



PCLS BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES

6:00 PM January 15, 2026
Hampton Memorial Library
304 Biltmore Road Easley, SC 29640

PRESIDING: Mr. Danny Parton, Chair – District 3 (Pickens)

Dr. Alfred Wheeler – District 1 (Clemson)
Ms. Nancy Miller – District 2 (Six Mile/Central)
Mr. Mark Kilburn – At Large

Ms. Alesa Pinkerton – District 4 (Liberty)
TBD – District 5 (Easley)
Mr. Brian Aiken – District 6 (Dacusville)

1. Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Parton called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. Ms. Miller did roll call confirming that there is a quorum. Dr. Wheeler, Mr. Kilburn, Mr. Parton, Ms. Pinkerton, Mr. Aiken and Ms. Miller all stated they were present.

Mr. Parton made a motion to approve the agenda for tonight's meeting. Ms. Pinkerton seconded the motion. Unanimously approved. Mr. Parton continued with the moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Chairman's Report/Rules for Public Comments

Mr. Parton stated his appreciation for being the chair of the library board and he intends to serve well. He wants the library to be a place for the whole community. Mr. Patron read the rules for Public Comment.

3. Public Comments – Limit to (3) minutes each (Total 30 minutes)

1. **Rachel Cox** – She thanked the board and welcomed the new board members. She spoke about the difference between public libraries and home libraries, school libraries, church libraries and bookstores. Public libraries are meant to serve all members of the community, whatever their background, beliefs, age, or financial situation. She expressed gratitude for all the various library programs that her family currently enjoys. Her hope is that the board does not limit access to books based on their own personal beliefs and instead trust individuals and families to make their own decisions about what to read. She expressed that library policies must be clear, not ambiguous or vague and they should be applied without discrimination.
2. **Lou Kaye** – President and founder of Students Against Book Banning at Daniel High School. She stated that the increased censorship of literature in this area, sounds like history repeating itself and this didn't end well for Germany. She has watched this board violate their own policy and the Freedom of Information Act by caving to political coercion and banning books without even reviewing them. She stated that she is not affected by another person's choice to read or not read her favorite book, she cannot force someone else to enjoy it. She stated that the board should not make decisions in the place of a parent or guardian about a child you don't even know, that is not how libraries are supposed to work.
3. **Debbie Hudson** – She welcomed new board members and thanked the board for their service. She mentioned that she hopes the board will revisit the collections policy to protect minors from stumbling

upon obscene, age-inappropriate graphic sexual content. She spoke about how her request to move a book to the adult section was denied last year and that this violates the requirements for the Pickens County Library System to receive state funding. She is concerned about the types of books taken by librarians to innocent children in daycares. She asked that the board make wise decisions in 2026 to restore trust in the library system.

4. **Brigit (Gigi) Greenberger** – She welcomed the new board members. She expressed to the new board members her confidence in them to serve with distinction upholding the critical principles of fiscal responsibility, community centered decision-making, protecting our innocent children in their special learning environment, and professional conduct. She assured the board of broad-based support of citizens and families in Pickens County.
5. **Johnnelle Raines** - She welcomed the new board members and expressed appreciation for their time and expertise. She expressed faith in the board to provide the community with access to appropriate collections. She stated that there is legislation currently being introduced to protect minors even more from harmful materials. She expressed that she wanted the board to understand that the South Carolina law in place to protect minors from obscene material does not mention that you must take into consideration the whole book, that is only if you are removing a book from circulation completely. She stated that proviso 27.1 is not about removing or banning any book from circulation but rather addressing age appropriateness in material and correct placement of those books. She stated that there are plenty of books in our teen section that produce arousal of lewd and lascivious desires and thoughts. She stated that Senator Rex Rice assured her that he will report the library's non-compliance in February if the board signs that they are in compliance when they are not.
6. **Kate Byrd** – “Members of the Board, Director, and members of the public. My name is Kate Byrd. I am a Pickens County resident, a retired librarian, a library patron, and a taxpayer. Please include these remarks in the official public record. I submit them not only as a resident, but as someone who spent a career upholding professional standards, ethical responsibility, and public trust in libraries. This Board has changed rapidly, and with that change comes responsibility-especially the responsibility to recognize that the Pickens County Library is a limited public forum under the First Amendment. A public library cannot restrict access to materials based on viewpoint or personal disagreement with content. Viewpoint discrimination by a public library is unconstitutional and carries legal risk for the county. The policy changes on tonight's agenda are deeply concerning. Most troubling is the removal of references to the First Amendment, along with the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement. These documents exist to guide policy and protect patrons' constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. Their removal, combined with other proposed policy changes, represents a significant change from long-standing professional and legal standards. At last week's Board meeting, a change to committee appointments was proposed and approved during the meeting. The publicly posted agenda listed two committees. One was replaced, without prior public notice that the change would be acted upon, by the Policy and Public Awareness Committee. South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act requires reasonable public notice of matters to be acted upon, particularly when decisions affect governance and policymaking authority. This Board has previously reversed a decision involving library materials after similar notice concerns, raising concerns about recurring process issues. I want to place on record my support for the Board member who has consistently defended patrons' rights, and for the Library Director, whose professionalism reflects the ethical standards libraries are meant to uphold. Any adverse action against those who follow policy and the Constitution discourages lawful and principled decision-making and increases liability. I respectfully suggest that this Board consult legal counsel and honor the constitutional obligations associated with your office. Thank you.”

7. **Virginia King** – She welcomed new board members. She looks forward to all the board will do to make the library great again. She explained that it is not accurate that they are trying to ban books. She believes in providing age-appropriate books in the children’s section. She suggests having an “adults only” section of the library where kids can only enter with a parent. She said that having a library card where children can’t check out adult-only books is not good enough, because they can wander the library and read anything in the library. She feels the public library needs to be responsible enough to help the parents protect the children. She offered to volunteer to help with this anyway she can.
8. **Debra Sole** – She thanked the board for serving. She said that we cannot provide filthy books full of sexual perversion and allow children to be exposed to authors who do not have their best interest at heart. She explained that freedoms are not a free-for-all, they come with responsibility.
9. **Denise Davidson** – She stated that the agenda is full of needed changes to policy to bring this library into compliance. She thanked the board for their hard work.
10. **Reba Kruse** - My name is Reba Kruse. I am a Pickens County resident, a library patron, and the parent of two teenagers. I am speaking tonight to address substantive defects in the proposed Collection Development Policy. This draft makes material changes that alter how access decisions are made and it does so by removing long-standing professional safeguards. First, the policy redefines the term "young adult" as ages eighteen to twenty-five and recommends locating those materials in the adult section, while simultaneously narrowing what may be included in the teen collection. This departs from established publishing, educational, and library practice, where young adult materials are written for readers roughly age twelve to eighteen and serve as a recognized transitional collection. This change eliminates a developmental category and restricts access by design. As a parent, I want to emphasize that teens are neither children nor adults. Removing this middle space replaces parental choice with a blanket restriction applied to all families. Second, the policy embeds vague and legally loaded content standards directly into the selection policy. Terms such as "graphic," "pervasive vulgarity," and "prurient interest" are not professional library selection criteria. They are subjective terms drawn from legal contexts that require judicial analysis. Placing these standards into a collection policy invites inconsistent enforcement and shifts staff decision-making from professional judgment to controversy avoidance. That shift exposes staff to pressure, uneven application, and accusations of bias, regardless of intent. I also want to note for the record that the draft removes every reference to diversity from the existing policy. Diversity in a collection development context is a neutral, professional standard used to ensure breadth of subject matter and viewpoint, and its removal increases the risk of disparate impact in both selection and challenge outcomes. Third, the draft removes explicit principles that protect the library from ideological misuse. The existing policy states that the presence of an item in the collection does not represent endorsement or promotion by the library, and that the library subscribes to the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement. That language is being removed. This deletion is significant. Non-endorsement language and alignment with recognized professional standards exist to prevent materials from being treated as advocacy or indoctrination. Removing these statements strips away a key safeguard that protects both the institution and its staff. It also weakens the library’s ability to demonstrate neutrality when challenged. Pickens County Library Board of Trustees Meeting Jan 15, 2026 - Written Comment 1 Policy revisions must be evaluated not only by what they add, but by what they intentionally remove. The combined effect here is a clear shift away from professional neutrality toward preemptive restriction. This statement is made for the public record as documentation of the policy's procedural defects and increased institutional risk.
11. **Brittany Fowler** – She welcomed the new board members and states she is speaking tonight as an advocate for the library system and the people it serves across Pickens County. She encouraged the

board to consider how it can best support the library's mission, not just through policy, but through partnership. She stated that we have a team of trained professional librarians and staff who know how to manage collections, create engaging programs, and serve a diverse public with care and professionalism. She stated that the library is losing momentum on the things that truly move the library forward like program development, outreach, funding, and advocacy. She said that the library lost its dedicated millage not long ago, and now the library is at the mercy of the general fund. The library needs board members who are willing to collaborate with county council, advocate for improved funding, and help ensure that our branches can continue to meet the growing needs of our community. She believes that advocating for the library's budget should be your number one priority, not squabbling over where things are placed on a shelf. She encouraged the board to trust the professionals they hired, stay to support the library's future.

4. Approval of Minutes

- a. Library Board Meeting 11/20/25**
- b. Special Called Meeting 12/22/25**
- c. Special Called Meeting 1/8/2026**

Mr. Parton made a motion to accept the minutes of all three meetings. Mr. Kilburn seconded the motion. Mr. Parton asked for discussion. No discussion was given. Mr. Parton stated that the minutes are approved.

5. Library Directors Report

a. Library Information

The Director reported:

- 1. HVAC replacement at the main library is finished except for addressing minor issues and installing the new control panels. The Renovation of spaces at the Captain Kimberly Hampton Memorial Library is going well, they are now getting pricing from consultants and hopefully it won't be too long before we can start construction.
- 2. United Way Free File at the Libraries - Begins Tuesday, January 20th and will take place at all of the library locations, if you have made an annual salary of \$69,000.00 or below you can call 2-1-1 to set up an appointment.
- 3. Welcome New Branch Manager at the Village Branch in Pickens (Jessica White) Jessica has worked as a Children's librarian for 12 years and prior to that worked as a middle school and high school teacher.
- 4. Seed Library and upcoming programming - The Seed Library is restocked and will re-open on Monday February 2nd. You can visit the Sarlin Library in Liberty every week in February to get 10 packets of free seeds per person with your library card. Choose from multiple kinds of vegetable, flower, and herb seeds including heirloom varieties. For more information and guidelines for the Seed Library you can visit our website. There will also be pop-up seed libraries at the other library locations: February 9th at Easley from 2-3pm, February 11th at Pickens from 2-3pm, and February 23rd at Central-Clemson from 2-3pm. We have some great February programming coming up and the newsletter will be available next week.

b. Financial Report

The Director reports that everything looks good. We are asking county why the computer equipment account (4810) has more money in it than we budgeted, it is not an overage, but possibly a glitch. Everything else is right on track for the midway point of the year.

Dr. Wheeler asked if the overtime account at 75% use is due to the vacant staff positions. The Director clarified that the overtime account is not real overtime, it is when part-time staff work beyond their 20 hours. Part-time staff will cover the vacancies. We currently have two vacancies. Funds from the part-time account would just be moved over to overtime account make up the difference.

Mr. Kilburn asked what time-period the financial report covers. The Director stated that it is to date and the board will get a report at every regular board meeting. The date this report was run is January 12, 2026. Mr. Kilburn asked if the “encumbrances” column on the report is money that you’ve committed to spend but have not actually paid yet. The Director stated that it is correct, it is what we’ve requisitioned but the check hasn’t gone out yet. Mr. Kilburn asked if “books” are the same as printed material. The Director explained that “books” is really circulating material and she requested to change “books” to “circulating material” because this would include things like the Library of Things items, Wi-Fi Hotspots, DVDs etc. The Director clarified that “direct assistance” is state aid and state aid covers circulating materials too, except for this year because they are trying to buy some vans with state aid. Mr. Kilburn asked if “department support” lines are grants. The Director answered yes, “department support” are grants. Mr. Kilburn pointed out that there are no subtotals on the spread sheet and that confused him. Mr. Kilburn asked about “software and equipment” contracts being used up. The Director explained that it is a yearly contract that county used to pay for at the end of the year, but now they are asking to pay for it at the beginning of the year and that is why the account shows used up for the year.

c. Foundation Report

The Director reports that the foundation looks good and they took in a significant amount of money and the account is almost \$80,000. They have sold a few leaves, and the T-shirts are on sale now for \$10 each. They are trying to sell out the T-shirts so they can design a new T-shirt to sell.

d. Quarterly Statistical Report – Assistant Director

The Assistant Director explained that this report is for our second quarter, October through December. Visitors are up 11%. New borrowers, computers and wireless users are all down because last year we had FEMA and early voting here. We had an increase of 15,000 people here using our resources and we made a big push for people to sign up for library cards while they are here voting. We compared our statistics from FY24 to FY26, and we are right on par with where we should be this year. The regular material circulation is still feeling the effects of the delay in getting state funding and the delay in ordering books. The E-material is way up on everything. Programming is doing well; teen programming is exploding with attendance up 116%. Outreach is down a little bit due to some events that we went to last year that were specific to hurricane Helen and Treats on the Streets got rained out this year, so our outreach attendance took a hit. Dr. Wheeler asked about the massive increase in the teen programming attendance. The Assistant Director explained that the teen programmer is doing a really good job and the teen want to come to her programs and the teens will tell their friends.

Ms. Pinkerton asked what the difference is between the eBooks and e-audio. The Assistant Director explained that eBooks are electronic written books and e-audio are audio books.

6. Friends of the Library Report – Friends Executive Board Member

Mr. Robert Sams, the Friends of the Library Treasurer, reported that The Friends of the Pickens County Library System is a volunteer organization that is the “booster club” for our libraries and librarians. Currently we have 150 active members. We are sustained through memberships, donations, and fundraising activities.

In 2025 volunteers participated in two Belk Charity Days events, we held a very successful book-lovers quilt raffle, and we had a “\$20 for 20 Years” fundraiser in honor of the Easley branch’s 20th anniversary.

Our long-standing, monthly used book sales continued in 2025 in a new spot—the old children’s programming room adjacent to the Children’s wing. This dedicated space allows us to have sales more often and more easily (and our patrons now have bathroom access unlike our old location in the basement!) Our books are a combination of library discards and books donated to the library by patrons. Our sales are open to the public, and we keep our prices low to put more books in more hands.

In 2025 the Friends helped fund general library and children’s programs, provided prize money for the poetry and bookmark contests, and purchased adventure passes for destinations such as the Children’s Muse,

Upstate History Muse, and Western North Carolina Nature Center. We invite the Library Board members to attend our annual meeting in April!

7. Old Business

a. Young Adult VS Teen

Ms. Pinkerton made a motion to rename the YA section/area, YA collection and anything related to the 13 to 17 age range to “Teen.” Mr. Aiken seconded the motion.

Dr. Wheeler asked the Director, “Is any confusion among the patrons of the meaning of “young adult?”

The Director stated, “Not that we’ve seen. We did the survey. I think where it could be confusing is there’s still a lot of state items where they’ll still say “YA.” So, we can’t do anything about that. We can do our collection here, but as far as the state library, they have tons of “YA” where “Teens” is used still. But we can change everything locally.”

Ms. Miller asked, “What do you mean materials from the state?”

The Assistant Director said, “There’s like the state survey that we do, all the language surrounding teens says, “young adult.”

The Director added, “And a lot of their other language is still “young adult” for teen.” Because it’s been understood for so long in the history of library that “Teen” is “YA.” So, if you see something like that, it may come from somewhere else. But we’ll change what we can locally to match that language if that’s what you want to do.”

Ms. Pinkerton said, “The state library actually recommends “young adult” is too ambiguous. And every time I look up the age range for young adults, it always comes up 18 and up. It never says 13 to 17. Not one time. And I’ve asked so many people, like at my homeschooling stuff that have teenage programs. And I’ve asked in my community, because I have a lot of teenagers living around us, and they all say when I ask them the question: “young adult, what age do you think of?” They always say 18 and up. Every time.

The Director clarified, “That in terms of literature, “young adult literature” is teen and age 18 to 25 is “new adult literature” and the people that use the library tend to understand that. If you’re asking people out in the community that don’t use the library, they may not understand that. But that’s why those terms are sort of universal in the library world.”

The Assistant Director said, “And publishers use them as well.”

Ms. Pinkerton replied, “We’ve had this discussion before but the programs and the events that you have on the website all say teen. So, to a parent that is trying to involve their teen in a program say for library, I think they would be confused. And we want to, you know, we want to create new business in this library also not just keep what we have. Right so, I mean yes, that’s what the common term is for the people who use the library but for the people who in the community who maybe want to use the library but are confused about that. I think it’s more clarifying overall for when you have teen events, teen programs, teen, teen, teen, and then you have YA area, like I think that to me in my opinion is just confusing.

The Director said, “YA literature is for teens, but that’s fine we can change it to “teens.”

Mr. Aiken said, “For the past 19 years and currently I’m in the most public of all public institutions in the county. I teach in the school district of Pickens County 9th through 12th graders and, without a doubt, when you think about it, they are teens, 9 through 12th graders. I teach them, and we got them all varying maturity levels, but we’re just talking about strictly age levels, at age 13 through 17 or 18 once they graduate high school. A child, we can’t give them an aspirin without parental permission. We can’t load them on a school bus and haul them somewhere without parental permission, even if it’s the bus they rode to school on. They cannot enter into contract. They cannot do any of these things because they are deemed by society as a child. They are teenagers. They are not adults. So, yes some of them might act like adults sometimes, but this is all about definitions and applications is what all the arguments are with this whole board, at what point are they deemed as an adult and

that age is 18, legally. They can vote. They can enter a contract. They can get married without parental permission. They can do all the rest of those. So, if we're looking at a teen section, I can merely look from, not from my own personal opinion, but from a school district standpoint, the most public of all public institutions in the county, that "teen" has to be just that. It is quite honestly, though some people might use the terminology interchangeably, by definition, they're not an adult until age 18. So, clarification on that, I think would do away with a lot of the issues and the heartaches that this community is going through from one end to the other. Simply defining that and putting that one to bed. That's my take."

Dr. Wheeler stated, "I'm actually agnostic about what you call it. I'm more concerned about what's in it. Maintaining young adult literature in that section, whether you call it "teen" or whether you call it "young adult". The name is not as important as the content of the collection."

Mr. Aiken said, "I can I address content for a moment? I've learned a lot just in a short amount of time trying to get in on the library board and some all the rest of these things. The terminology of prurient. That's a definition that I had to learn, and everybody is wrestling with. The definition is pretty easy to understand, but the application isn't necessarily easy to understand. How do you apply that terminology of prurient? Is prurient qualitative or is it quantitative? Is it the depth of the description behind it or is it the quantity of that prurient content that would tip the scale one way the other. I hear a terminology that's brought up repeatedly, it's in some of the documents that we have already. That "when taken on the whole," "when taken on the whole overall." Those terminologies when it's taken overall. So let me just give just a couple of minutes to try to think I'm trying to put together how do we deal with this? Is it qualitative or quantitative? The amount or the substance? Because in practical application, and I'm not accusing the library board of doing such a thing, but if you roll back the clock, I'm going to display some personal things. One time and one time only in my life have I held a Playboy magazine in my hand. Ronald Reagan was in his first term. I was in junior high. I can assure you that there were things in there utterly inappropriate to be looked at, but if we take prurient to mean quantitative, the quantity of what's there. If you add up all the images, was 51% of the images in that magazine prurient? No. Was 51% of all the words in that magazine prurient? No. It would not meet the standard of, if we're looking at overall content. Yet, I would say that there's probably not a parent in this county, regardless of which political party or any affiliation a person has, that wouldn't flip out if their 13-year-old came home with a Playboy magazine in their book bag. So, we need to determine, is prurient quantitative or qualitative? So long as we follow ourselves in as a board or as a community into these little arguments over playing a continual whack-a-ole over this book, that book, or the other book, we're not addressing overall issues. I don't think there's a big move to try to ban books. From what I see, it's simply how do we categorize stuff for adult content, young adult content, or teen content? I'm just speaking from the heart and I'm all yours to learn."

Mr. Kilburn said, "I think the question is that we're talking about, I understand what you're saying, but we're just talking about renaming the "young adult" to the "teen" nomenclature, I guess, because even in all these statistics that you just walked us all through, they're children's teen events or adults events. So, we're just trying to determine, do we get rid of the terminology, "young adult," not regarding the collection, but do we get rid of the terminology and just convert it over to "teen"? That's really what we're trying to determine right now, right?"

The Director explained, "And just in terms of implementation of that, we do have to change a record of each book and the spine label of each book from "YA" to "teen" and we have over 13,000 in that collection. That means if you want to change the collection, like right now it says young adult literature "YA" is considered on the spine and in the record of the book. Every book has an electronic record attached to it so we can see where it is, who has it. So, we would have to change the record, change the spine label to say "teen." Right now in our catalog, it says "YA", but it's in the "teen collection." So, it says both when you look it up in

our catalog online, “YA” blah blah blah and then it'll say collection “teen.” So, people know that that's interchangeable. If you want to get rid of “YA” completely, that is something that we will have to do in terms of implementation. That will take a while.”

Ms. Pinkerton said “Can I say one more thing with the teen and the YA being interchangeable? If say our policy that we have out here is passed, what if we if would how would that affect if you have young adult as a subcategory in the adult section? How would the interchangeable of the YA and the teen, how would that affect that?”

The Assistant Director said, “I think people would be very confused if we had a teen and a young adult collection because everybody that uses a library or reads teen/young adult material, understands them to be interchangeable. So, they would, I think that they would be like, what's the difference? Because I know them to be the same thing.”

Ms. Pinkerton said, “young adult definition is 18 to 26. So, if you have a subcategory in the adult section, then the books that are, you know, 13 and up and they're supposed to be in the adult section according to our policy, if it ever passes, then it would go into the young adult subcategory instead of the adult section. So, it would keep a separation. But if the teen and the young adult are interchangeable, then that would be the confusion part, right? So, if we make it teen 13 to 17, young adult 18 to 25, wouldn't that clarify that?”

The Director said, “This is going to have to work in conjunction with whatever policy that you pass because it's going to have to be taken as a whole depending on what you do with the policy because I can't right now figure out an implementation process until I know what the policy is to say if we could do that or not.

Ms. Pinkerton stated, “That’s fair.” Ms. Pinkerton restated the motion, “Motion to use teen as 13 to 17 age range.”

The Director said, “Once this is passed, just so I know, what is your understanding of how we would need to implement this, if this passes? What are you expecting immediately to happen since we're not voting on the policy yet?” “Is your expectation that we don't move on this until the policy is done?” Ms. Pinkerton replied, “yeah.” The Director responded, “Okay. That's all I need to know. Yeah. Because we're not going to do anything yet. So, I don't want you to come back and say, "What? Why haven't you done anything?"”

Dr. Wheeler said, “So, basically right now we're just voting on whether to rename it the teen section.”

Mr. Parton called the vote. Mr. Kilburn, Mr. Parton, Ms. Pinkerton, Mr. Aiken, and Ms. Miller all voted in favor of the motion. Dr. Wheeler voted against. Motion passed.

b. Workshop with SC Director

Mr. Parton explained that he will contact the SC State Library Director, Leesa Aiken, to setup a time to have a training workshop for board members to attend.

c. Budget breakdown (sent to County Council)

Ms. Pinkerton asked, “Is there a meeting scheduled? Is there anything with the council about that, because you know when we talked and passed the budget originally it was that we were going to come back and actually be able to have more questions and be part of the budget committee. Are we going to have that?”

The Director said, “We're meeting with them on the 29th of January I believe it's 2:45 to 3:45.” Ms. Pinkerton asked, “And who all is allowed to go to that meeting?” The Director said, “I believe three can go. So, you, Hap, and Mark.”

Mr. Kilburn stated that he would like to have a budget committee meeting prior to that meeting with Hap Ales and the Director.

d. Schedule Executive Session - personnel matter- February 12th

Mr. Parton asked for a motion to have an executive session for a personnel matter at the February 12th meeting. Ms. Pinkerton made a motion for an executive session for a personnel matter at the February 12th meeting. Ms. Miller seconded the motion. Unanimously approved.

8. New Business

a. Amend moment of silence with a prayer

Mr. Parton made a motion to amend a moment of silence with a prayer. Ms. Pinkerton seconded the motion.

Mr. Parton said, "I want to speak to this. You know it has been, what, maybe a year or two, and we talked about it and so I know we went with a silent prayer. I know that many government institutions still have verbal prayer and so I would like to see that as a part of an opening up, instead of a silent prayer.

Dr. Wheeler said, "I'm a big fan of the separation of church and state and the establishment clause of the first amendment, but I also recognize that it is a common practice in public bodies to have prayer. I think that we need to have a clear understanding that no one needs to participate if they choose not to. I think it sort of follows what the Congress does which is, and they have prayer and they have a chaplain United States Congress but, they always restrict it to a non-sectarian. So, in other words, we don't give a Christian prayer. We don't invoke the name of Jesus Christ or something like that. We maintain a non-sectarian environment. I think that's good advice and that's why they do it. But as far as prayer, that is pretty common practice."

Mr. Parton said, "For a little clarity, I should have mentioned this. It would be strictly voluntary by our board members, and if you don't want to pray, you don't. And those that do, can and set up on a rotation for that. So that's kind of what that'll look like.

Mr. Aiken said, "So that was my next question. Was it going to be on a rotating basis? Noted in advance so that person could chose to have a moment of silence, pray to anybody they want to, or choose not to."

Dr. Wheeler said, "But I think, you know just to emphasize it, really, we should try to maintain a non-sectarian prayer. I mean I know that's not what you're saying. I but I think that would be advisable. I mean obviously you're going to invoke a higher power of some kind but try to enhance the solemnity of the situation. And that's what prayer is supposed to do, it's to bring your attention to the solemnity. And I don't think you have to invoke a particular a theology in order to do that.

Ms. Miller said, "But I think if you want to and if you feel like you want to, it's your freedom to be able to do that."

Dr. Wheeler said, "Yeah. Well, I hear what you're saying. I don't agree with that, but I hear what you're saying."

Mr. Parton called the vote. Mr. Kilburn, Mr. Parton, Ms. Pinkerton, Mr. Aiken, and Ms. Miller all voted in favor of the motion. Dr. Wheeler voted against. Motion passed.

Dr. Wheeler clarified that his vote reflects, not the prayer itself, but the not having a non-sectarian prayer.

b. Changes to Miscellaneous Procedures - M1 & M2

Mr. Parton stated that M1 is the Bill of Rights and M2 is the Freedom to Read and opened it up for discussion and stated that any changes will come at the next meeting.

Ms. Pinkerton said, "My problem with these two is the age appropriate and the minors. I just don't feel like minors are protected. It's not that I don't feel like everybody should have a right to read. That's not, I mean I agree that everybody should. But I believe minors need to be protected. And I believe that if we protect the children and give more accountability to the parents, I believe that that will be more of a community effort and get families and everything more involved. So that is my problem with the Freedom to Read and the library Bill of Rights, is there's no age-appropriate protecting minors in it at all. It's everybody can have a free-for-all. It has nothing with parents involved. It just, it's nothing age appropriate. So that's what my problem is with that. It's

lacking any parental, any minor, any protecting any minors. It does not even acknowledge parent's approval or parents being involved. It doesn't have any age appropriate. It just thinks that everybody should have a right to read anything they want to and that is my problem with those."

Mr. Kilburn said, "I would like to say that I kind of think that part of this goes along with the previous old business of adults and teen or the young adult and teen. We're going to have to like see how this Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read are in the policy. So, as we start reviewing the policies that are on here as well, we'll have to take that into consideration. The thing about the library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read, seems to me that they're not helpful in regard to what we're trying to determine going back to the proviso, the budget proviso controversy that we going to have to address at some point. These docents don't really help and they kind of more than don't help. They don't address the facts that or the idea that there are minors and there are adults. The propositions that they put forth in the docent, it's really hard to argue against it, because it all makes common sense and it seems like it's right to me. But the sections underneath which are like the expansion of what that provision means is not helpful in trying to answer the question of what we're trying to accomplish as far as dealing with minors, because it doesn't deal with the it doesn't make a distinction between an adult and a minor here. We just had, I mean I'm no lawyer, but there was just a Supreme Court case free speech coalition etc. Which was about can states go ahead and require people to prove that they're 18 years old to get onto a porn site or not? And in that opinion, it says that "history tradition and president establish that sexual content that is obscene to minors but not adults is protected in part and unprotected in part and states may prevent minors from accessing such content but may not prevent adults from doing the same." So, there's a distinction between adults and minors, but I don't really see that in here. And when we reference these documents or incorporate them into the policies that we have, it gets muddled. So, my point only is that we have to be clear when we go through these policies and where this shows up in our policies. Then we can make a determination at that point whether to scuttle them or not. I guess I mean not scuttle them, but you know, incorporate them or not. So, I think it kind of goes in conjunction with or is similar to the young adult versus teen and we'll have to roll it all into the whole policy."

Dr. Wheeler said, "I think that the Library Bill of Rights and so on are meant to be general. They're meant to apply to all people, and you know teenagers have rights equal to adults and so I think that it's intentional not to divide it up among various age groups."

Mr. Kilburn stated, "I would disagree with that but that's okay."

The Director said, "These are framed on the first amendment. So, I think when you are looking at policies that don't agree with this, you have to use caution because the policy you're creating, if it does not correspond to this, you may be violating the First Amendment. And minors do have First Amendment rights."

Mr. Kilburn responded, "They have some."

The Director stated, "They have freedom to access information. So, I'm just saying when you do find a policy that is going against this, you have to make sure that that policy is not a violation of the First Amendment."

Mr. Kilburn responded, "Yeah, I understand that."

Mr. Aiken stated, "One of the things I want to mention, I think we should be very cautious about any of our policies, rightly said and rightly stated. I'm absolutely opposed to unelected bureaucrats, of which I guess I am one now, telling parents what they should, you know, taking parents' rights away for what their children should or should not be able to access. That's decision for parents to make. Then once a child is age 18, I think there should be a very very high bar for removing anything from a library. But the categorization of where it sits and how this is implemented because parents do have the ability to tell children what they can and cannot do, what they can and cannot see. That is definitely placed upon parents. We just need to make sure as a board,

we're not stopping a parent that wants to be able to allow their children to access something and at the same time not put it out where anybody whose parents do not want them to access it is able to do the same thing."

Mr. Parton said, "We have a library card that the parents can check what their children can see or not see. And so that's kind of where we're at now with that is keeping the parents okay, not taking their rights away, but they make the choice whether, you know, their child can, you know, see something that another parent would not let them look at or read."

The Assistant Director said, "I would just add that we have very strong parental policies in place. A minor can't get a library card with us without a parent's permission. They can't be in the library without a parent or guardian if they're under the age of 13. So, there's restrictions in place that really make the parents know what's going on."

Mr. Parton said, "I want to say this concerning the collection policy and library material and um, and I hear what you're say. We're not trying to take anybody's rights away. But we want to be able to make materials available, in the age appropriate for parents. They know where the books are. We're not taking any books. Mom wants, you know, Johnny, Susie to read whatever they want to in the library. That's them and that's their family. That's their choice. But what I see is a win-win. Is that parents that do not want their children to stumble across some of the books that we've been dealing with in the children's section and some in the teens. If we can prevent that, but yet the ones that say, "Well, just leave it where it's at. Don't be moving books."

Well, I think they can get to the book with their child, that we're not taking that right away. And also, we're saying whole community, are we not? We're wanting to have some kind of a compromised middle ground here so that the whole community can somewhat benefit from this. Plus, we're looking at the proviso that if we do not comply, you see on the budget what that amount is about \$260,000 a year, we sure don't want to lose that funding. So, I think somewhere we've got to be able to get the library in compliance with proviso and everybody's getting to their books but it's going to be a little different in some ways of making sure we meet the compliance of the proviso. Does that make sense?"

Mr. Kilburn added, "Yeah, I think it makes sense because I mean the proviso has to be dealt with because it's part of getting our state funding, which we're thinking is like around 360. So, I mean it's got to be addressed."

c. Collection Policy and Library Material/Reconsideration Policy

The Director asked to make a statement about the collection policy and library materials policy. "Statement from Pickens County Library Director Stephanie Howard to the Pickens County Library Board - January 15th Meeting 2026

Before the Board deliberates on these proposed policy changes, I want to speak from my role as Library Director, and as the individual responsible for implementing these policies.

Public libraries occupy a unique place in constitutional law. Courts consistently recognize that libraries exist to provide access to a broad range of information and viewpoints. Decisions affecting access are subject to heightened First Amendment scrutiny. Removal or restriction of materials based on content, viewpoint, or moral disagreement raises serious First Amendment concerns-especially when policies rely on vague standards like "prurient interest," "pervasive vulgarity," or "community standards" without reference to professional review criteria.

In *Mainstream Loudon v. Board of Trustees*, a library policy was struck down for imposing content-based restrictions without sufficient safeguards or precision. In *Board of Education v. Pico*, the Supreme Court affirmed that while governing bodies have discretion, that discretion is limited when policies remove or restrict materials based on content or viewpoint. Federal courts, including *Sund v. City of Wichita Falls*, have reinforced that even "procedural" policies requiring relocation or removal can violate the First Amendment.

The rationale offered for these policy changes is compliance with the state budget proviso and guidance from the State Library Agency Director. But compliance alone does not shield the Board from constitutional review. Courts hold local entities responsible for how they interpret and implement state requirements. If a policy goes beyond what the proviso explicitly requires - or adopts restrictions not required by law - the Board assumes liability. Courts do not accept "we were required to do this" as a defense when discretionary policy choices are evident.

Even where a state law is involved, courts examine whether compliance could have been achieved through less restrictive means. Existing collection development standards, professional review processes, and established reconsideration procedures are routinely cited by courts as evidence that broad or categorical restrictions were unnecessary. It is my professional opinion that our current policies already meet the requirements of the proviso and State Aid Certification.

Federal constitutional standards apply to libraries in South Carolina. Any policy that categorically excludes materials, relocates them based on subject matter, or restricts access without individualized review is subject to constitutional scrutiny, regardless of intent.

Parental rights are also at stake. Courts recognize parents' authority to guide their children's reading. Policies that restrict access system-wide, rather than empowering parental choice, undermine those rights. Vague categories and automatic restrictions place staff in legally vulnerable positions and increase the likelihood of uneven enforcement.

These proposed revisions do not occur in isolation. Alongside major policy changes, the Board is considering removing the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement from the policy manual. These statements are recognized as authoritative expressions of professional standards. Courts often consider the totality of changes, not each revision in isolation. Removing these safeguards while adopting restrictive policies increases litigation risk and signals a shift away from established norms.

If these policies are adopted, they will shape not only our collections but the public record of how and why access decisions are made. In the event of a legal challenge, that record including tonight's discussion and previous statements made at board meetings, will be reviewed to determine whether these changes are truly compelled by law or were discretionary policy decisions made by the Board.

Having said all that - I am not a lawyer. I have been assured by Mr. Parton and Ms. Pinkerton that these policies have been reviewed and are legally sound. Based on my research, I must respectfully disagree.

I ask the Board to consider these questions:

- What specific language in the state proviso requires each of these policy changes?
- Why were the existing policies and review process insufficient?
- How do these revisions avoid content- or viewpoint-based restrictions in language and practice?
- How do these new policies preserve, rather than replace, parental decision-making?
- And how do these changes reduce, rather than increase, the Library System's exposure to litigation?

I urge the Board to carefully consider not only the immediate implications, but the long-term legal and constitutional consequences. Once access is restricted and safeguards are removed, these decisions cannot be undone without harming the library.

The integrity of our Library, and our commitment to intellectual freedom, rests on the policies we adopt. I ask the Board to ensure these changes do not compromise patrons' rights, parental authority, or the Library's standing as a trusted public institution. We have the opportunity to uphold the Library's tradition of fairness,

access, and intellectual freedom. Let's not replace professional judgment, parental authority, and constitutional safeguards with vague restrictions that invite litigation and erode public trust.”

Dr. Wheeler said, “So my first question is why are we doing this? It was just last year that we did a thorough review and revision of our policies as you remember. Are we concerned about not having our certification for state aid funding accepted? Okay, but the certification was accepted for the first half of the funding under our current policies. Are we concerned about meeting the tenants of proviso 27.1? Well, I think it's clear that our librarians do not acquire prurient material according to the legal definition. And if the public disagrees, we have a clear reconsideration process in place. And further, do you build a policy around a budget proviso which may not even be in place in six months because this it is attached to the budget? So, I have dozens of policy and editorial comments and concerns about these documents that were put forward as you might guess. I can't air them all, obviously at this point, but for example why are we, and this came up earlier, why are we removing all the statements about the rights of patrons from the documents? For example, the First Amendment and the ALA's Bill of Rights. Maybe they should be obvious, maybe they don't have to be included. But once we have had them in our policies, removing them sends a very negative image of the board's attitude towards reader's rights. And you know, as a note, the South Carolina Public Library manual for trustees recommends boards adopt the ALA Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read. As another note, why are we not requiring petitioners and board members to read the books under reconsideration? Why do we need such a draconian shortening of the review process? I'm all for increasing efficiency, don't get me wrong. And some of the things that were in there, I think, were actually positive, but it could be down to about 5 days now by the time the director gets these materials. Is it that the criteria in these policies suggest it is sufficient because of these changes to rule on a book based only on selected passages or age ranges? Regardless of what we've heard tonight, I believe it is a violation of the law because the law requires that all legs of the Miller criteria be met. And you know and the idea of a book being considered as a whole, that's been removed in this new policy proposal for the collection development policy. So, I have concerns there. So, you've been assured you've contacted an attorney. But as I look at this, the possibility of lawsuits based on content-based restrictions or minor's first amendment rights are being violated, among others.”

Mr. Parton replied, “Hap we've, you know, over the past couple of years, we've been through this basically the same thing. My discussion on it would be and thoughts, why is the state of libraries, okay, the state of the libraries in this state county libraries, under the guidelines of the state library, they're lining up, they're doing their collection policy accordance, so much like we are tonight, okay and to line up with the proviso and we're not seeing lawsuits? They can come and you can have a lawsuit at any time, but to use the lawsuit in order to scare off and move your decision because what we're doing, libraries are doing this in the state of South Carolina to meet the proviso. I just wanted to say that.”

Ms. Miller said, “According to Ms. Aiken at the state library, she said all the other counties in South Carolina have already made moves towards this except this one.”

The Assistant Director asked, “Towards what specifically? Towards the guidance? Because this policy goes beyond the guidance.”

The Director said, “That's not my understanding with the directors that I have talked with. Most of the ones that I know have the understanding that we do not have prurient materials in this library. There's no reason to change our policy. That's my understanding from the directors that I know. I know that some libraries, Greenville I think, are still being sued for the changes that they've made. But my understanding and Ms. Aiken's are different.”

Ms. Miller replied, “Yes, I see that. But the Greenville library system is being sued because they entered in the LGBTQ, which we are not. We're not having anything to do with that.”

The Director stated, "If you're confident with these policies and voting on them, that's fine. I just would like to caution you as a professional librarian that there are things in here that are very problematic. I've been doing this for a long time, and I would say it to any board I've worked with. There are things in here that could get you sued."

Ms. Miller asked, "So, do you know lawsuits that are happening because of these kinds of changes we're talking about?"

The Director responded, "Yes."

The Assistant Director said, "Stephanie mentioned constitutional scrutiny. Libraries are a governmental entity. So, when they are making content-based restrictions, we have to follow strict scrutiny. Which is the highest level of scrutiny. So, there has to be a compelling government interest, and the restrictions have to be narrowly tailored, using the least restrictive means. So, they're going to look at things like our library card application, which already gives parents the rights to restrict what books they can check out and they're going to ask why that wasn't sufficient. They're going to say the proviso talks about prurient interest but the constitution when you're talking about the first amendment you can't separate the legs of the Miller Test when you're looking to restrict things based on obscenity. You can't just say this has some prurient material in it; you have to use the whole Miller Test. I would also like to say, just from an implementation standpoint point, the language that is currently in this proposed revision is really vague. Some of the language staff would not be able to implement it consistently and they would have to guess at what you guys mean by it. Things like "age appropriate" that means something different to every individual, that is highly individualized. Things like "gratuitous sex." Gratuitous sex to who? That's subjective. You can't expect us to be able to move materials based on subjective language. So that would need some work if you want us to implement this."

Mr. Parton replied, "They'll be having a policy meeting going over what we discussed tonight. And so I'm going to end discussion so we can move on."

Ms. Miller asked, "Can I just ask one question? Could you publish a list of the lawsuits? I would really like to see them and be able to look them up. The ones that you keep referring to over and over and over again"

Mr. Parton ended the discussion and stated that the Policy Committee meeting is next Thursday, January 22, 2026, at 5pm at Liberty library.

Dr. Wheeler asked, "I'm not on the policy committee. Will the policy committee accept my commentary, which is going to be copious, about these new policies and take them under consideration? Because there are literally dozens of, as you've pointed out, places where it's very problematic"

Mr. Parton ended the discussion again.

d. Special Called Meeting – Feb 12th (Policies)

Mr. Parton makes a motion to have a special-called meeting February 12, 2026. Ms. Pinkerton seconded. Unanimously approved.

e. Constitution, Article V word change

Mr. Parton makes a motion to table 8E Constitution, Article V word change. Ms. Pinkerton seconded. Unanimously approved.

f. Library Card Policy Update- Holiday Book checkout limit change 5 to 10

The Assistant Director explained that this change is to increase the number of holiday books that can be checked out on each card. The current limit is 5 and staff feel that we now have enough holiday books in our collection so that we could increase that to 10.

Ms. Miller said, "I don't know what you mean by holiday books. Like Christmas books?"

The Assistant Director replied, "So, we have in our youth collections, we separate the holiday books out so that they're easier to find for parents and teachers or whoever's checking out children's books. So, we have

like Halloween books, Christmas books, St. Patrick's Day. Currently each card is only allowed to check out five of those books at a time. So, we are wanting to change the checkout limit to 10.”

The Director added, “A number keeps somebody from wiping out all the Halloween books on one card. So, there has to be some sort of restriction, so somebody can't come in and take all of our Valentine's Day books, but they can have 10, which is what we're proposing. We have more now than we did when this policy was first put in place.”

Mr. Aiken made a motion to change the Holiday book checkout limit from 5 to 10. Dr. Wheeler seconded the motion. Unanimously approved.

Dr. Wheeler asked, “I just would like to ask a favor of anyone who is producing highly edited documents like these collection policies to use the edit function in Word, so that we know what's been changed and what's been retained. Because I had to go through this thing and patch together what was actually retained and what wasn't. So that's just a request for the future.”

Mr. Parton asked, “All in favor of adjourning, raise your hand. Meeting is now adjourned.”

Meeting adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Next Meetings:

Special Called Meeting - Thursday, February 12, 2026, 6:00pm – 7:00pm Hampton Memorial Library

Executive Session - Thursday, February 12, 2026, 7:00pm – 8:00pm Hampton Memorial Library