

Augusta Richmond County Public Library System

Board of Trustees Regular Meeting

Wallace Branch Library

Monday, August 18, 2025

5:30 pm

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Augusta Richmond County Public Library System (ARCPLS) Board of Trustees was called to order at 5:30 pm by Board Vice President, Brenda Garman.

II. ROLL CALL

Member present: Brenda Garman (Vice President), Tonia Gibbons (Treasurer), Anna Reeves, Anita Rookard, Cher Best, Christine Rhodes, Shelia Siler. Members Absent: Morris Porter (President) (excused), Kimberly Brown (excused), Leadra Collins (excused). Ex-officio members present: Commissioner Francine Scott, Emanuel Mitchell (Library Director). Ex-officio members absent: Robyn Wittenberg Dudley (Friends of the Library)

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Mitchell requested moving Living in Purpose to the top of the agenda, before the Treasure's Report. There was no objection. There was no motion or vote to approve the agenda.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There were no changes or objections to the minutes from June 16th. There was no motion or vote to approve the minutes.

V. LIVING IN PURPOSE

Ms. Freeman, from Living in Purpose, handed out her proposal and petitioned the Board to become a Library Partner, allowing them to use the meeting room space for her group free of charge.

- Living in Purpose is a non-profit, free of charge, after school program, for at-risk and low-income students. Their main facility was damaged during the hurricane and is still awaiting repairs. They provide food, education, and enrichment for the children in the community. Due to the damage from the storm, their program was shut down from September through March. Due to the inability to support their students, the children have been suffering academically and socially.
- Living in Purpose has been utilizing the smaller spaces at the library that are free of charge, however those spaces are very small, thus limiting the number of children they can accept into their program. Additionally, due to the nature of their program, it would be disruptive to other library patrons to allow them to meet in more public areas.
- They are looking to utilize the 3rd floor meeting spaces at HQ Branch. Due to a lack of transportation for many of the children, it would be difficult to use a different branch in the library system.

- Mr. Mitchell clarified for Ms. Freeman that there are some spaces in the library that will allow food to be served for the children.
- Commissioner Scott asked how the children get to HQ branch currently and from where. Ms. Freeman responded that many of them walk, however some do have parents with reliable transportation. Their damaged building is located in the 15th street corridor and service the schools in the Jonesy High School area.
- Living in Purpose can provide proof of the positive impact their program has had on the community.
- Ms. Garman asked how many children are in the program. At the moment it has been capped at 34 children.
- Ms. Garman and Ms. Gibbons asked if the Wallace Branch would work, as it is located closer to the 15th street corridor. Ms. Freeman said it would, except they meet after school from 4:30 pm-6:30 pm, which is later than the Wallace Branch is open.
- Ms. Reeves asked when the program runs. Ms. Freeman said Monday-Thursday.
- Ms. Gibbons asked if this program is open to the public. Ms. Freeman said it is, but families need to register to have their children participate, and registration is free. If parents came up to them in the library and asked to join, Living in Purpose would be able to direct them to registration.
- Mr. Mitchell asked to clarify that the program is free of charge. Ms. Freeman confirmed that it is.
- Ms. Garman asked what the maximum capacity of the program is. Ms. Freeman says it is reliant on the volunteer list. Volunteers are from the community, former military, local churches, etc.
- Ms. Reeves asked if they are a 501c3 and how long they've been serving the community. Ms. Freeman confirmed they are a 501c3 and they have been running for 15 years, with the after-school program running for the last three years.
- Ms. Garman and Ms. Reeves asked if there was a timeframe for their primary space to be repaired. Ms. Freeman responded that there is not a timeline at this point, as they are still stuck in insurance limbo and it is a continuing situation. The building remains unsafe to allow the children inside.
- Ms. Tonya Jeffers from Dream Builders of America's Youth spoke in support of Living in Purpose as partners.
- Ms. Garman asked how long the program runs during the year. Ms. Freeman responded that they run off of the RCS calendar.
- Ms. Freeman spoke about how the program has benefitted already from meeting in the library as it has introduced Living in Purpose, and their students, to programs they did not know existed in the library. As such, this increases engagement in library programs, as the students are now participating in library services.
- Ms. Garman asked what rooms in the HQ branch have they been using. Ms. Freeman responded that they've been using the study rooms on the 2nd floor.
- Ms. Garman asked how many staff they have. Ms. Freeman responded that it depends on the age. The lower the age, the lower the staff to student ratio. She also stated that volunteers can be former program participants when they reach high school age.
- Ms. Reeves asked what the age range of the students are, and what room they are looking to rent. Ms. Freeman responded that they service children from 1st-8th grade, and they are looking to use the rooms on the third floor of HQ, either the writing room or the 3rd floor meeting room.

- Mr. Mitchell informed that those rooms are utilized by AARP and 2nd Chance on a regular basis.
- Ms. Garman asked if they would need a dedicated room. Ms. Freeman stated that they can be flexible with whatever space is available.
- Mr. Mitchell asked if there are certain requirements needed for the room. Ms. Freeman said their program can be adjustable based on what is provided in the room.
- Mr. Mitchell brought up the possibility of the children's room. It is always open and has a classroom area. Ms. Freeman responded that a private space would work better because they can be loud at times and don't want to disturb other patrons.
- Ms. Freeman directed The Board to visit their website at LivinginPurpose.org for more information about their program.
- They are also looking at potentially renting out older closed schools as additional location options, which will allow them to add their more physical extra-curricular activities back into their programming.
- The Board stated that they will discuss the proposal and have a response from Mr. Mitchell by weeks end.

VI. TREASURER'S REPORT

There were two Treasury Reports to go through, year-end and beginning of the new fiscal year. Mr. Mitchell pointed out the following from the end of FY25: Line 31 Full Time Salary Budget - \$1,463,671.41. Actual amount paid was – \$1,450,116.00. This created an ending balance of \$13,055.40. Usually the budget runs high with new staff, so it was really good to see it come under budget. For June 2025 Full Time Salary was: \$114,224.71. Part Time Salary budget for FY25 was \$131,800. In June, Part Time Salary was: \$14,352.93. For the year, Part Time Salary was: \$130,998.27. This left a balance of \$801.73. Mr. Mitchell reflected that we had a good year partially through investing in Community Foundation. Part time workers have increased significantly, and almost every position is filled. The main challenges for FY26 will be healthcare. Library receipts (fines, meeting room spaces, and lost books) were projected at: \$50,000.00. We ended with \$65,640.72 making us over by \$15,640.72. We started putting money in Community Foundation in June and interest was \$14,894.00. We were scheduled \$1,000.00 in interest for the year. The reason for the increase was we were not receiving appropriate interest for the amount of money we had in the account. Mr. Mitchell stated we are heading in the right direction. Mr. Mitchell continued to talk about the State Disbursement for FY25. We received \$547,027 broken down by three state reimbursed positions, healthcare, and loans. We received \$147,000 towards books, \$12,000 towards IT, and \$5000 for E-Rate.

Ms. Garman asked to clarify if all money from the state disbursement was spent. Mr. Mitchell confirmed that it was.

Ms. Reeves asked if the investment was directed by Mr. Mitchell or if they redirected them. Mr. Mitchell responded that they deposited them into the already existing investments that we have. We didn't change anything.

Mr. Mitchell passed around copies of the Capital Fund and Augusta Library Fund. Mr. Mitchell clarified that the Capital Fund has limited use, mainly building improvements, whereas the Augusta Library Fund is more of a "rainy day" fund. \$187,670.32 was added to the Augusta Library Fund. At year end we have netted \$16,235.16. For July we made, on investment, \$2,471.40.

Mr. Mitchell moved onto July, the beginning of FY26. Mr. Mitchell reminded The Board that this budget is tentative, and we are awaiting for the commission to approve the budget. We will work off of this budget, with the understanding that it may need to be adjusted at the January meeting. Mr. Mitchell spoke with the Administrator, the Deputy Administrator, and the Finance Director about the increase in the State Health Insurance. For 40 full time employees, we are projected \$648,000 for Healthcare. We paid \$70,000 for healthcare for the month of July. We are working on a solution with the county to save money for, both the library, and the county. Line 31 (Full time Salary) for FY26 has a slight increase to \$1,444,271.27. For July we spent \$111,097.79. Our regular financial analyst is out on leave. Mr. Mitchell called their replacement to discuss the disbursement checks. We are still awaiting the July check, as well as the August check. Mr. Mitchell will work with them to ensure we get our checks in a timely manner. For Part Time Staff Salary, FY26 allots \$150,000. For July we spent \$14,913.91. Mr. Mitchell reminded The Board that the majority of our part-timers are students so it can be difficult to gauge how many will stay throughout the school year. Library receipts are projected at \$80,000 for FY26. For July, we have brought in \$6,884.50. Interest on accounts for July are \$13,541.35. Still carrying normal disbursement from the county, since their FY is different from ours. That disbursement is \$243,000, from that we net bills, utilities, full time and part time staff, FICA, Health insurance, Life insurance, Long term disability, medicate, and social security. Then we receive the balance.

VII. REPORTS

A. President's Report: No report

B. Director's Report:

- The June and July Director's Reports were combined
- The FY26 Budget Request was submitted on time.
- OCR has approved the ARCPLS Audit for its website. However, we are still stuck when it comes to revisions as there is no one in their office to state that we are in compliance and send it to be approved by a judge. Until that happens, we are unable to make any changes.
- Mr. Mitchell met with the General Manager of Dave and Busters for the Summer Reading Program. There were lower numbers than expected, but still over 700 children attended. This is despite rainy weather and local protests. 150 books were handed out and all of the books brought by the school board were also handed out. Dave and Buster donated food and Pepsi provided drinks.
- Mr. Mitchell met with the General Manager of Dave and Busters for the close out of the Summer Reading Program, which is scheduled for Saturday, August 23rd from 9:00 am-11:00 am.
- We are working with the artist PK from Augusta Arts Council. He's been commissioned to make fish sculptures around the Augusta area. We're going to have children paint the fish scales that will be incorporated into the sculptures. That will begin on Tuesday, August 19th at Friedman Branch.
- Mr. Mitchell met with the Administrator to discuss the status of the Library. There is a letter from the State Library Vice-Chancellor stating that the Library is an extension of Augusta-Richmond County, not the State. This was provided to the Administrator, the Deputy Administrator, and the Interim Finance Manager. Mr. Mitchell pointed out that the county is paying around \$40,000 a month for 40 employees for health insurance, whereas we are paying \$70,000. We are hoping to be brought under the county's health insurance umbrella, thereby

saving \$200,000 a year. The Administrator would like to see more numbers. Mr. Mitchell explained to them that to move forward, we need to look at everything and every option. Mr. Mitchell will continue to meet with them to discuss this further. Mr. Mitchell also dropped off a packet to the Administrator discussing the history of the Library System going back to the 1930s through 2014. Commissioner Scott asked when we can expect an answer about being brought under the county's health insurance. Mr. Mitchell responded that he is hopeful to have an answer by the end of September of 2025, which would allow the staff to take advantage of open enrollment, which is a two-week time period around October. Staff will be able to enroll through the new ADP portal.

- Mr. Mitchell had an interview with Tabernacle Baptist Church about banned books. It went well. Mr. Mitchell discussed the process of banning books. Mr. Mitchell expressed that we do not ban books at the library, or censor our books at all. He also made a point to mention that we separate the Children's Center to prevent children from being exposed to mature ideas without parental guidance. Mr. Mitchell also stated that the first floor of the HQ branch will soon be exclusively children's materials, and that all YA and Adult material is in the process of being moved to the upper floors.
 - Mr. Mitchell also sent letters to churches in Augusta-Richmond county requesting them to send us obituary programs so they can be scanned to our digital library and archived for posterity. Commissioner Scott asked if this is a common practice for Libraries. Mr. Mitchell responded that it is.
 - The FY25 year has closed, and we are preparing for an audit. Before the audit can be held, The Board must approve of The Letter of Engagement. The audit will cost \$3,000. After The Board reviewed the form, Ms. Garman called for a vote. Ms. Gibbons made a motion to approve the Letter of Engagement. Ms. Rhodes seconded the motion. The motion to approve the Letter of Engagement passed unanimously.
 - The State Budget for FY26 has been allocated. It remains the same as FY25 at \$547,000. Augusta is the 2nd largest city in the state.
 - There was a question if we leave the State Health Benefits Program, will we also leave the Teachers Retirement Fund. We will not. You do not need to be enrolled in State Health Benefits to be enrolled in the Teachers Retirement Fund.
 - Mr. Mitchell reported that we are working well with Richmond County Schools. We've seen an increase in attendance from children across all branches.
 - The bid has gone through for the roof at HQ. We are waiting for a vendor to be selected, then to committee to be approved.
 - Appleby has had its first bid meeting, so all preliminary tasks have been accomplished. The delay was due to adding work too the basement. Ms. Garman asked if there was a projected timeline. Mr. Mitchell responded that more information is needed and is hoping to know more in November.
- C. Committee Report: No report
- D. Friends of the Library Report
- From Dennis Garman, read by Ms. Garman. The bookstore is open again with new floors. They are trying new operating hours. They will now be open Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 10:00 am-4:00 pm. There is a Booksale the second weekend in November. They also received a large donation of non-fiction history books from a professor who taught at Augusta University.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a) Incident Reports

- On 8/14/25 a patron was found “pleasuring themselves” at one of the computers at HQ Branch. They were escorted out of the building for the rest of the day.
- At the Wallace Branch a new staff member accidentally triggered the silent alarm.
- There was a patron that cut their hand
- There was a patron that fell off of their chair
- There was a patron sleeping in the children’s section
- A patron drove their car into Maxwell Branch. Maxwell has been repaired. The driver was an elderly lady who pressed the gas instead of the breaks by mistake and drove alongside the building on the sidewalk.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

a) Library Board Retreat

It was agreed upon that it would be in the Board Room at HQ, for a half a day on a Saturday, but a date and time was never selected. After being unable to find a date in September that would work, The Board Selected October 4th from 1:00 pm-4:00 pm.

b) Election of Coverage

A letter from HR was sent stating that we have the option to opt in partially or entirely to Augusta-Richmond’s 3PM HR manual. Ms. Reeves asked for clarification. Ms. Rookard explained that the 3PM is the policies and procedures that the county follows. The Library can choose to opt in, entirely, opt in, partially, or opt out of, entirely to the policies of the 3PM manual. If you choose to opt out of the policy, then you must have policies in place, approved by HR to supplement. Mr. Mitchell is in favor of joining 3PM as long as some policies are tweaked to account for the differences of Library staff from other county staff. We would also be able to match our calendars to the county’s as long as we receive it from the Administrator. Ms. Rookard stated that, that shouldn’t be a problem, since the calendar is put together in July so it can go out with the budget. Adjustments could also be made to SOPs allowing for differences between library staff and county staff with an addendum. Procurement would then run through the city, except for book purchasing, which would still be the state. Ms. Garman called for a vote. Ms. Reeves motioned to adopt the 3PM manual in its entirety. Ms. Siler seconded the motion. The motion to adopt the 3PM manual in its entirety was passed unanimously.

c) Living in Purpose

The Board discussed the proposal to make Living in Purpose a Library Partner. Mr. Mitchell is in favor as it would be mutually beneficial to the Library and Living in Purpose. Ms. Garman asked if there is space available to accommodate Monday-Thursday. Mr. Mitchell responded that we can make the space. We could keep an additional staff member or Marshall at Wallace Branch for the additional time after the library closed, but there would be a fee of \$25 a day. Ms. Garman asked for a motion to approve Living in Purpose to use the library spaces for their afterschool program for the 25-26 school year, with a plan to revisit in a

year. Ms. Gibbons made the motion. Ms. Siler and Ms. Rhodes seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously

X. Public Comments

a) Reinforce Job Faire

- Ms. Gibbons introduced Reinforce, a non-profit that does job force development for justice impacted individuals. They are holding a job faire at the library on Sept 17th from 10:00 am-2:00 pm and, since they work with 2nd chance, are requesting use of the room free of charge. Ms. Reeves asked if the Library could be an official sponsor perhaps with the library logo on the flier. Ms. Gibbons said she did not see a problem with that. Ms. Garman motioned to allow Reinforce to use the space for free for their job-faire. Ms. Reeves seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- b) Ms. Mason mentioned the dates that PK's scale painting will take place. It will take place on August 19th at 11:00 am at the Friedman Branch, on August 21st at 3:30 pm at Wallace Branch, and on August 26th at 11:00 am at the HQ Branch.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

The ARCPLS Board of Trustees regular meeting adjourned at 6:56 pm.