

MINUTES

BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS CITY OF LOS ANGELES

Board Retreat

July 10, 2025

The Board of Library Commissioners held a retreat in the Special Collections Room at Central Library located at 630 West 5th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90071, starting at 10:37 a.m. on the above-written date.

1. Roll Call:

Present:	President	Valerie Lynne Shaw
	Vice President	Linda Blank
	Commissioner	Kelly Besser
	Commissioner	Hiram Sims
Absent:	Commissioner	Mayra Valadez

Also present: City Librarian John F. Szabo, Assistant City Librarian Susan Broman; Deputy City Attorney Josh M. Templet; and Administrative staff.

2. **Opening Remarks:** City Librarian John F. Szabo provided welcoming remarks and a brief introduction of the Special Collections Room of Central Library. Attendees were encouraged to view a 1990s rendering of the Central Library and the 'Well of the Scribes'—a 1920s sculpture with a rich backstory.

3. **All Agenda Items Comment Period (In-Person only):** (1)

The Board heard one public comment regarding the Benjamin Franklin Branch Library and the surrounding community's need to reopen the facility.

4. **Staff Presentations:**

- a. **Update on Partnerships with City Departments:** City Librarian John F. Szabo provided an overview of the Library's partnership with other City Departments. The Library collaborates with nearly every city department on public programs, services, and special initiatives. Mr. Szabo explained that the Library works most closely with Recreation & Parks, HACLA, Cultural Affairs, General Services and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment on programs.

Commission Vice President Blank asked whether the head librarians from different regions meet collaboratively to discuss additional programs their colleagues would like to see implemented. Mr. Szabo stated that Area Managers meet frequently with Branch Library Services leadership on systemwide matters. Children's and Young Adult Librarians each convene throughout the year to share programs, address issues, and identify citywide needs.

- b. Overview of Library Facilities:** Cynthia Smith, Acting Director of Facilities and Event Management conducted a presentation of the history, current state, and progression of the Facilities and Event Management Division of the Library Department. The division manages facilities upkeep, equipment repair, HVAC systems, custodial operations, filming, landscaping, and building renovations. Ms. Smith noted that a great portion of the work done by the Facilities team is done in partnership with the Department of General Services, and is dependent on the availability of their staff and resources. Ms. Smith also provided an update on the Facilities Master Plan, which commenced in December 2020 but experienced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has progressed into the next phase of collecting data and engaging the community and stakeholders for input. This feedback will help shape a bond issue that reflects voter and community needs.

Facilities Administrative staff Alexander Tagle, Yuhui Zhang, Aerial Granger, Christina Young, Frank Yorba and Evelyn Araujo spoke about their supporting roles in the division. Commission President Shaw asked how the Library plans to fund significant capital improvements over the next five years. Mr. Szabo explained that funding begins with the Facilities Master Plan, which will identify the needs and potential of funding tied to a dedicated bond measure. The plan is ongoing with many challenges, and will include public input and community engagement. The final product will be shared publicly with stakeholders including the Board of Library Commissioners, Friends groups and the Library Foundation before any bond measure is proposed.

Joyce Cooper, Director of Branch Library Services gave a brief outline of the Branch Library Services Division. The Branch Library Services system, is comprised of 72 branches that are spread out across Los Angeles with over 750 staff members who work every day to bring services to the City of Los Angeles and to make Library spaces welcoming and safe for everyone.

Commissioner Besser asked if there were originally more Carnegie libraries than the three that remain. Mr. Szabo stated that there were originally six Carnegie libraries, noting that the Arroyo Seco facility was demolished due to structural safety concerns. Commission President Shaw asked if there was an update on the old Washington Irving Branch Library and stated that she has spoken with her council office about repurposing the site. Mr. Szabo explained that the facility has remained vacant for over 20 years. Although it is city-owned, the building has not been repurposed, despite strong community advocacy to transform it into a community center. Challenges within the site include ADA non-compliance, lack of parking, and seismic issues.

Ana Campos, Assistant Director of Central Library Services provided a brief overview of the Central Library Services Division, and highlighted Central Library's rich history from its opening in 1926. The Library has 13 departments and specialized services including the Octavia Lab and New Americans Center. Next year will mark Central Library's centennial and plans for the Central 100 celebration include major exhibits, year-long programming, a time capsule project and a Central 100 Festival with a proposed date of July 11, 2026.

Lunch Recess 12:51 p.m. - 1:06 p.m.

- c. Overview of Library Experience Office - Creating Safe & Welcome Spaces:** Jacqueline Welsh, Acting Lead, and Edna Osepans, Social Worker, of the Library Experience Office, provided an update on the ongoing work in their division. The Library Experience Office addresses growing safety and security challenges by managing security and mental health-related services, while also serving as a bridge between library staff and patrons to support a safe and welcoming environment. Ms. Welsh explained that instead of relying solely on police or contract security, the office integrates social workers, community service representatives, mental health clinicians and outside partners to create safer and more welcoming spaces for patrons and staff alike. This multi-agency strategy has improved safety, responsiveness and staff support system-wide.

Commission Vice President Blank inquired about how well-supported the Library staff feels when addressing safety and security concerns. Mr. Szabo emphasized that staff are encouraged to report issues to emergency services when uncertain. While staff are offered resources and guidance, it is stressed that they are not trained health professionals and it is unrealistic for them to handle these challenges alone without external resources.

Joyce Cooper, Director of Branch Library Services noted that leadership staff will immediately check in with Library personnel to assess safety and needs following incidents. Support resources are activated, including the city's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), as well as options for workers' compensation and leave if the stress is severe. She emphasized that Ms. Welsh and her teams' approach has worked much better than the use of LAPD overtime presence in some branch libraries. Ms. Welsh and Ms. Osepans explained that when crises occur at branch libraries, staff can call for guidance from social workers or clinicians, who provide help by phone or during visits, but they are not emergency responders. In true emergencies, staff are instructed to call 911 immediately, with full support from leadership to prioritize safety. All branches have panic buttons and clear procedures to ensure staff protection. After an immediate emergency is resolved, the Library Experience Office provides follow-up training, preparation and support to help staff handle similar situations in the future. Commission President Shaw asked how often staff is offered training. Ms. Cooper stated that the Library makes many trainings like de-escalation mandatory, while others such as Narcan training, are optional but widely taken.

5. Commissioners' Comments and Announcements

- a. Discussion of Commissioner Work Plan:** The Board deliberated on the current Work Plan, detailing the responsibilities and areas of particular interest for each commissioner. Board President Shaw requested that the Board members review their assignments and report any modifications. Commissioner Sims will be responsible for community outreach within Council District 11. Commissioner Besser requested the removal of "Canon busting collection development" from her special interests and indicated that Human Resources has been added to her list of Library Divisions. Commission Vice President Blank requested the inclusion of branch library security to her list of interests. Commission President Shaw requested the removal of "dual enrollment to high school programs" from her list and the inclusion of senior programming at branch libraries; she will also oversee Council

District 8. Board President Shaw stated that she will relay the changes to the Board Secretary and requested that any additional requests be submitted to her via email.

Commission President Shaw thanked Mr. Szabo, Ms. Broman, and the Library staff for their dedication, and emphasized the vital role the Library Department plays in improving the lives of so many.

6. Adjournment: The retreat was adjourned at 2:17 p.m.

ATTEST:

Valerie Lynne Shaw
President

Lynda Achi
Executive Administrative Assistant

Approved: 9/11/2025