

# TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Meeting of the Trustees as a Corporation and Administrative Agency

Tuesday, March 24, 2026 at 8:30am

Via Zoom

## MINUTES

The Meeting of the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston (“BPL”) held on Tuesday, March 24, 2026, at 8:30 a.m. via Zoom.

All present at the meeting included: Chair Dr. Ray Liu, Vice Chair Evelyn Arana Ortiz and Trustees: Navjeet Bal, Joe Berman, Jim Canales, John Hailer, Julie Kim (departed at 9:05 am), Jonathan Lavine, Porsha Olayiwola, Jose C. Masso III, Senator Mike Rush, Christian Westra (arrived at 9:00am ). Trustees Cheryl Cronin, Jeff Hawkins, and Lynn Perry Wooten were absent.

BPL President David Leonard, Clerk of the Board Pamela R. Carver, BPL staff, and members of the public were also present.

Chair Liu presided and called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. He acknowledged the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) welcome statement. The Clerk reminded all that the meeting was being recorded for administrative purposes and reviewed the process for signing up for public comments.

The first matter of business was the approval of the meeting minutes from January 20, 2026. No comments or edits were made, and the Board voted to approve them.

Chair Liu acknowledged and thanked Trustees Bal, Cronin, and Westra, as well as himself, for their service to the Board as they prepare to transition off the Board at the conclusion of their terms. He noted that newly appointed trustees will transition onto the Board beginning May 1, 2026.

David Leonard began his President’s Report. He noted that the MA Senate/House of Representative’s Joint Ways and Means Hearing was recently held at the Mattapan Branch Library that was hosted by Representative Russell Holmes. It was noted that Trustee Senator Rush was unable to attend due to mandatory Navy training obligations.

President Leonard also highlighted the recent Massachusetts 250 celebration held at the Central Library in Copley Square. He noted that the Mayor approved the early closure of the second floor of the McKim Building to accommodate the event, during which the Washington Medal was showcased. Trustee Joe Berman attended as the Board’s representative.

President Leonard then reviewed highlights from the Library’s Strategic Plan, organized by strategic pillars, including:

### **Lifelong Learning**

- 3,800 downloads of the Winter Reading Log.
- Children’s Room programs at the Central Library averaged 916 patrons weekly during March.

### **Trusted Resource**

- 12,052 new eCard registrations.
- 1,747 Books Unbanned registrations.

### **Welcoming Destination**

- Development of accessibility improvements database

### **Organizational Readiness**

- Hired or onboarded 7 positions since last meeting

Chair Liu requested that the clerk recirculate the Strategic Plan materials to the Board.

President Leonard introduced the Director of Library Services, Michael Colford, who announced his retirement effective July 2026 after 22 years of service to the Boston Public Library.

Mr. Colford presented an overview of the Library's social work initiative, explaining its origins and growth. He noted that the Library first hired a Health and Human Services Specialist, Allie Dowd, whose work helped shift staff perspectives regarding homelessness and highlighted the increasing role libraries play in connecting patrons with social services.

The initiative later expanded through collaboration with the Boston Public Library Fund to support the Library's first dedicated Social Worker and Peer Navigator positions. Mr. Colford noted that the City ultimately transitioned the position into a permanently funded role after demonstrated success. Taylor Morris is the current Social Work Manager.

Taylor Morris presented an overview of the current Social Work Team and its services which include: Resource navigation and basic needs support, trust and relationship building, collaboration and advocacy with community partners, and staff training and trauma-informed approaches.

Ms. Morris noted that the team currently hosts drop-in hours four times weekly at the Central Library and hopes to expand services to branch locations following the hiring of a second social worker in April 2026.

Some community partners supporting this work include organizations such as Pine Street Inn and Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program.

Ms. Morris shared examples of the team's impact, including assistance provided to unhoused patrons, support with compensation claims for crime victims, and referrals to veteran housing and shelter services. She also described the "Coffee and Conversation" program held weekly outside the Newsfeed Café.

Trustees commended the work of the Social Work Team and discussed the importance of supporting frontline staff and maintaining sustainable trauma-informed practices throughout the institution. Trustees also discussed opportunities to share best practices with peer library systems nationally.

Chair Liu remarked that the work strongly aligned with multiple pillars of the Strategic Plan.

Beth Prindle, Director of Research and Special Collections, provided an update on recent and upcoming exhibitions at the Central Library.

Ms. Prindle reported that the "Revolution!" exhibition, which opened in October 2025, had attracted more than 75,000 visitors. She also noted that over 1,500 survey responses have been collected to better understand visitor demographics and experiences. The exhibition will remain open through the conclusion of the Boston Marathon period.

Ms. Prindle then previewed the upcoming "Declarations" exhibition, opening April 11, 2026, and running through September 13, 2026. The exhibition will feature eight rare printings of the Declaration of Independence alongside maps, books, and historical materials exploring the development of American independence. The exhibition is co-presented by the Boston Public Library and the Leventhal Map & Education Center.

Trustees discussed the importance of balancing the Library's social service role with its stewardship of cultural and historical collections. Trustees also expressed interest in future visitor demographic analysis.

Evelyn Arana, Vice Chair and Committee Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee, thanked outgoing trustees and staff members for their contributions to the Finance and Audit Committee and the strategic plan process, including Trustee Bal, Christian, Cheryl, as well as Michael Colford.

Emily Tokarczyk, Chief Financial Officer, provided an update on the Fiscal Year 2027 City Operating Budget process. She explained that all City departments had been directed to prepare budgets reflecting a 2% reduction scenario.

Ms. Tokarczyk reviewed the Library’s operating budget structure, noting that approximately 75% of funding is derived from the City budget, with the remainder supported through external funding sources. She also reviewed key budget categories and the timeline for the Mayor’s proposed budget and City Council hearings.

President Leonard stated that while budget constraints may impact the Library’s ability to fully advance all Strategic Plan goals, the administration’s priority remains minimizing impacts to filled positions and core public programs and services.

Trustees discussed contingency planning, anticipated impacts on staffing, and the status of capital projects, including the Fields Corner and Chinatown Branch projects. Staff noted that the Fields Corner Branch remains anticipated to open in Fall 2026.

Trustee Arana requested that the Clerk share information regarding the City Council budget hearing in May with the Board.

Jessica Chapel, Chief of Digital & Online Services, presented an update on the Library’s AI Digitization Initiative first introduced in March 2025.

Ms. Chapel explained that the three-year initiative is intended to expand public access to historically significant materials through large-scale digitization and improved metadata discovery. The pilot currently includes approximately 5,000 items and over one million scanned pages from the Library’s collections.

Ms. Chapel presented a proposed acceptance of a \$100,000 gift from OpenAI, along with an additional \$100,000 in product credits, to support the digitization initiative. She emphasized that all digitized materials are in the public domain and will remain fully accessible to the public.

Trustees discussed the value of the Library’s collections, the long-term implications of AI partnerships, and opportunities for future negotiations should the initiative continue beyond the pilot phase.

Following discussion, the Board approved acceptance of the gift after a motion was duly made, seconded and voted on.

***VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston. acting pursuant to their authority under Section 2 of Chapter 114 of the Acts of 1878, as amended, hereby accept a gift of One Hundred Thousand Dollars and Zero Cents (\$100,000) from OpenAI Opco, LLC (“OpenAI”) of 1455 3rd St, San Francisco, CA 94158 to support digitization projects by the Boston Public Library.”***

The Board then reviewed the dates for the 2026-2027 Board Meetings. They voted to approve them as presented. It was noted that the public should check the BPL website as the dates/times are subject to change.

***VOTED: “that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston vote to accept the schedule of meetings for 2026-2027 as presented, noting that these meetings are subject to change (see website for details).***

**Full Board:**

- Tuesday, September 29, 2026, 8:30am-10:30am, Central Library
- Tuesday, December 1, 2026, 3:00pm-5pm, Codman Square Branch
- Tuesday, January 19, 2027, 3:00pm-5:00pm, Adams Street Branch
- Tuesday, March 16, 2027, 8:30am-10:30am, Central, Rabb Hall
- Tuesday, May 18, 2027, 8:30am-11:00am, Annual Meeting, Central Library

**Executive Committee Only:**

- Tuesday, February 2, 2027, 8:30-9:30am (via Zoom only)
- Tuesday, June 8, 2027, 8:30-9:30am (via Zoom only) “

Dr. Liu asked for any new business.

President Leonard acknowledged the contributions of the outgoing trustees and expressed appreciation for their commitment to the Library. He read Citations prepared by Mayor Michelle Wu for each of them.

The board members echoed remarks recognizing Chair Liu's leadership and service to the Board along with each of their years of service to the patrons of the BPL and the city overall.

Chair Liu reflected on his tenure, describing service on the Board as "the honor of my life," and thanked fellow trustees and Library leadership for their partnership and dedication.

Dr. Liu asked for public comments. The Clerk noted that two individuals signed up for public comment; however, neither remained present at the time designated for comment.

Chair Liu introduced a motion to enter Executive Session. The purpose is to conduct litigation strategy if an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the body's position, as declared by the chair; under exemption #2 of MA Open Meeting Law. He noted it will be held at the conclusion of the public meeting. The Board of Trustees will not reconvene in a public session.

Trustee Berman raised a procedural question regarding the applicability of the cited exemption related to litigation. Discussion followed.

On a motion duly made, and seconded, the Board voted to enter Executive Session. Joe Berman asked that his vote to not enter into executive session be reflected in the record.

***VOTED: "that, the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve to enter into Executive Session for the purpose to discuss litigation strategy under Exemption #2 of MA Open Meeting Law."***

Dr. Liu noted the next meeting would be the Annual Meeting held on May 19<sup>th</sup> at the Central Library.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:18 a.m.

*Respectfully submitted,*

***Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board***