



Russell Library Board of Trustees Regular Meeting
Tuesday, March 17, 2026, 6:00pm
Hubbard Room, Russell Library, 123 Broad St., Middletown CT

Draft minutes and other supporting items can be requested in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. All meeting attendees are expected to abide by the Russell Library Board Community Dialogue Framework.

Present: Trustees Andy Becker, Bill Foster, Jennifer Hadley, Cindy Harrison, Steve Nelson, Ann Percival, Sarah Schulenburg, Eamonn Wisneski; Library Director Ramona Burkey

Absent: Trustees James Belin, Greg Harris, Andrew White, Tom Russell

DRAFT MINUTES

- 1. Call to Order-** The meeting was called to order by President Wisneski at 6:20 p.m.
 - a. Mission Moments: "*We empower people to grow, connect, strive and thrive.*" - Trustee Schulenburg shared that the Russell Library had representation at Snow School's Read Across America Day celebration earlier this month. Bonnie from Children's Services read to two kindergarten classes, and Trustee Foster read to the two fifth grade classes. It was a wonderful opportunity for the library to connect with a local school.
- 2. Public Comment** - There were no members of the public present, nor pertinent emails nor submissions through the website.
- 3. Approval of Minutes**
 - a. January 20, 2026 Board meeting - **MOTION**: It was moved (Trustee Becker) and seconded (Trustee Percival) to approve the minutes of the January 10, 2026 Board Meeting. The motion passed unanimously in favor of approving the January 10, 2026 Board Meeting minutes.
- 4. Administration Report** – Ramona Burkey, Library Director
 - a. In addition to her [written report](#), Director Burkey noted that the Russell Library has been chosen by *Connecticut Magazine* as one of the top five choices for the best cultural attractions for families. The voting goes through the end of April, and it is an honor to be nominated.
Upcoming birthday celebration updates: Director Burkey has invited the governor to the Russell Library birthday celebration. Senator Murphy will be writing a letter, and an aide is visiting the library next week. The party will be full of fun events, and it is also the kickoff of the Russell Library Games. The Games run from April 11 to November 17th. Registration opens April 5th. This is an opportunity for people to celebrate the entire city of Middletown, as activities will bring participants to many locations across the city. Director Burkey encourages all trustees to attend and/or volunteer at the birthday celebration.
The elevator has been repaired and is up and running again. The staff did a lot of legwork to re-shelve books while the elevator was not working. Director Burkey has asked for the city to consider the library when making requests for infrastructure bond funds, as the elevator repairs and HVAC projects in the library and throughout the city continue to be a challenge.
Save the dates: The annual Company Meeting will be Monday, June 15th at 6 p.m. Library Giving Day is Wednesday, April 1st.

5. Committee Reports

- a. Executive Committee – E. Wisneski - The Executive Committee noted that there are some board vacancies, which are City Trustee spots. Trustee Hadley and Trustee Nelson will be re-nominated as City Trustees at the April City Council meeting, then the vacancy appointments will be addressed. Upcoming City Council meeting dates are in the written Director’s Report. Trustees are asked to keep any potential Company nominees in mind, and to share names with President Wisneski as appropriate. Trustees and Company members are encouraged to become members of the Friends of Russell Library if they are not already. Anyone interested in serving as an officer of the Executive Committee should inform President Wisneski or another member of the Executive Committee in the next month or so.
- b. Finance Committee – A. Becker - The Finance Committee meets at the end of this month. Further Finance discussions will take place in items 7a and 7b.
- c. Governance Committee - J. Hadley - The Governance Committee voted on a revised Meeting Space Policy, which will be discussed in this agenda under item 7c. There have been a couple potential bylaw changes discussed. Currently under the bylaws, City Trustees do not have a term limit but Company Trustees have a limit of four full terms. There is a proposal for the Governance Committee to consider eliminating the term limit for Company Trustees. Also, under the bylaws, for the Board to have a quorum there must be 7 trustees present. When there are vacancies on the Board (as there are now), this makes it more challenging to meet the requirements for a quorum. A potential solution is to have a certain percentage of current board members be the requirement for having a quorum. Any bylaw changes would need to be approved by the May Board meeting, in order to be voted upon by the Russell Library Company in June.
- d. Strategic Planning Committee - The committee last met in January. The press release has been sent out regarding the Strategic Plan. Survey results are being analyzed by staff to identify trends, using Gemini as an analysis tool. Initial concerns raised in the surveys include finances, taxes, cost of living, community building, community engagement, and the general tone and tenor of interactions between people. The committee meets again later this week and will be looking at the data analysis and determining next steps. Much of the current Strategic Plan will stay in place, with the current information guiding updated tweaks to the plan.

6. Unfinished Business

- a. Russell Library/City Hall Feasibility Study Committee - There are no updates from this committee to share at this time.

7. New Business

- a. Company budget expenditures through EOY
 - i. MOTION: Authorization to request up to an additional \$10,000 in distributions from the endowment to cover expenses through June 30, 2026, with net receipts to be returned to the endowment after the end of the fiscal year. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Schulenburg) and seconded (Trustee Hadley) to authorize the request for up to an additional \$10,000 in distributions from the endowment to cover expenses through June 30, 2026, with net receipts to be returned to the endowment after the end of the fiscal year.

Discussion: There were legal fees that had to be paid last fall out of the Company budget, which added up to \$50,000 more than anticipated in the FY projected budget. The proposal to compensate for the legal fees includes freezes to Company budget lines, such as building maintenance, professional development, and publications. While there are anticipated areas of Receipts, such as Library Giving Day and copier fees, the \$10,000 request from the endowment will be a cushion for the current disbursements that need to be paid. It is not anticipated that this amount would be paid back into the endowment prior to July 1, but it is a loan from the endowment that will be repaid.

There was a motion for a friendly amendment to the motion. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Becker) and seconded (Trustee Hadley) was amended the motion to read “to authorize the request for \$10,000 in distributions from the endowment to cover expenses through June 30, 2026, with said funds to be returned to the endowment

after the end of the fiscal year.”

The amendment to the motion was approved unanimously.

The amended motion to authorize the request was unanimously approved.

- b. Annual audits and 990s - Under the recommendation to look into new audit partners for the Company Budget, Trustee Becker reached out to auditors for estimates. The new auditor estimates were around \$20,000, which is a large increase from the \$6,000 previously paid to the current auditor. However, the auditor used previously is no longer providing audit services and no estimates have come close to that cost. An audit review is less precise and was estimated at approximately \$14,000. Benefits of doing a full audit include being more desirable to donors and also having accountability and favorable optics with the city. Director Burkey reached out to the state to see if we are required to do an audit as a charitable organization, and it is not required at the current financial level. A \$20,000 estimate for an audit on a budget that is around \$130,000 is a tremendous percentage of the budget. The Board discussed the high cost of the audit in light of the current financial strains on the budget. Director Burkey will reach out to pro bono partnership to see if they have a connection to any auditors. Trustee Hadley suggested that the Middlesex Community Foundation has helped non-profits in the past, which could be a resource. President Wisneski clarified that there is not currently a time limit on making this decision. Trustee Becker will bring the discussion to the Finance Committee.
- c. Meeting Room Policy - The Governance Committee worked to clarify between areas that patrons do need to make reservations for as opposed to what they do need to make reservations for. The policy included updates on reserving the Hubbard Room. The aim is for space use to be spread fairly among the community. The Hubbard Room is free for Middletown residents to use but the committee discussed charging potential fees for non-residents. The suggestion is to charge \$50 per hour for the Hubbard Room for non-residents or for-profit groups. This fee will be noted in the Hubbard Room Reservation Form, so the fee is not written into the policy itself. The reservation form and associated fees would be left to the discretion of Library administration or staff. The Board unanimously approved the Governance Committee’s motion to approve the updated Meeting Space Policy.

8. Announcements - n/a

9. Executive Session to discuss strategy and real estate

- i. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Harrison) and seconded (Trustee Hadley) to enter Executive Session to discuss strategy and real estate at 8:01 p.m. with an invitation for Director Burkey to stay. The motion passed with all in favor.
- ii. MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Nelson) and seconded (Trustee Harrison) to exit Executive Session at 8:09 p.m. The motion passed with all in favor.

10. Adjournment - MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Nelson) and seconded (Trustee Schulenburg) to adjourn at 8:10 p.m. The motion passed with all in favor.

Next regular board meeting: Tuesday, April 21, 2026, 6:00 p.m.

Russell Library Board Community Dialogue Framework

Parliamentary procedure and public meeting requirements set a method for deciding the business of the Russell Library in view of the public. A Community Dialogue Framework provides guidance on improving the decision-making process by encouraging productive discussion.

- Practice open and honest communication.
- Listen carefully, actively, and respectfully.
- Be courteous; do not interrupt another speaker and do not multi-task.
- Speak from personal experience. Use "I" statements to share your thoughts and feelings.
- Support your statements with evidence and provide rationales.
- Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that are different from yours. All perspectives are welcome and valid.
- Be open to new and different perspectives.
- If you are offended, speak up.
- Challenge and debate the merits of ideas, not the person supporting it.
- Step up and participate in the conversation.
- Step back and recognize others deserve an opportunity to speak.
- When discussion takes place in Executive Session, respect and maintain confidentiality.
- Share the message, not the personal.
- Trust that dialogue and disagreement will take us to deeper levels of understanding and acceptance.