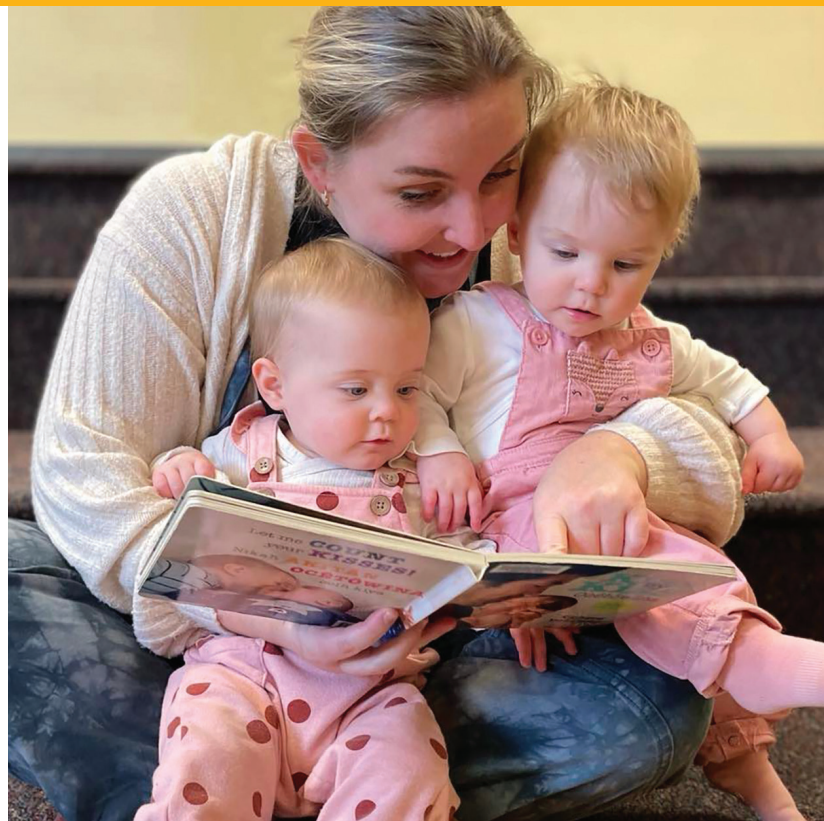
Every day, the Bellingham Public Library nurtures joy, curiosity and connection.

Join us in moving our children's library from worn to wonderful, transforming tired rooms into a vibrant hub for every age and stage: playful spaces for early learners, inspiring hangouts for tweens and teens, and safe gathering places for families. With your help, we can support Bellingham's youth and families from storytime to study time.

THE CHALLENGE

The City of Bellingham constructed the Central Library in 1951 to serve a population of 34,000. While the building was renovated in 1985 to meet the needs of a population of 46,000, the now 75-year-old building is expected to serve a population of nearly 100,000 and receives 400,000 visits per year.

The Central Library infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth and demand for ever-evolving methods of delivering library service. Additionally, heating systems have failed in parts of the building. In 2020-2021, the library went through a significant remodel of the main floor that modernized the space dedicated to adult services. It is now time for spaces serving children and their families to be updated and improved.



THE SOLUTION

The **Bellingham Central Library Renovation Phase 2** focuses efforts on the ground floor, where the children's library is located, and upper mezzanine staff spaces. Some additional work will be completed on the main floor to increase safety, access and HVAC systems. Future plans involve a Phase 3, that focuses on an exterior renovation.



Phase 2 will bring Teen Services and spaces to the ground floor so youth have a more natural and welcoming transition from Children's Services to Teen Services. Renovations will include a refreshed space that sparks inspiration for all who enter, ADA accessible book stacks and welcoming, age-appropriate areas for youth. Bellingham youth deserve to have a floor devoted to them and their family, caregivers and teachers. Now is the moment to uplift a beloved space that encourages the youngest to read, play and learn and older youth to explore their curiosities through stories, information and community.

INSPIRE YOUNG MINDS!

WHY IT MATTERS

Youth in Bellingham matter. The lifelong learning and joy sparked by a library card matters. There is no better investment for youth in a community than the public library. Bellingham families rely on the public library for no-cost, in-person access to books, movies and audiobooks. Storytimes for babies and toddlers are often a child and caregiver's first group learning experience, leading to friendships, support and enrichment for children and adults alike.



The Children's Space isn't just for tiny tots though, each progressive age group deserves both a welcoming space and developmentally-appropriate opportunities to access stories and information. Moving the Teen Space to the same floor as the Children's Space inspires a sense of belonging and connection for tweens and teens, helps to preserve established relationships with library staff, and reaffirms that the library is, and always will be for them. **The library is for all.**

"Raising brand new babies is the hardest thing to do. Many people can't afford to take parenting classes, but at the Library parents can learn for free about how they can interact with their children at home." – Local parent

**TOTAL PROJECT
BUDGET ESTIMATE:**

\$8.53 million



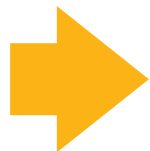
\$3.03 million

State grants



\$2 million

City of Bellingham REET Funds



\$3.5 million

Capital Campaign

Source Amount: Washington State Department of Commerce; Library Capital Improvement Program grant: \$2,000,000; Local & Community Projects grant: \$1,030,000; City of Bellingham REET Funds: \$2,000,000.

Children's and Teen Library Impact

51.3%

of all materials checked out through Central Library are children's and teen materials, in multiple languages.

20

on-site programs/week for children and teens (2 bilingual).

500k

children's and teen items are checked out annually from Bellingham Public Library.

AN INVESTMENT IN KIDS AND OUR COMMUNITY

Let's create a vibrant, inspired and compelling library for our youth.



BELLINGHAM CENTRAL LIBRARY RENOVATION CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

Kristy Van Ness (trustee)

Bethany Hoglund (Deputy Library Director)

Annette Bagley (Head of Communications and Community Relations)

Bernice Chang (Children's Librarian)

Rachel Myers (volunteer)

Carol Comeau (volunteer)

Jessica Ferreras-Stone (volunteer)

Mikaela Rickards (volunteer)

Please reach out to learn how you can contribute to this project and inspire young minds.

Jenn Daly

Director of Engagement & Philanthropy

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Rebecca Judd

Library Director

Bellingham Public Library

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360-778-7221



**Bellingham
Public Library**



Central Library, 210 Central Avenue, Bellingham | bellinghampubliclibrary.org/library-giving