



City of Lawton

Library of Tomorrow Council Committee

Lawton City Hall
212 SW 9th Street
Lawton, Oklahoma
73501-3944

Minutes

Friday, January 16, 2026

1:30 PM

Wayne Gilley Auditorium
Conference Room

Recommending Body

"Official action can only be taken on items listed on the agenda. As a recommending body, the Committee may review and discuss agenda items, propose and enact floor amendments, and then choose to make a recommendation to the City Council or provide direction to the City Manager. The Committee may also defer items for further review, refer matters to the City Attorney, or send items to standing committees, boards, commissions, or authorities for additional study. In some cases, items may be postponed to a later date or removed from the agenda entirely."

Purpose

To establish a shared understanding of the committee's charge, define the core function of the public library, consider duplication of services in the community, and set a disciplined framework for future meetings.

Chairman Warren opened by explaining the purpose of the meeting. He stated that the intent of the committee was to establish a shared understanding of its charge, beginning with defining the core function of the public library. He emphasized that no action would be taken and no vote would occur, and that the meeting was intended solely for discussion. He further stated that if any questions were not addressed during the discussion, time would be provided at the end of the meeting for additional questions. Chairman Warren asked for confirmation that the meeting was in compliance with the Open Meeting Act, and an affirmative response was given.

Meeting Called to Order

Chairman Warren called the meeting to order at 1:30PM.

Statement of Compliance with Oklahoma Open Meeting Act, 25 O.S. 301-314

Blazek-Scherler confirmed compliance with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act, 25 O.S. 301-314

Roll Call and Introductions

Please answer with your name, role, and state in one sentence what you believe is the most important role of a public library in our community.

Present:

Randy Warren- Councilmember Ward 8 and Chairman
Patty Neuwirth- Library Advisory Board Director
Sherene L Williams- Councilmember Ward 7
Bob Weger- Councilmember Ward 6

Absent:

Also Present:

Kristin Herr- Library Director and Ex-Officio Member
Dr. Krista Ratliff- President and CEO of FISTA and Ex-Officio Member
Dewayne Burk- Deputy City Manager and Ex-Officio Member
Jari Askins- Interim City Attorney
Donalynn Blazek-Scherler, City Clerk

Business Items

1. Committee Charge & Operating Principles- Chair Overview (High-level) (10 Minutes)

Participant readiness question:

- *Do you agree that defining what the library must do should come before discussing where it is located or what it costs?*

Chairman Warren posed an initial guiding question to the committee, asking whether members agreed that defining what the library must do should come before discussing where it is located or how much it will cost.

Chairman Warren noted that no one had responded and stated that he would answer himself. He explained that he believed it was important to first determine what the library should be able to do in the year 2075, noting that this represented the same length of time between when the current library building was constructed and the present day. He stated that defining the future role and function of the library should come before determining what it should look like or where it should be located. He explained that this line of thinking, combined with known building repair needs, was what led to the formation of the committee.

Neuwirth stated that as a Library Board member for many years, the Board discusses these issues regularly and has an established strategic plan. She noted that committee members had received the plan and stated she had additional copies available. She expressed that the Library Board would welcome any input from the public regarding what more the library should be doing beyond its current services.

2. Where We Are Today — Shared Baseline (15 minutes)

Staff overview (summary only):

- Current facility constraints and why full relocation is required for repairs

- What decisions have and have not been made
- Purpose of the committee process

Participant readiness question:

- *Is there any part of the current situation that you believe needs clearer public explanation as we move forward?*

Chairman Warren introduced Business Item Two, stating that the current library facility has numerous issues that staff is working through. He explained that his concern, and what he believed to be the Council's concern, was the risk of spending substantial funds without fully understanding the total scope of needed work. He stated that he wanted to avoid spending millions of dollars only to later discover additional major deficiencies. He explained that the committee was formed to identify needs before funds are expended or contracts are awarded.

Neuwirth commented on references to "full relocation," stating that a full relocation of the library was never intended. She noted that Kristin Herr could explain the temporary relocation concept that had been discussed.

Warren responded that his recollection of the Council discussion was that the library would need to move out of the building and then move back in, which caused public confusion. He clarified that he was not asserting a permanent relocation had been decided, but rather explaining how the discussion had been perceived publicly. He asked Herr to explain the plan.

Herr explained that early discussions with the project consultant involved phasing construction so the library would not need to relocate. She stated that as project costs increased, it became more practical to consider vacating portions of the building so work could be completed efficiently. She explained that flexibility and adaptability are core principles of the "library of tomorrow." She noted that all children's and teen shelving is on wheels due to grant funding, while much of the adult shelving is older and must be dismantled to move. She explained that the plan discussed involved shrink-wrapping immovable shelving and leaving it in place, relocating only what could fit into a temporary mall location, and operating a limited library there during renovations. She added that branch library services would be expanded during that time. She explained that wide aisles in the existing building would allow scaffolding to move through the facility. Herr stated that the intent was to avoid situations experienced by other cities where renovation costs escalated dramatically once construction began.

Chairman Warren then asked whether any part of the current situation required clearer public explanation. He stated that he believed the issue had been blown out of proportion and emphasized that no decisions had been made. He reiterated that all options remain open, including repairing the existing building, constructing a new one, or other alternatives. He stated that the idea of moving the library to the mall originated from the temporary staging plan and that his concern was spending money without a long-term direction. He emphasized that the goal was to avoid making decisions incrementally without an overarching plan.

Deputy City Manager Dewayne Burk stated that it would be helpful for the committee to understand how the project scope evolved. He explained that the City initially identified a two-million-dollar budget but later received cost estimates closer to four million dollars when additional needs were included. He stated that staff then worked to prioritize and scale the project and asked Herr to explain what was included in the project and what items were considered alternates.

Herr explained that no formal study had been conducted to determine whether a new building, relocation, or continued use of the current facility was the best option. She described a ceiling study funded in 2022 that initiated deeper evaluation of the building. She explained challenges associated with the building's 1,500 light fixtures and stated that earlier LED retrofit concepts were impractical. She stated that the project scope was reduced to align with the two-million-dollar directive, but alternates were included to inform Council of potential additional needs.

Herr identified alternates related to replacing aging VAV units, installing an air curtain, and completing interior paneling. She explained that while major HVAC components had been upgraded since 2017, the VAV units remain approximately fifty years old and perform poorly. She stated that it was unclear whether refurbishment or replacement would be more cost-effective. She also noted that she would be interested in an air curtain at the front door to increase energy efficiency.

Herr explained that converting to LED lighting would generate significant annual energy savings and reduce maintenance, noting that many lights are intentionally left unreplaced pending a final plan. She stated that this has resulted in darker areas within the library.

Williams asked whether an air curtain would help with odors. Herr responded that it could help but explained that restroom exhaust fans were currently not functioning, contributing to odor issues. She stated that repair costs would be approximately \$1,500 and that the fans had been out for approximately three weeks.

Dr. Ratliff asked if all the work Herr listed was included in the \$2 million budget or if a new budget was set.

Herr explained that the \$2 million included putting in new LED lights with a hybrid open ceiling concept, put in a fire suppression system, and installing duct work from the VAV to the diffuser. She stated electrical panels were not included in the two-million-dollar project. She described frequent brownouts and surges affecting library operations and explained that surge protectors installed on lighting panels significantly reduced outages. She described one electrical panel as dating to the 1960s and stated that it posed safety concerns and was difficult to find contractors willing to service it.

Chairman Warren stated that he would like to see a multi-year list of building needs, including a five-year outlook, to better understand future costs and priorities.

3. **Defining the Core Function of the Public Library (15 minutes)**

Committee discussion — no locations, no costs

Participants should be prepared to comment on:

1. *What services must always be provided by a public library, regardless of location?*
2. *Which services are essential for:*
 - o Children and families*
 - o Teens and students*
 - o Adults and seniors*
 - o Workforce and job seekers*
3. *What functions define the library as a universally accessible civic institution?*

Outcome:

Consensus on core service categories that define the “Library of Tomorrow.”

Williams asked which groups most consistently use the library. Kristin Herr responded that library usage is highly diverse, including homeschoolers during the day, children after school, adults throughout the day, job seekers, individuals completing legal paperwork, students studying, genealogy researchers, and users of maker equipment. She stated that serving a broad cross-section of the community is a defining feature of modern libraries.

Patty Neuwirth added that Friends of the Library support literacy and citizenship programs and noted significant growth in those populations.

Councilwoman Williams asked about attendance tracking. Kristin Herr explained that door counts are tracked monthly and estimated annual attendance at approximately 200,000 visits.

Councilwoman Williams asked whether the project was part of the PROPEL 2040 Capital Improvement Program. Deputy City Manager Burk confirmed that it was funded through PROPEL 2040 in the amount of two million dollars.

Chairman Warren asked whether usage data was broken down by socioeconomic or age group. Kristin Herr responded that door counts track only foot traffic, while program attendance is tracked by event type. She stated that circulation data for physical and electronic materials is tracked, but personal demographic data is limited due to privacy considerations.

Dr. Ratliff stated that the Chamber of Commerce could provide geofenced demographic data if needed.

4. **Duplication of Services & Community Specialization (15 minutes)**

Chair framing:

- Responsible stewardship includes understanding what services already exist in the community
- The goal is not to eliminate services, but to avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure the library focuses on what it does best
- Some functions may be better delivered by other entities with specialized facilities or expertise

Participants should be prepared to comment on:

1. *Are there library services that may overlap with services already provided elsewhere in the community?*
2. *Which library functions should remain uniquely public and library-based?*
3. *Are there functions that could reasonably be reduced, shared, or refocused if another entity is better equipped to deliver them?*
4. *How should duplication or specialization factor into evaluating long-term library options?*

Outcome:

Shared understanding of how duplication and specialization will be considered during evaluation.

Chairman Warren introduced Business Item Four, stating that part of Council's responsibility is to avoid duplicating services and asking whether there were services the library currently provides that might be better handled by other entities.

Herr cited the provision of restroom facilities and sale of bus passes for LATS users, noting operational strain and expressing hope that future transit facilities would reduce that burden. She explained that bus pass sales continue due to community need, particularly for individuals without smartphones.

Neuwirth referenced collaboration between the library and FISTA on STEM and LEGO programming to avoid duplication.

Dr. Ratliff described the strong partnership between FISTA and the library and emphasized shared resources and coordinated programming.

Warren stated that identifying duplication represents one of the best opportunities for cost savings.

Herr stated that many expanded services provided through the library are not funded by City tax dollars and emphasized that the library operates with limited staffing, approximately 17 full-time equivalent employees. Staff stated the library has prioritized collaboration and efficiency through measures such as self-checkout, online library card registration, and mailing of library cards, allowing staff to focus on reference and service desk functions. It was noted that the library regularly declines programs that would require excessive staff time, but frequently serves as a venue and facilitator for

external organizations that lead programming.

Examples of partnerships were provided, including collaboration with Lawton Rocks to host painting classes led by that organization rather than library staff, and support from Friends of the Library, which funds an individual to provide one-on-one computer assistance to patrons needing help with basic technology skills. Additional operational efficiencies were described, including RFID tagging of materials to streamline circulation and consolidation of service desks to maintain continuity during staffing shortages. Library leadership stated that while the events calendar is full, many programs are partner-led, allowing the library to remain “lean” while still expanding services.

5. **Evaluation Framework — Approving the Criteria Categories (10 minutes)**

(No scoring or ranking yet)

Proposed evaluation categories:

- Community service impact
- Accessibility and equity
- Duplication vs. complementarity of services
- Long-term flexibility (50-year horizon)
- Operational and governance risk
- Alignment with adopted City goals
- Responsible use of taxpayer resources

Participant readiness question:

- *Do these categories provide a fair and comprehensive framework for evaluating all options?*

Warren remarked that, while there was not truly an “elephant in the room,” one issue stood out during review of the broader library discussion: the County currently contributes approximately \$50,000 per year to the library. Warren expressed appreciation for the County’s contribution but stated that, based on population math, the contribution does not appear proportional to the level of service being provided to county residents who are not Lawton residents. Warren referenced an estimated 33,000 county residents outside the City of Lawton and stated that, if those residents were paying at a rate intended to equalize the investment made by Lawton citizens, the cost would be approximately \$136 per year per card to match the availability funded by City residents. Warren stated this imbalance presents a fairness concern because Lawton residents are effectively subsidizing broader county service. He noted the City routinely requests increased county support, recalling a time when the county contribution was \$25,000 and stating that additional funds were obtained through prior discussions, but he described the issue as “money left on the table” and reiterated that it is not equitable for Lawton residents to carry the full burden, even while acknowledging the library provides good value.

At Neuwirth’s request, Herr provided context regarding state requirements and funding.

She explained that, in Oklahoma, municipal libraries are required to serve the entire county in order to receive state aid and additional services through the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, and that other libraries within the county, including Elgin Public Library and Cache Public Library, are also charged with serving the county. Kristen stated the Oklahoma Department of Libraries calculates an official service population using a formula and cited an official number of approximately 90,200, while noting the library's actual service reach is closer to 150,000. Herr stated the library requests county funding annually and uses those funds for books and electronic materials, and added that Elgin and Cache also receive county funding. She further explained that evaluating county versus city investment must account for state support, noting that if the library stopped serving the county, the library would lose approximately \$34,000 in state funding, along with eligibility for other grants, and therefore the funding calculation changes because state funds help offset the broader service obligation.

Warren asked whether most municipal libraries belong to library associations or systems, and Herr explained that Oklahoma generally has two models: library systems and municipal libraries. She stated there are eight library systems in Oklahoma and provided examples, including Pioneer (Norman area), Metropolitan (Oklahoma City area), and Tulsa City-County, among others. Kristen stated Lawton is the largest municipal library in the state by population and one of only two municipal libraries with two locations (noting Duncan as another). She explained that library systems typically receive a significant portion of funding through county-based revenue models, including ad valorem or county sales tax mechanisms, and that this is a different funding structure than Lawton's municipal model. When asked whether the system model had been evaluated for advantages and disadvantages, Herr stated the concept has been broached and expressed that systems can be more stable and, in her view, can support stronger libraries. She stated she would like to see a regional library system for Southwest Oklahoma but was not aware of any official committee that has formally explored that option, noting such a process would require a dedicated committee.

Ratliff requested clarification for the record regarding funding streams, stating the FISTA STEM Lab receives zero City of Lawton tax dollars and operates through grant funding, noting that FISTA has performed well in securing grants and that the library has also been successful in that area. Warren agreed and stated that having a dedicated grant writer could be beneficial if such a position were feasible in the future. Warren then stated the committee would continue working through the overall discussion topics but emphasized he did not want the committee to make a rash decision, noting the importance of developing a long-term plan before committing significant funds to any single direction.

6. Work Plan, Meeting Rhythm & Between-Meeting Assignments (10 minutes)

Determine meeting frequency (weekly or bi-weekly)

Between-Meeting Assignments

Committee members:

- Identify three “must-have” public library services
- Identify one service that may warrant duplication review
- Suggest community stakeholder groups for future engagement

Staff:

- Prepare library usage trends and operational overview
- Prepare a summary of current space and service utilization
- Identify known facility constraints at a high level

Warren noted that Blazek-Scherler would be responsible for the scheduling of the next meeting.

Herr requested five minutes to share several points that could be helpful to the committee and asked that the Chair provide feedback afterward so staff could better prepare additional information for the next meeting.

Burk wanted to clarify the committee’s focus. Burk stated that, in his view, the mission of the committee is not only to re-evaluate or refine what the library should look like in the future from a service and programming standpoint, but also to determine the appropriate facility footprint needed to support that mission. Burk stated the library is doing excellent work, but questioned whether the current facility is the long-term solution and noted the discussion appeared to be moving along two tracks—one focused on mission and service delivery, and another focused on the financial impact to the community and the physical footprint of the building. He stated the current library is approximately 37,000 square feet and asked whether that amount of space is necessary to accomplish the mission established by library leadership, the Library Board, and Friends of the Library. He stated that if less space is needed, the committee should consider whether there is a more suitable facility for a smaller footprint; if the full footprint is needed, the committee should then evaluate the financial implications of renovating the current building versus relocating to or acquiring another facility of similar size that may be in better condition. Burk described this as the “elephant in the room,” stating the committee needs to “marry” mission, footprint, and fiscal efficiency into one coherent direction.

Warren explained that his initial interest in the issue was prompted by national reporting indicating in-person library foot traffic was down approximately 28% nationwide while electronic usage had increased, and that libraries across the country were adapting accordingly. He stated that those trends raised the question whether a smaller footprint might be viable and, if the library remains in its current location but is larger than needed, whether the City could develop a plan to rework interior layouts and improve insulation and efficiency over time. Warren referenced that some libraries have reduced physical collections by consolidating stacks, using off-site storage, or shifting to electronic formats, and stated that the City should not invest substantial funds into a facility until the committee has determined how large the facility needs to be, whether it should remain in its current location, and what functions it must support.

Herr responded that staff is aware electronic usage continues to increase and stated the library is actively monitoring both electronic and physical circulation. It was noted that certain electronic lending platforms charge the library per checkout, creating cost pressure that must be managed through budget controls. Herr stated physical circulation remains strong locally and that recent six-month statistics were up compared to the prior year, noting the pandemic affected usage patterns. She further stated local foot traffic does not mirror national trends in the same way, emphasizing that the library is not merely a warehouse of books but a community space that is frequently well-used, with periods when seating is full throughout the building. Herr referenced the Chair's earlier comment that about 40% of libraries are stacks and stated the library calculated its own footprint at approximately 26% stacks, reflecting ongoing efforts to consolidate physical collections and reallocate space for services. Herr stated that space constraints were a reason certain programming, such as LEGO League, is being hosted at FISTA this season, and described how reduced stack space has enabled additions such as a maker space area and a digital memory center. She described continued space planning efforts, including using open areas for new programs such as virtual reality (requiring clear floor space), volunteer tax preparation services, and shifting needs during tax season. Additional space needs were identified, including more study carrels and study pods, small collaborative rooms, and additional private booths—one example being a telehealth booth that also supports IRS appointments due to the privacy it provides. Herr also noted a significant portion of the building is dedicated to family and local history collections, which may gradually shrink over time, potentially allowing additional table space to be added in the future.

Herr then transitioned to energy efficiency and facility improvement examples and described using grant funding to address the brick flooring in the lobby, which was identified as a tripping hazard and a noise issue. She stated prior quotes to fix the flooring had been approximately \$78,000–\$80,000, but a local vendor completed the work for less than \$20,000 using a sand-blasting and resurfacing approach. Herr also described work on the building's perimeter glass, noting that large single-pane windows are costly to replace when broken and that some panes are not safety glass. Herr stated grant funds were used to install double-pane, energy-efficient safety glass in meeting room areas and expressed interest in pursuing additional grant funding to continue improvements to exterior walls, noting that a building of this age is inherently less energy efficient. She asked whether the discussion sufficiently addressed space considerations.

Warren responded that the discussion highlighted a longstanding challenge shared across public bodies—matching community needs with financial constraints—and stated that Burk's observations about long-term building use and efficiency were aligned with the committee's purpose. Warren stated the committee must determine how to use the building as efficiently as possible for the least cost while still meeting service expectations, and then invited any last final comments for that portion of the discussion.

Neuwirth reminded the committee to consider the importance of the green spaces

surrounding the current library, noting that proximity to Shepler Park and the Farmers Market provides significant value because many library programs and activities extend into those outdoor areas. Shee stated that location should remain an important consideration in any future discussions regarding the facility.

Weger then commented on the importance of stewardship, emphasizing the need to carefully consider the financial investment the community has already made in the library. He stated that the committee should continue to examine the building with respect to needed renovations, acknowledging that additional work will likely be required in the future. Weger noted that he does not favor temporary or “band-aid” solutions and instead supports identifying root causes and addressing them directly rather than treating symptoms. He expressed appreciation for the information shared during the meeting and stated he looked forward to learning more as the process continues.

In response to discussion about next steps, it was suggested that a presentation on current projects and the building’s maintenance condition, along with usage data, would be helpful at a future meeting. Herr agreed this information could be shared electronically in advance, noting that decision-making improves as more complete information becomes available.

Herr then provided an illustrative example related to facility maintenance, describing sewer backup issues following restroom upgrades completed in 2020. Herr explained that collaboration with Public Utilities staff led to identifying a design issue within the plumbing system. Adjustments to restroom fixtures, including replacing internal components, resolved the issue, and no further backups had occurred since. Herr stated this experience underscored the importance of open dialogue and collaboration, noting that such conversations often lead to practical solutions and, in some cases, significant cost savings. Herr acknowledged that older buildings inevitably present challenges, but emphasized a willingness to continue sharing information and working collaboratively to identify improvements.

Leadership further stated that the library of the future must remain flexible and adaptable, noting that technology and service expectations will continue to evolve. This philosophy has informed decisions to use movable furnishings and reconfigurable spaces. Leadership expressed willingness to provide additional information at future meetings regarding building conditions, long-term challenges, and potential solutions, emphasizing that recent plumbing issues are no longer as significant as they were previously.

Warren concluded this portion of the discussion by summarizing that the purpose of the committee is not to decide on a specific construction or renovation outcome, but rather to determine what the library needs to fulfill its mission. Once those needs are clearly defined, other bodies can determine how best to implement them. Warren also stated he would like a separate committee to someday examine the potential advantages and disadvantages of a library system model, noting the importance of understanding those

options.

Public Comments (10 Minutes)

Public comments will be limited to 3 minutes per speaker. All comments must be related to the committee scope and process.

Jim Maroon stated that he had heard from many residents who love the library in its current location and value the services it provides. He stated that several residents indicated they would attend meetings if scheduled at different times. He added that on busy days, particularly during summer programming, the entire facility is actively used and questioned what services or spaces could reasonably be removed.

Kenra Ford stated that separating critical safety-related repairs from “nice-to-have” improvements would be helpful so timelines and priorities could be clearly established.

Annette Wiseman commended Kristen Herr and library staff for their work and stated that the library is one of the community’s most valuable resources. She asked about the library’s budget, residency requirements, and visitor tracking. Herr responded to each question, explaining budget levels, card requirements, and foot traffic tracking.

Matina Davis addressed the committee and stated her opposition to relocating the library to FISTA, expressing concerns regarding public access to records.

Confirm Next Meeting & Focus (5 Minutes)

Proposed focus for next meeting: Current Library Operations & Usage Trends.

Chairman Warren stated the City Clerk will coordinate the next meeting date.

Chair's Closing Statement

“Our task is not to make the library smaller or larger, but to make it smarter — by focusing on what a public library does best while respecting the services already available in our community.”

No discussion took place.

Adjournment

The City of Lawton encourages participation from all of its citizens. If participation at any public meeting is not possible due to a disability, notification to the City Clerk at (580) 581-3305 at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled meeting is encouraged to make the necessary accommodations. The City may waive the 48 hour rule if interpreters for the deaf (signing) is not the necessary accommodation."

Motion by Sherene L Williams, Second by Bob Weger, to adjourn. AYE: Randy Warren, Patty Neuwirth, Sherene L Williams, Bob Weger. NAY: None. Motion Passed.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.