

**BLACKWATER REGIONAL LIBRARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES
March 18, 2026**

Present

MeChelle Blunt – Southampton County
Ora Briggs – Sussex County
Sylvia Claggett – Isle of Wight County
Deborah Dawson – Surry County
Charlene Herrala – Isle of Wight County
Pam Lease – City of Franklin
Margie McClenny – Southampton County
Karen Richardson – Sussex County
Judge Alfreda Talton-Harris – City of Franklin
Ben Neal – Library Director
Bonnie Lauver – Assistant Library Director
Debbie Carter – Budget & Finance Manager

Remote (via Zoom)

Johanna Wiggins – Isle of Wight County

Absent

Kathy Lippard – Isle of Wight County
Kisha Watford – Southampton County

Chair, Deborah Dawson called the meeting of the Blackwater Regional Library Board of Trustees to order at 3:07 p.m. at the Franklin Branch.

Agenda

Ms. Herrala moved, and Ms. Briggs seconded that the agenda be approved as amended. The vote was unanimous.

Consideration of Remote Meeting Participation Requests

Trustee Wiggins requested to attend this meeting remotely. Mr. Neal read the Motion to Permit Board Member to Participate Remotely, filled in the required information, and Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Dawson

Nays: none

Minutes

Ms. Harris moved, and Ms. Lease seconded the minutes be approved as presented. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Public Comment

None

Correspondence

Letter from Isle of Wight County Schools Superintendent, Dr. Theo Cramer, expressing gratitude for school supply donations.

Library Director's Report

BRL's first Winter Reading Program with Beanstack was very successful with about 150 participants of all ages. Over 6,800 children's books circulated as part of the program.

Mr. Neal briefed the Isle of Wight County School Board on plans for the new Windsor Library and received overall positive reactions. Initial renderings for the library building should be available in the next few weeks.

A state budget compromise was not reached, so it could be April – May before state aid is finalized.

Committee Reports

Budget & Finance – Mr. Neal – At the February Budget and Finance meeting, the committee directed staff to investigate CD options at financial institutions that BRL already does business with and to make a recommendation. Upon staff research, staff is recommending investing \$100,000 of the current reserve fund in CDs with Carr Investment Group at the best available rates when the motion is approved. Budget and Finance came to a consensus to recommend this option as well. Ms. Herrala moved that the recommendation be accepted. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Dawson

Nays: none

Abstentions: Wiggins

Personnel & Policy – will go into closed session under New Business.

Long Range Planning – Ms. Blunt moved that the 2026-2031 draft of BRL's Strategic Plan be accepted as presented. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Accounts Payable

Ms. Briggs moved, and Ms. Herrala seconded that the accounts payable be filed for the Annual Audit. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Unfinished Business

None

New Business

Closed Session – Ms. Briggs moved, and Ms. Herrala seconded that the Board go into closed session at 3:31 p.m. for the purpose of discussing personnel matters, under Section 2.1-344 A.1 of the Code of Virginia. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

The Board reconvened at 3:36 p.m. with a roll call vote to certify closed session.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Ms. Richardson moved, and Ms. Briggs seconded that the Board accept, with regret, the Library Director's resignation, effective April 15, 2026. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Ms. McClenny moved, and Ms. Briggs seconded that Bonnie Lauer be appointed Interim Director, effective April 16, 2026, at an annualized salary of \$74,000. If Interim status lasts more than six months, the Board shall reconsider the interim salary at a higher rate. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Nominating Committee – Ms. Dawson appointed the following Trustees to the Nominating Committee: Pam Lease, Chair; Johanna Wiggins, and MeChelle Blunt. The committee will present a slate of officers for fiscal year 2026-2027 at the May Board meeting. The Board will vote on officers at the June Board meeting.

Search Committee – Ms. Dawson appointed the following Trustees to the Director Search Committee: Deborah Dawson, Chair; Charlene Herrala, Judge Harris, Karen Richardson, MeChelle Blunt. Ms. Dawson will email the group with an initial meeting date.

Board Member Comments/Announcements

Ms. Blunt – The Links, Incorporated (Suffolk VA Chapter) will hold a Black Family Wellness Expo at the Workforce Development Center on March 21, 2026.

Ms. Claggett – expressed appreciation for Mr. Neal’s time and accomplishments while with BRL

Ms. Dawson – Surry Middle School hosted a One Book, One School event showcasing the Jennifer Torres book, Stef Soto, Taco Queen. BRL staff attended. Many good comments about BRL and the Library of Things.

Announcement of Next Meeting

The next Blackwater Regional Library Board of Trustees meeting will be on April 15, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. at the Franklin Branch.

Adjournment

Ms. Briggs moved, and Ms. Claggett seconded the meeting be adjourned. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Carter for
Ora Briggs, Secretary