



Russell Library Board of Trustees Regular Meeting
Tuesday, January 20, 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, Tom Russell, Sarah Schulenburg, Andrew White, Eamonn Wisneski; Library Director Ramona Burkey

Absent: Trustees James Belin, Greg Harris

DRAFT MINUTES

- 1. Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order by President Wisneski at 6:03 p.m.
 - a. Mission Moments: "*We empower people to grow, connect, strive and thrive.*" - Trustee Becker shared how inspiring the Company Meeting was last week. Trustee White shared his appreciation for the Friends of Russell Library. He was recently helping an elderly friend move, and they had a large collection of poetry that needed a new home. The Friends welcomed the collection and wrote a lovely note in appreciation of the books.
- 2. Public Comment** - There were no members of the public present, nor pertinent emails nor submissions through the website.
- 3. Approval of Minutes**
 - a. December 16, 2025 Board meeting - **MOTION**: It was moved (Trustee Percival) and seconded (Trustee Becker) to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2025 Board Meeting. The motion passed unanimously in favor of approving the December 16, 2025 Board Meeting minutes.
- 4. Administration Report** – Ramona Burkey, Library Director
 - a. In addition to her [written report](#), Director Burkey shared that the library has been asked to submit a flat budget for fiscal year 2026-27. Aside from contractual salaries, the rest of the library's budget needs to come in at the same number of dollars for next year as this year. This totals \$931,477 and includes overtime, general and administrative supplies, and books and materials. This also includes things like maintenance and repairs. The library has also been asked to submit what a 5% budget reduction would look like for the non-contractual portion of the budget and is due by Friday, 2/6. This would mean a \$46,574 reduction. It is unlikely this could occur without eliminating Sunday hours (currently ~\$40,000 allotment in budget) and would also have an impact on services in other areas. Digital subscriptions and materials are expensive and need to be repurchased every couple years. Without Sunday hours, that would bring down circulation numbers and patrons brought to Middletown each weekend. Sundays are very busy at the library but are not as busy as Saturdays. Sunday hours are paid through a separate line from full time employee salaries and have a separate mention in the union contract because they are not

mandatory and involve overtime.

The library is looking at materials that are not currently getting much use, such as disc rentals, to see where cuts can be made.

The library continues to have 4 vacant clerk positions due to budget constraints from other years. There is also a part-time vacant clerk position from a retirement in November. The part-time clerk position recently vacated by the retirement is still currently in the budget. Once items are cut from the budget, it is difficult to get them back in later budgets.

5. Committee Reports

- a. Executive Committee – E. Wisneski - The Executive Committee met in December to discuss the Board Vice President nomination. They did not meet this month.
- b. Finance Committee – A. Becker - The Finance Committee is meeting this Thursday.
- c. Governance Committee - J. Hadley - The Governance Committee met and looked at the Meeting Room Policy. They are working to clarify the language of the policy and to sync the language of the policy with the language of the online forms. The committee is discussing a potential fee for out-of-town for-profit groups requesting use of The Hubbard Room.
- d. Strategic Planning Committee - A. White - The Strategic Planning Committee met twice since the last Board meeting. The committee is continuing to work on individual stakeholder interviews and is hoping for 80% completion of interviews with the identified list by February 28th. Director Burkey shared the press release with media outlets today. Members of the committee will be meeting with middle schoolers at the Rec Center later this month. February and March will be data sorting months to identify overarching themes, key questions, and concerns. Brandie Doyle will be the primary author on the updated Strategic Plan, following the data analysis. The committee will use the release of the Strategic Plan as an occasion to share all of the awesome things that are happening at Russell Library. Trustee Hadley suggested that the Wesleyan Urban Policy class' report has not yet been fully shared with the board and can be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting.

6. Unfinished Business

- a. Russell Library/City Hall Feasibility Study Committee - The committee met earlier this month. They discussed a meeting schedule and also the necessity to refresh any information from last year regarding the total project cost estimates.

7. New Business - n/a

8. Announcements -

- a. Director Burkey received the United Way Community Service Award for this year. She makes a tremendous impact on the community. Congrats Director Burkey! President Wisneski will share the press release with the board.
- b. Saturday, February 21 - Wesleyan will be hosting a community book fair "Celebrating Black Stories and Voices"
- c. Saturday, February 28 - The Wesleyan Library is hosting Book Dances from a Hartford-based dance group that performed at Hartford Stage last month. The first piece they are sharing is a dance around the topic of immigration and the second is about book banning and the power of reading.
- d. April, Date TBD - Wesleyan is hosting a screening of the documentary "Of the Librarians" with opportunities to raise funds for The Russell Library

9. Executive Session to discuss strategy and real estate

- i. **MOTION:** It was moved (Trustee Schulenburg) and seconded (Trustee Nelson) to enter Executive Session to discuss strategy and real estate at 7:01 p.m. with an invitation for Director Burkey to stay. The motion passed with all in favor.
- ii. **MOTION:** It was moved (Trustee Becker) and seconded (Trustee Hadley) to exit Executive Session at 7:23 p.m. The motion passed with all in favor.

10. Adjournment - MOTION: It was moved (Trustee Nelson) and seconded (Trustee Harrison) to adjourn at 7:23 p.m. The motion passed with all in favor.

Next regular board meeting: Tuesday, February 24*, 2026, 6:00 p.m.
(*fourth Tuesday)

Respectfully Submitted,

Sarah Schulenburg

Sarah Schulenburg, Secretary

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.