

**THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 WASHINGTON STREET
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY**

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 24, 2025, 5:00 P.M.**

MEMBERS:

Aisha Cooper	Co-President/Chair
Lauren Wells	Co-President
Rosemary Steinbaum	Vice-President
Havier Nazario	Secretary
Jacqueline Quiles	Deputy Mayor
Robert J. Austin II	Trustee

STAFF:

Leslie Colson	Assistant Director for Human Resources
Scharron Little	Interim Director of Finance
Zuhare Meri	Building Superintendent
George Williams	Assistant Director, Capital Planning

GUESTS:

Neil Cleary	Counsel, Genova Burns LLC (from 5:50 p.m. until 6:32 p.m.)
Kevin Stawicky	Counsel, Genova Burns LLC (from 5:50 p.m. until 6:32 p.m.)

ABSENT:

Jason Ballard	Treasurer
Sharnee Brown	Trustee
Miguel Rodriguez	Trustee

Minutes prepared from a recording by Shazia Ahmad of Minutes Solutions Inc.

1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present, and the Trustees having been given adequate and proper notice of the meeting, the meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. STAFF HONORS

The Board and staff honored Leslie Colson's 39 years of service to the Newark Public Library (NPL). L. Wells thanked her for her support of the Board and her assistance and guidance in the hiring process. H. Nazario led the thanks on behalf of the City of Newark.

3. APPROVAL OF PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved to approve the Public Session Board of Trustees minutes of May 28, 2025, and the Public Session Special Board of Trustees minutes of August 8, 2025. Motion carried unanimously.

The Board agreed to defer approval of the July 23, 2025, Public Session minutes, as some amendments are required.

4. **RESOLUTION TO MOVE INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION**

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Steinbaum, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees move into the Executive Session. Motion carried.

5. **RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION**

On a motion duly made, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees reconvene in the Public Session. Motion carried.

6. **CONSENT AGENDA**

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by Trustee, it was resolved to approve all items on the meeting agenda with the exception of the following:

- Treasurer's report
- Finance Committee report
- HR resolutions
- Facilities Committee resolutions

Motion carried.

7. **HR RESOLUTION**

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to ratify the three-year contracts for Local 68, covering the period from 2024 to 2026. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the wage adjustments for January 1, 2024, for Local 68. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the 2.5% retroactive salary pay from January 1, 2025, to September 29, 2025, for Local 68. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the 2.5% staff salary increase for Local 68, effective January 1, 2026. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the 2.5% salary increase for 2024 and 2026 for non-union staff. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the wage adjustments for 2025 and 2026 for non-union staff whose titles are covered in Appendix B for Local 2298 bargaining unit. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve 2.5% retroactive salary pay from January 1, 2025, to September 29, 2025, for non-union members whose titles are covered under Appendix B for Local 2298 bargaining unit. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by the Trustee, it was resolved to approve the memorandum of agreement dated July 16, 2025, between the Newark Public Library and AFSCME Local 2298, setting forth the terms and conditions of an amended collective bargaining agreement that superseded the one that expired on December 31, 2023. Motion carried.

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the personnel resolution for the Newark Public Library Board meeting held on September 24, 2025, as a package. Motion carried

8. TREASURER'S REPORT

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by Trustee, it was resolved to approve bill sheet 1362 for July, 2025, in the amount of \$2,792,857.56, and bill sheet 1363 for August, 2025, in the amount of \$1,351,927.10. Motion carried.

The Treasurer's report was included in the Board package.

9. COMMITTEE REPORTS

9.1 Facilities Committee

On a motion made by L. Wells, seconded by A. Cooper, it was resolved to approve the contract for architectural services related to the renovation of the Springfield Branch as follows:

- Whereas the Board of Trustees for the Newark Public Library, as its governing body, has awareness of the legally binding contracts entered into on March 12, 2025, and May 5, 2025, between the Newark Public Library and OCA Architects in the amounts of \$11,700 and \$59,000, respectively; and
- Whereas the following subset of services is not previously contracted and directly related to the Springfield Branch renovation:
 - A. Public competitive bid process management, \$5,200
 - B. Construction documents, \$23,500
 - C. Construction administration, \$16,000
- And whereas the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees is fully committed to the completion of capital improvements of this project, and in compliance with all requirements set forth by the New Jersey State Library
- Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Board of Trustees of the Newark Public Library approves and awards the professional services named above and contracted to OCA Architects in the amount of \$44,700 for the fiscal year 2025, for which date the project will be completed.
- Be it further resolved that the persons whose names, titles, and signatures appear below are authorized to delegate and/or do any and all such acts as deemed necessary to affect the responsible execution of the foregoing resolution.

Motion carried unanimously.

Z. Meri updated the Board on this project, noting that all aspects are moving forward with OCA Architects. The firm has completed the request-for-proposal (RFP) and the new drawings. This was discussed during the Facilities Committee meeting.

A. Cooper noted that there is limited construction administration under the March 2025 contract and additional construction administration under the May 2025 contract and asked about the difference between the two. Z. Meri responded that OCA Architects were hired to

conduct the RFP; however, they agreed to do this with the inclusion of construction administration. When the contract for the full scope of work was signed in the amount of \$59,000, the firm may have added the construction administration. A. Cooper asked if the May, 2025 contract would replace the March, 2025 contract and Z. Meri confirmed that this was the case.

H. Nazario inquired about the final line of the motion presented, and A. Cooper explained that this is necessary until an Interim Director is appointed.

9.2 Finance Committee

A. Cooper noted that the report was for the August, 2025 month-end results for the consolidated summary review. As capital project reimbursements will be made only when the projects are completed, revenues are currently lagging. Reimbursements are expected from the City of Newark and New Jersey State Library in October, 2025.

Expense totals are favorable to planned operating grant and endowment funds. A. Cooper noted that the Springfield Branch renovation was delayed and explained that any reimbursement delays after October, 2025 would affect NPL's cash flow.

NPL presented an appropriation request in the amount of \$10,553,773 to the City of Newark during its 2025 budget presentation. This appropriation request reflects a 2.3% increase from the 2024 fiscal year. Interim Comptroller Little and Assistant Director for Human Resources L. Colson attended the City budget hearing on September 5, 2025. This budget was included in the Board meeting package.

Some highlights of the 2025 NPL budget include:

- Salary adjustments for para-professionals and professional librarian titles, effective January 1, 2026.
- Reduction in staffing vacancies by at least 50% (12 positions) and corresponding reductions in temporary staffing services for library titles.
- Elimination of summer hours for the Main Branch, adhering to state requirements of 60 operational hours per week throughout the year, and late-night hours for neighborhood branches on par with the Main Branch.
- A pause in capital expenditure projects following the completion of the Springfield Branch renovation, with resources being redirected to other areas of need within the Library.

A. Cooper also noted that the 2021 financial audit had been completed by the independent auditor, with the internal preparations for the 2022 audit completed. 2023 audit preparation is nearly complete at the time of this meeting.

H. Nazario inquired about the 2021 audit report. S. Little responded that the report was provided to Treasurer Ballard and the City Business Administrator's office. She agreed to share a copy of the report with the Board. H. Nazario asked about the findings, and S. Little responded that these pertained to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. She also confirmed that there are material findings to NPL's obligations to the City, in particular the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS). The NPL has three areas of concern, as per the audit:

- Its debt to the City is upwards of \$3 million at this time.
- Resolving the PPP loans.
- Non-compliance with the *Fair Labor Standards Act* with regard to compensatory time balances.

H. Nazario inquired about the repayment to the City, and S. Little confirmed that this dates back to the 2019, 2020, and 2021 audits. He asked if there were additional findings regarding pension payments for subsequent audits, and S. Little noted that there would be. She agreed to send the audit report to the Board.

Upon an inquiry from L. Wells, S. Little explained that, according to the statute, compensatory time balances are limited to a certain number of hours. L. Wells followed up to ask if the audit findings and concerns were reflected in the new budget.

10. NEW BUSINESS

The Board noted that these resolutions included in the package were voted on during the HR resolutions discussion.

11. NEXT MEETING

The scheduled for November 19, 2025.

12. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by A. Cooper, seconded by R. Austin and carried, it was resolved to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. Motion carried.

Aisha Cooper, Co-President

Director

Date

Date