

**Milford Public Library
Board Meeting Minutes
September 21, 2026**

President Ya’Nelle Powell called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM.

Present: Ya’Nelle Powell, Joe Zurzolo, Patti Calhoun, Meredith Wise, and Averí Richards

Staff Present: Lea Rosell

Minutes of August Regular Meeting: Patti made a motion to accept the August meeting minutes. Joe seconded.

Director’s Report: Circulation prior to the library’s weeklong August closure was relatively consistent with the same period the previous year. Daily traffic was significantly affected by both the closure and construction related space limitations. Traffic counts have also been understated because patrons entering through the children’s entrance are not captured by the existing automated counter. Staff have been manually counting these visitors and submitting the numbers to the Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL). Following additional communication with DDL and the Interim State Librarian, DDL confirmed that the manually collected numbers will be incorporated into the library’s statistics. Approximately 900 to 1,000 additional visits may need to be added to the reported total. Program attendance remained relatively consistent with the previous year despite construction limitations. Chair yoga, the tele-services kiosk, children’s programming, and other continuing services contributed to attendance. Meeting room use remains very limited because of construction. The library registered more new users in August than during the same month the previous year. Computer usage has declined. The library transitioned from the outdated SirsiDynix Director’s Station to BlueCloud Analytics, providing improved access to real-time collection and circulation data. New adult materials had their strongest August on record despite the closure. Approximately \$720 worth of library materials were lost through the transit system. With the exception of items requiring immediate replacement, the library will wait for DDL to establish a reimbursement process before replacing those materials. Staff participated in back-to-school outreach at Milford High School and Milford Central Academy, with both teen and children’s staff represented where age groups overlapped. Due to the limited circulation area during construction, study rooms and general adult-use spaces are unavailable. Patrons may remain in the circulation area while actively using library services or resources. Staff will continue communicating these temporary restrictions consistently. The library initially received an approximately \$53,500 general liability insurance cost associated with the construction period. After the Director questioned the increase and discussed the matter with the existing broker, the amount was reduced to approximately \$30,000. Lea is continuing to investigate alternative insurance coverage and brokerage services. A potential concern was identified regarding claims occurring during construction, as an open claim could require the library to maintain the construction-period coverage until the claim is resolved. Additional insurance professionals have been contacted and the building has been reviewed as part of the process. Lea will continue evaluating options and report back to

the Board. Carolyn has retired. Her remaining scheduled hours were paid to close out her employment. The open position received more than 100 applications. Staff narrowed the pool and conducted Zoom interviews with the top candidates. Approximately three to four finalists will be invited for in-person interviews so they can also see the current construction environment and temporary working conditions. A November start date is considered more likely than October. In the meantime, existing staff are sharing circulation responsibilities.

Financial Reports: The library is approximately two months into the fiscal year and expenses remain generally in line with projections. At approximately 16% of the fiscal year completed, the budget is tracking close to expectations. The library's Crystal Trust application advanced to the second round of consideration. The application is expected to be reviewed at the Trust's November meeting, with notification anticipated in December. Joe made a motion to accept the financial reports. Averi seconded.

Old Business: The library's fundraising brochure has been printed and was distributed during the Riverwalk event. Additional promotion is planned through a standalone newsletter and the library website, including a direct link to the online donation platform. The Board also discussed possible future video and social media content highlighting the library and construction project. One possibility discussed was partnering with a local high school, college, or student media program.

New Business: The Board discussed a serious after hours incident beneath the library portico that required assistance from police, emergency medical personnel, the fire department, construction management, and cleanup services. To improve safety for staff and patrons, the Board is exploring decorative metal fencing and gates across the portico that would preserve as much of the existing opening as possible, maintain ADA compliant access, and include emergency egress hardware. Before proceeding, the Board requested additional information about preventing exterior access while meeting emergency egress requirements, maximizing the gate opening, and improving camera coverage or coordination with the Milford Police Department. The City has trimmed nearby trees to improve visibility. Further action on the fencing proposal will be held until after the October 13 downtown public safety meeting. The temporary construction restroom has also been locked due to misuse, with access provided by key as needed. Lea reported continued concerns involving the unsheltered population and other activity in the downtown amphitheater and Riverwalk area. City Council representatives, downtown businesses, and law enforcement will meet October 13 at 6:00 PM at a location to be announced. Lea reiterated that the amphitheater and surrounding City owned property fall under the City's jurisdiction. The mobile shower unit previously operated at the library by United Church has been discontinued due to limited participation.

Lea clarified that eligible Bond Bill expenditures may receive a 50 percent reimbursement and that reimbursed funds may then be applied to additional eligible expenses that can also be submitted for reimbursement. This successive, diminishing reimbursement process significantly improves the library's projected construction funding position. The library also has approximately \$380,000 in separate Bond Bill funding designated for eligible HVAC expenses, including equipment, controls, testing, balancing, and commissioning. The current Crystal Trust request is

\$100,000, and Lea plans to pursue approximately \$25,000 to \$50,000 from the Delaware Community Foundation. The original furniture allowance was approximately \$400,000, but one preliminary proposal totaled approximately \$650,000, including shelving costs in the high \$200,000 range. An additional \$100,000 has been added to the planning projection while staff reviews the package, removes unnecessary or excessively priced items, and seeks additional proposals. The estimate for third party commissioning, testing, and inspections has also been updated to approximately \$40,000. Construction uncovered a missing structural steel beam associated with the prior building project. Although the issue initially threatened a one month delay, the construction team has recovered approximately two weeks. The steel work increased from an estimated \$50,000 to approximately \$85,000. Unused allowances for vestibule work and permit expenses are being reallocated, limiting the impact on the project contingency to approximately \$35,000.

The library will be closed October 26 through October 28 while the main electrical panel is replaced. Properties along Walnut Street will experience a brief service interruption during the switchover, while the library will be without normal electrical service throughout the work. Public notice will be provided through the library newsletter, media releases, and other communication channels. The library will also close at 5:00 PM on October 21 for the Milford Halloween Parade. Phase Two work in the meeting room hallway is expected to begin in January and continue through approximately March. Upstairs meeting areas will be unavailable, affected programming will be suspended, and staff workspaces will be temporarily relocated. Children's services will continue downstairs, and staff will accommodate book clubs and other activities where possible. DDL included Milford Public Library in a rural development grant initiative without prior consultation. One concept may require participating libraries to extend hours on selected days. Lea reported that the library's average operating cost is approximately \$302.75 per open hour, based on approximately 2,548 annual operating hours, while approximately \$20,000 per library has been discussed as possible funding. Lea will update the Board when the requirements and funding structure are clarified. Sussex County has also retained BerryDunn to study independent and County operated library systems, including their funding structures, operations, finances, and services. The study is expected to continue through approximately February. Although the Board noted the lack of direct independent library representation in the process, the independent libraries have agreed to cooperate and evaluate the findings upon completion.

Administrative Matters & Public Comments: N/A

Adjourn: Patti made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Meredith seconded. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:12 AM.

The next regular Board meeting will be held at **10:00AM on Monday, October 19th, 2026, in the Lions Room A at the Milford Public Library .**