



## HCLS Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

November 20, 2024 ♦ 7 pm  
Elkridge Branch

Board members present were: Elizabeth Banach, Chair; Kelly Smith, Vice Chair; Phillip Dodge; and Rob Mentz. Also present were staff members/citizens including, Lew Belfont, Angela Brade, Mary Brosenne, Piyali Callahan, Kelly Clark, Carolyn David, Vera Davies, Stacey Fields, Sharon Fuller, Cari Gast, Rita Hamlet, Eliana Holgate, Christie Lassen, Jessica Lee, Marcy Leonard, Steve Lewicky, Phil Lord, Tanya Malveaux, Brooke McCauley, Lauren McCloskey, Nana Owusu, Gabriela Penaloza, Megan Royden, Stephanie Shane, Mark Swerdlin, Dennis Wood, and Sheng Wu. Additional audience members represented the AFCSME union.

Liz Banach called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm, noting a change in the agenda with the auditors presenting at the January meeting.

The Board unanimously approved the Board meeting minutes for September 18.

Liz opened the floor to Public Comment. Charles Smalls, a member of Howard County Library Workers United's bargaining team spoke on behalf of the HCLWU bargaining unit's wage proposal. Liz thanked him and shared that HCLS has consistently prioritized staff. Over the past five years, staff have received COLAs and merit, with annual increases typically equaling five percent. Liz noted the Board's responsibility to plan realistic budgets that prioritize both staff and the community.

Marcy Leonard gave a preview of the DIY Tour that took place at the end of the public session.

The Board reviewed the financial report through October 31, 2024.

Angela Brade presented an update on capital projects. The County has purchased land for the new Community Center and Senior Center in Elkridge, with completion scheduled for Summer 2027. The design process for the approximate 9K additional space to be vacated by the seniors can begin sooner. All previous funding is to stay in place and the Board's request to the County includes additional staff for children and teens. In response to a question from the Board, HCLS will still implement new signage first at the Elkridge branch.

Funding has been approved for a site assessment and feasibility study for the Southwest Site. HCLS is working with the County to learn more about available space in the Maple Lawn area. Regarding the Downtown Branch, County Administration is in the analysis phase. The County has agreed to pay for redoing the entrance to Glenwood. A shared campus sign for the East Columbia Branch is set to be installed by December.

I presented the proposed operating budget, referencing the FY 2026 Curriculum Focus which had one change from September which was to cover an additional \$56K for part time benefits in medical and dental coverage in keeping with what the County is doing for its employees. The rest of the request from September is unchanged. Proposed increases in Object 1 include 3% merit, 4% COLA, 7% in medical benefits, a compensation study (\$35K) and security costs (\$450K). No changes are proposed for Objects 2 and 5, while modest increases are proposed for curriculum and professional development. The Board discussed the history of merit increases at HCLS, hoping that going forward merit would be exercised on a true basis. The Board approved the proposed FY 26 Operating Budget.

I presented the FY 26 Capital Budget, explaining that we have no new ask as of right now.

The Board approved a requested amendment for FY 25 Closings to allow HCLS to use one full day or two half days a quarter for professional development. This will allow for more efficient staff training. At least three weeks' notice will be provided to community and staff.

The Board reviewed the proposed changes to Supplement 1, approving adoption of changes to incorporate additional details on presentations by the public at Board meetings, plus switching the Call to Order elements of New Business and Old Business. The Board also approved Supplement 2 with no changes, as proposed.

Nana Owusu gave an update on Friends & Foundation of HCLS activities. The Board reviewed the Gift Giving Guide curated by HCLS staff that is produced and distributed by the Friends to its members. Nana referenced recent Friends activities, including Friends week with daily posts on Facebook, the Longest Table at which many Friends participated, and the current status of the annual campaign which represents \$30K in donations at the end of October. He noted that the national trend is down in terms of number of donors. He closed by stating pending grants that the Friends have applied for, including the Community Foundation of Howard County and M&T Bank.

Liz adjourned the meeting at 7:45 pm to tour the DIY center ahead of convening in closed session.

Below is a summary of the closed session held on November 20, 2024.

1. Statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session:
  - a. Time of closed session: 8:02 pm – 9:07 pm
  - b. Place (location) of closed session: Elkridge Branch
  - c. Purpose of the closed session: to discuss personnel matters and collective bargaining
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): Topic #7: § 3-305(b) (1) & (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 and collective bargaining
  - b. Persons present for discussion: Tonya Aikens, Dorna Anderson, Elizabeth Banach, Phillip Dodge, Stacey Fields, Christie Lassen, Steve Lewicky, Rob Mentz, Kelly Smith, and Mark Swerdlin.
  - c. Action Taken/Each Recorded: The board discussed personnel matters and collective bargaining.

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for 7 pm on **Wed., January 15, 2025**, and will be virtual.

Respectfully submitted,



Tonya Aikens  
President & CEO

Hello members of the board of trustees, I am Charles Smalls and I am a member of Howard County Library Workers United's bargaining team and an Instructor at the Savage branch. Thank you for this opportunity to speak tonight on behalf of HCLWU and as well, thank you for making great strides in the initial contract negotiation process. I understand that the members of the bargaining unit and leadership both want this process done well and as soon as possible.

All of that said, it is important to recognize we are at a crucial point in negotiations. For some time, myself and the other members of the bargaining team have been championing fair wages for every member of the HCLWU bargaining unit. I hope that each member of the board shares that same goal. The honest question I bring to you tonight though is, does HCLS as an organization respect its staff? Does HCLS value the myriad services provided by the staff to our customers? Nothing that HCLS accomplishes inside of the library could be done without our dedicated staff.

As of now, the library system has offered a 2% cost-of-living-adjustment, or COLA, for this fiscal year as well as a step on the payscale. This increase has been HCLS' standard for a long time. Frankly, this is out of step with others in the county. For example, Howard County government employees are receiving COLAs of anywhere between 5-7% in addition to steps. Employees of the Howard County Sheriff's Department are receiving COLAs of 9% this fiscal year. Our union siblings with Howard County Public Schools, who were contemplating layoffs at the beginning of this fiscal year, eventually settled on a total COLA of 3.5% in addition to a step. All told, county workers in nearly every sector in Howard are compensated better than library workers.

In addition, our peers working the same jobs elsewhere in central Maryland, Anne Arundel, Montgomery, and Prince George counties, are all being paid a higher wage for the same responsibilities. It's ludicrous that an organization that prides itself on education in a part of the nation this wealthy would leave such little behind for those facilitating learning. I speak on behalf of my siblings in the unit when I say that we love working inside of this community but it is sickening that so many of my peers cannot afford to live inside of Howard County. It seems to me that the services we provide for the people who come through the doors of HCLS branches aren't deemed worthy of a sustainable wage that would allow us to support ourselves and our families.

The board makes it abundantly clear that they value the members of our community and I want to iterate that we too are members of the community. The board has a special opportunity to make a change and respect not just its employees, but also the people of Howard County through agreeing to our most recent wage proposal. With a more competitive wage, workers would be enabled to continue the exemplary service that HCLS should continue to be renowned for. But excellent service deserves comparable compensation. I implore the members of the board to consider whether HCLS will continue to short change and disrespect its staff with poor wages or if they will do the right thing and understand the need to allocate their abundant resources into supporting the essential work being done by their staff in HCLWU.

Thank you again to the members of the board for hearing me this evening and everyone attending for supporting your local library.

**Board of Trustees Statement re: Wage Negotiations  
November 2024**

HCLS has consistently prioritized staff.

Over the past five years, staff have received COLAs and merit along with a full complement of benefits. Typically, the annual increase equals five percent, which has been higher than the rate of [inflation](#) each year since 2000 (2022 notwithstanding).

According to [HCPSS](#), collective bargaining unit members who are represented by AFSCME are receiving a 3.5 percent COLA and mid-year step increase. [Howard County employees](#) are receiving a five percent increase, with the exception of two units receiving a larger increase due to the results of a comprehensive pay study that indicated they were significantly underpaid.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees and HCLS leadership to plan realistic budgets that prioritize both staff and the community. The State of Maryland is currently projecting a [\\$2.7 billion deficit](#) over the next five years. That, coupled with potential cuts to the Federal government and resulting impacts to local jobs, may have negative impacts on local governments, which provide the bulk of funding to libraries.

As we have conversations with the County's budget office and learn more about their economic forecast, we will adjust our budget request accordingly.

As always, we will prioritize our staff while also balancing our responsibility to taxpayers to operate in a fiscally prudent manner.

Sincerely,

Liz Banach  
Chair  
Howard County Library System Board of Trustees