

Board Meeting Minutes

Croton Free Library

January 12, 2026

Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Croton Free Library, held on Monday, January 12, 2026 at The Croton Free Library, Creative Space, 171 Cleveland Drive, Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520.

PRESENT

Library Board of Trustees:

Susan Ranis, *President* (29)
Justin Johnson, *Vice-President* (28)
Bethany Basile, *Treasurer* (27)
Adam Decker (28)
Leslie Ellis (29)
Kate Fabian (28)
Mayla Hsu (26)
Laura Jaeger (26)
Margaret Mahoney (26)
Marianne Merola (27)

Library Director: Jesse Bourdon

ABSENT

Barry Feinberg (28)

GUESTS

Maria Slippen, village trustee

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm.

APPROVAL OF THE DECEMBER LIBRARY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Kate Fabian to approve minutes of the December 8, 2025 Board Meeting, which were distributed in advance. Leslie Ellis seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved with the following abstentions: Justin Johnson.

APPROVAL OF THE DECEMBER LIBRARY BOARD WORK SESSION MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Adam Decker a to approve the minutes of the December 18, 2025 Board Work Session, which were distributed in advance. Marianne Merola seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved with the following abstentions: Kate Fabian, Laura Jaeger, and Justin Johnson.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Collection Statistics and Patron Services

Flor Bromley, one of our top children's programming performers is becoming more popular/famous outside of Croton. There was a little dip in events attendance given a few less programs as Flor was unavailable.

End of Year Summary of Reference Stats

We expect some digital checkouts to decrease with the limiting of Hoopla in the coming months.

Staff Development Funding Request

Dianna Solano has provided an updated request for funding based on costs associated with her traveling to the PLA Conference 2026 in Minneapolis. At the October 2025 board meeting, the cost of early bird registration (\$259) had been approved.

The new request shows the following costs Dianna has incurred for hotel and airfare:

- Hotel: \$618
- Airfare: \$596
- Combined Total for Airfare and Hotel: \$1,214

The board discussed adding per diem compensation for meals and incidentals. (This would not include covering the cost of alcoholic beverages.) The rates for this compensation would be based on suggested 2025-2026 per diem business travel rate guidelines from the IRS (\$74-\$86). The cost of airfare and hotel, as well as 4 days of per diem at a rate of \$86 would total \$1,558. Dianna should keep all meal and incidental receipts and submit them after returning from her trip for reimbursement.

MOTION TO APPROVE USING FUNDRAISING CAPITAL TO COVER THE FINAL TRAVEL TOTALS PLUS PER DIEM COSTS of \$86 PER DAY FOR DIANNA SOLANO TO ATTEND THE PLA CONFERENCE 2026 IN MINNEAPOLIS.

A motion was made by Justin Johnson to approve budgeting up to \$1,558 to cover the cost for Dianna Solano to attend the PLA Conference 2026 in Minneapolis. Kate Fabian seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The board discussed the future of funding heads of library departments to attend conferences. Submissions could be done annually. Money for this purpose currently comes from our Fundraising account. In the future it could be allocated from our operating budget. This is a line item that could be addressed in future budgets.

The Librarians: Virtual Screening (Week of Jan. 18-24)

Registration has opened for this virtual screening. Up to 100 patrons may register, and will have the ability to watch from home between Jan 18-24, 2026.

Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Complete

All library staff completed this training by December 31, 2025.

Grant Applications

Jesse completed all grants submissions to Dana Levenberg and Peter Harckhman. These grants were submitted for our roof and parking lot lights.

Jeanette Gingold

Long-time resident and patron Jeanette Gingold passed away this past weekend. In lieu of flowers, the family has asked for donations to be made to the Croton Free Library.

TREASURER'S AND FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Overall expenses were at 42% of budget in November, in line with this point of the year at 47.4%. We have spent \$19,000 more in expenses from this time last year (continuing along a trend of catching up since Sept, largely due to pre- and one-time payments).

Check Register Approval

The monthly check register for November 2025 was presented at the Finance Committee meeting.

The check register remains consecutive with large checks over \$10K going to Changing Our World and ADP (payroll services) this month.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER MONTHLY CHECK REGISTER

A motion was made by the Finance Committee to approve the November 2025 Monthly Check Register. The motion passed unanimously.

We are not adding Annual Appeal Fundraising markers yet; they will be reported as of next month.

Vanguard update/discussion of who has access to the account

Susan sent in paperwork to change names on the account to Susan Ranis (President), Justin Johnson (Vice-President), and Bethany Basile (Treasurer). We have not yet heard back from Vanguard.

We are proposing that Jesse has access to the accounts to make transactions. Jesse as our Director is also the CFO. The policy to prevent embezzlement was formerly that only Board members have access to the account. However, given the cyclical nature of board positions, we believe it is important that Jesse have this access.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Fundraising Committee

Annual Appeal

As of January 5th, 2026 our annual appeal has raised \$29,820. The final amount raised for the 2025 appeal was 29,204.15. We have officially raised more this year than ever in the history of our annual appeal.

A large amount of incoming donations happened after an email reminder/request was sent out by the library. We believe this small push for donations mid-December was very helpful.

Long-Range Planning Committee

2026 Long Range Plan Vote

MOTION TO APPROVE THE STRATEGIC AND LONG RANGE PLAN 2026

A motion was made by the Long-Range Planning Committee to approve the 2026 Strategic and Long Range Plan. The motion passed unanimously.

The January and February regularly scheduled Long-Range Planning Committee meetings conflict with Federal holidays and have been rescheduled. The Committee has agreed to view the next NYS Library Trustee Handbook Book Club on January 27. The subject is Open Meetings Law. The LRP Committee will meet for approximately ½ hour after the Book Club to review and draft guidance for the Board. The February LRP meeting will take place 2/23, at 7 pm, via Zoom.

Arts Committee

The committee is pleased with the new, brighter lighting in the Ottinger Room, as are the artists. Thank you so much to Jesse for coordinating everything and re-hanging the artwork when the electrical work was complete.

John Cote installed his exhibition: *Saplings and Arias* on 1/3/26; the reception was the following day, 1/4/26. It was well attended and John sold 5 paintings that day.

Margaret, in consultation with Laura, has arranged for Jeff Thornton, a Croton artist, to provide the art for the 2026 Annual Appeal. Mr Thornton will be exhibiting his work in November - December 2026.

After some discussion with Jesse and Susan, it was decided to suspend art exhibitions in the Ottinger Room beginning January 2027. This decision will be re-visited in Summer 2026 as timelines for maintenance work become more definite.

Buildings and Grounds Committee

The committee did not meet this month.

A safety issue was brought up regarding finishing the sidewalk through the rest of the parking lot. It currently only extends halfway down into the lot. This issue could possibly be addressed if we are given grant money from our recent requests.

Safety Committee

Justin Johnson emailed the committee this past month regarding the timing of restarting the safety committee meetings. Justin Johnson, Susan Ranis and Jesse Bourdon discussed postponing this committee given the other time commitments at this point in the Capital Campaign and Renovation Process.

Marianne Merola suggested that the committee a list of ideas of projects to be addressed. This would be a record for us to refer to regarding priorities and any issues. In lieu of meeting, Jesse Bourdon will create a list for our reference which we will review at our next board meeting.

New Trustee Selection and Training

All three trustees whose terms are expiring in 2026 have submitted their request to re-up their terms. The board has confirmed that we will not need to engage a search process for additional trustees to onboard Spring/Summer 2026.

A note was made that Officers of the Board should serve 1-year terms. Anyone who is interested in applying for an officer position should express their interest at the April board meeting.

A goal of the New Trustee Selection and Training committee is noting a pipeline for future board members. It was suggested that possible sources could be the capital campaign donors and repeat volunteers from the Book & Bake Sales.

OLD BUSINESS

Review of Board Master Calendar items for January

- New Trustee Selection and Training
 - Announce whether new board members will be needed
 - Distribute new board member application to appropriate venues and include invite to Feb board mtg
- Board - Create ad hoc committee for director review at Jan Board meeting
 - Adhoc Committee - reviews rubric for director in Jan
- Board - Set an annual joint meeting with Hendrick Hudson library to share best common practices for Association Libraries
- Long Range Planning Committee - Publish long range plan
- Preliminary Budgeting discussion for February. First business day in February - director review forms should be submitted to the board to be due Feb 15.
 - An ad hoc Director Review committee will meet within the next two weeks to address the director review rubric. Susan Ranis, Justin Johnson, Kate Fabian, and Leslie Ellis will meet.
- Check on any money that the state might be able to provide before end-of-year as part of available grant money.

Review of action items from last meeting

The board reviewed the full list of action items from previous board meetings. Remaining comments on action items include:

1. Jesse and Adam will work together regarding finding a pro-bono partnership with lawyers regarding our current legal needs. In Process
2. The Finance Committee will be communicating with Margaret regarding the Long Range Committee future policy around stock gifts. In Process. We need a brokerage account first.
3. Once the finance committee accesses the online financials in their new format, they will open up training with the board with those who desire it. Bethany proposes Friday, February 6th at 1pm as a zoom meeting. This meeting will be recorded for future reference. Bethany is also willing to meet 1:1 with individuals.
4. Missing Forms:
 - a. Whistleblower/Conflict of Interest: Leslie
 - b. Training Attestations (2hrs each): Leslie and Barry

NEW BUSINESS

Review placement agent for renovation loan

Both Jesse and Adam Decker met with three different options for placement agents. Hilltop Securities was our best fit; there were no red flags raised after the meeting, and after having reviewed the proposal. Hilltop would be legally obligated to act in the best interest of the Croton Free Library.

The full cost for services would be \$75k (1% of goal loan), which would be paid out of the loan once the process is completed.

MOTION TO APPROVE ENGAGING HILLTOP SECURITIES AS A PLACEMENT AGENT FOR OBTAINING A LOAN FOR OUR RENOVATION PROJECT

A motion was made by Adam Decker to engage Hilltop Securities as a placement agent for obtaining a loan for our renovation project. The motion was seconded by Leslie Ellis. The motion passed unanimously.

Paul Mays Proposal

The board discussed the requirements within the Butler, Rowland, and Mays Architects proposal, clarifying the people involved with BRMA as we take our next steps in this process.

The timeline within the proposal is very quick; we will need to be on the ground running. The board highlighted that the library will need a lawyer and project manager set as we move forward. Jesse will speak with Paul Mays regarding the timing and our specific needs relating to a lawyer and project manager. We also are concerned with the timeline as it pairs with the budgeting process - our loan request and the budget vote this May. The board discussed that Jesse and Susan hold the power to make decisions on behalf of the library. They would report any larger-decisions or surprises to the board to be able to discuss in larger format as needed.

This current proposal outlines costs for the next steps are (**not to exceed*):

- Basic Services: *\$18,250
- Renderings: \$1,200-\$1,500 each
- Outreach meetings \$350-\$400 each
- Site Plan Review: (after May 2026); *\$8,155

MOTION TO APPROVE THE LIBRARY DIRECTOR TO ENTER AN AGREEMENT WITH BRMA BASED ON THE PROPOSAL MADE JANUARY 6th FOR POST-MASTER PLAN SERVICES

A motion was made by Adam Decker to enter an agreement with BRMA based on the proposal sent January 6th for Post-Master Plan Services. The motion was seconded by Justin Johnson. The motion passed unanimously.

Jesse Bourdon will reach out to Paul Mays regarding the next steps of our process.

***PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Members of the public may address the Board of Trustees only during the Public Comment portion of the board meeting and must identify themselves by name when they begin to speak. Comments are limited to no more than three minutes per person. The number of public comments per board meeting may be limited due to time constraints.*

Maria Slippen mentioned that she truly enjoyed the November Book & Bake Sale.

The village has taken over the old kiosk in the shopping center lot, and it was a mutually beneficial decision.

Maria suggested the possibility of adding a cell tower booster to the roof of the Croton Free Library building. She wanted to make sure that the board is aware of this option, which might be a way to save/raise money.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Laura Jaeger and seconded by Kate Fabian to adjourn the meeting. This motion being unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:22pm.

Respectfully submitted by Laura Jaeger, secretary