



## HCLS Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

September 17, 2025 ♦ 7 pm  
East Columbia Branch

Board members present were: Rob Mentz, Chair; Phillip Dodge, Vice Chair; Elizabeth Banach; and Kelly Smith. Also present were staff members/citizens including, Dorna Anderson, Brandon Bannister, Angela Brade, Piyali Callahan, Sahana Callahan, Kelly Clark, Sarah Cooke, Stacey Fields, Rita Hamlet, Eliana Holgate, Kathleen Klebba, Christie Lassen, Jessica Lee, Marcy Leonard, Steve Lewicky, Tanya Malveaux, Tamara Nuttle, Emma Ostendorp, Dawn Popp, Stephanie Shane, and members of AFCSME union.

Rob Mentz called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Katie Klebba provided public comment. Her testimony is attached at the end of the minutes.

Stephanie Shane gave an update of the Friends & Foundation of HCLS, on behalf of Friends Chair Nana Owusu. She related that the Friends have exceeded their annual campaign goal for FY 2025 in terms of revenue from individual memberships, grants, seasonal fundraisers, and Evening in the Stacks. There are three new Board members, and 60 Friends members have signed up to volunteer at Friends/HCLS events. The goals for FY 2026 are to increase sponsorships for HCLS, seek outside assistance in the form of accounting and marketing contracts, and host two new fundraisers, Adult BOB (Oct) and Books N Brew (April).

The Board unanimously approved the Board meeting minutes for June 4 and September 3.

Marcy Leonard provided the operational highlight on the Savage STEM and Education Center, focusing on the AV Studio, Science Lab and 3D Printing. I then touched on the Makerspace Feasibility Study Final Report. While envisioned at the Lakefront Library, the report positions the Makerspace to go in any future new or remodeled branch. I highlighted core impacts, including economic and fiscal impact, community impact, and flagship maker hub. The report, which was included in Board packets, contains a very detailed roadmap for implementation.

Angela Brade provided an update on capital projects. The County continues to work with MEDCO on the Downtown Branch. With regards to the Elkridge Branch expansion into the Senior Center space, she related that groundbreaking for the new Elkridge Community Center is expected in Spring 2026. HCLS' expansion into the current Senior Center space would commence thereafter. New entry doors at Glenwood have been hampered by shipping delays. Once ordered and received, the storefront should take approximately 60 days to install. The FY 2027 Capital Budget proposal will be submitted to the Board in November.

I presented current thinking on the Operating Budget. Object 1 would see increases in salaries, in terms of a 3% Step and 4% COLA in alignment with our collective bargaining agreement, a 7% increase in medical benefit costs, and a 7.65% increase in FICA costs. Object 2 is forecast to not increase. An 8.37% increase is proposed in Object 3 to offset publisher increases and lessen community wait times. I noted that HCLS' discretionary budget paid by the state from federal funds is lower than some other jurisdictions based on the state's per capita funding formula. We envision a 42.28% increase in Object 4 to invest in staff professional development. While we do not currently have an increase in Object 5 (equipment), there will be a proposal from a vendor for a contract for self-check machines at the November Board meeting. I closed by referencing the FY 27 Strategic Milestones and FY 27 Budget Process Timeline documents contained in the Board packets.

The Board approved the modified FY 26 closings which were amended to align with new branch hours, as well as the sections up for review in Board policy, comprised of the Policies, Supplement 1 and Supplement 3 and its Appendix, "How We Choose."

Stephanie Shane provided an update on Board vacancies, noting that Dawn Popp's nomination is currently being considered by the County Council. Phillip and Kelly's reappointment was approved on September 2.

Rob adjourned the meeting at 7:32 pm to convene in closed session.

Below is a summary of the closed session held on September 17, 2025.

1. Statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session:
  - a. Time of closed session: 7:35 pm – 8:32 pm
  - b. Place (location) of closed session: Virtual
  - c. Purpose of the closed session: to discuss personnel matters, collective bargaining and matters related to real property acquisition
2. Record of the vote of each member as to closing the session:
  - a. Names of members voting aye: Elizabeth Banach, Phillip Dodge, Rob Mentz, and Kelly Smith
  - b. Members opposed: none
  - c. Members Abstaining: none
3. Statutory authority to close session: This meeting was closed under the following provisions of General Provisions Art. § 3-305(b)(1) § 3-305(b) (3) & § 3-305(b) (9) (add others as needed)
4. Listing of each topic actually discussed, persons present, and each action taken in the session:
  - a. Topic description: To discuss personnel matters, property acquisition, and collective bargaining
  - b. Persons present for discussion: Tonya Aikens, Dorna Anderson, Elizabeth Banach, Angela Brade, Phillip Dodge, Stacey Fields, Christie Lassen, Steve Lewicky, Rob Mentz, and Kelly Smith.
  - c. Action Taken/Each Recorded: The board discussed the Collective Bargaining Agreement, along with property acquisition and personnel matters.

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for 7 pm on **Wed., November 19, 2025**, at the Elkridge Branch.

Respectfully submitted,



Tonya Aikens  
President & CEO

Good evening to the board and my colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.

My name is Katie Klebba, and I am an Instruction and Research specialist at the Central Branch. I've worked at the library for roughly 7 years. I am also a proud AFSCME member and union steward.

My colleagues and I care deeply about our work and want Howard County residents to have access to the best library system possible. We are here today to question the choices made by the Howard County Library System that directly hurt the work that we do. We are here to ask our library leadership to make a different choice.

It is a choice that HCLS leadership made by choosing to walk back our already negotiated 4% raises in our union contract. Our union believes that this choice is a harmful one.

Here are the facts.

We've been told from leadership that a 2% cost-of-living adjustment keeps pace with inflation, with some library documents even calling it historic. But by any objective measure, the only historic thing about a 2% COLA is how consistently it has failed to support library workers through the inflation of the past five years. From 2020 to 2025, COLAs totaled 10%. Over the same period, inflation was 22.1%--a gap of more than 12%.

For workers like myself who are not yet at the top of our pay grade, this shortfall has been offset—just barely—by our 3% step increases. But let me be clear: this is not the purpose of a step increase. A step increase is designed to reward experience, skill development, and growth—not to be cannibalized to make up for inadequate COLAs.

And what about my colleagues who are already at the top of their pay grade—roughly 15% of our bargaining unit? This results in a decrease of purchasing power by at least 12% over the last 5 years. These are our most experienced colleagues, who know our community members by name and who mentor new workers. A 4% COLA would not undo the wage compression from five years of erosion. And making the choice to break our union contract and walk back our 4% negotiated wage increase sends a clear message: my colleagues' sacrifices were expected, not exceptional.

Now, 200+ of your staff are awaiting arbitration, and at this moment, bargaining unit members have received no wage increase over last year. Since the start of the fiscal year, management has withheld our fixed step increases along with our COLAs, justifying this by pointing out that both COLA and step increases appear in the same article of the contract. But only the COLA is in dispute—the 3% step increase is not. No other aspect of Article 18 has been suspended because the COLA is in dispute. There is no contractual requirement to withhold step increases while we await arbitration, and doing so is an additional violation of this contract. It is a choice you are making to weaponize cost of living increases and step increases against your own staff.

The contract we collectively signed is not symbolic. It is, in fact, binding and built on the understanding that library workers deserve to share in the stability and growth of this institution and that our communities and the patrons we serve deserve a well staffed, experienced, and respected workforce.

Sometimes choices can be hard—this is not one of those times. It is clear that leadership signed our union contract. It is clear that the library received funding to support our wage increases, and it is clear that there is no better way to respect your staff than to honor our legally binding contract and restore our negotiated wage increases.

Your choices as leaders of our library system will define you, and during times like these, we ask that you choose to support your staff so we can continue to make HCLS the best it can be.

Thank you.