

Meeting Minutes
Cedar Rapids Public Library
Board of Trustees
October 2, 2025

Board members in attendance: [President] Monica Challenger, Chris Casey, Ana McClain, Susie McDermott, Jade Hart (in person)

Board members unable to attend: [Vice President] Jeremy Elges, Elisabeth Hepworth, Rafael Jacobo, Hassan Selim

Staff in attendance: Amber McNamara, Kevin Delecki, Erin Horst, Todd Simonson, Jessica Musil (in person); Patrick Duggan (via Zoom)

Others: Charity Tyler, Executive Director, Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation; Libby Slappey, President, Friends of the Cedar Rapids Public Library (in person)

- A. Call to Order
 - Ms. Challenger called the meeting to order at 4:02 pm
- B. Consent Agenda – **Action**
 - Minutes: September 4, 2025

Ms. Casey moved to accept the consent agenda. Ms. Hart seconded. The action carried with unanimous approval.
- C. Public Comments and Communications
 - There being none, the meeting continued
- D. Foundation Report – Charity Tyler
 - Ms. Tyler reported. The Foundation is very excited to start sharing more about the Busse Branch, following the capital campaign's closure announcement. Staff are shifting away from using "Westside Library" and adopting the Busse Branch name. Ms. Tyler noted the new library is intentionally named Busse Branch to differentiate it from Mt. Mercy's Busse Library. She is grateful for the family's support and the transformational capstone gift.
 - The Foundation is now working on donor stewardship and finding the new normal now that the campaign has closed. Ms. Tyler wants to focus on how the Foundation can support the library's strategic initiatives and ensuring that donors who gave several years ago don't feel forgotten. She is planning private donor events between now and grand opening in a year. Part of this is an update on the project in the Friends and Foundation's semi-annual newsletter, which will be mailed soon.
 - Ms. Casey asked what it means for donors now that the campaign has closed. At this time, the Foundation is still accepting gifts but will stop in time – that date is to be determined. Similar to the downtown library, the goal is to grow a capital improvement fund for the Busse Branch. The Foundation Board will have to vote to establish that fund but it has been in discussion. Ms. Challenger expressed her thanks and appreciation to Ms. Tyler for all her work. Ms. Tyler also thanked her hardworking campaign co-chairs – Libby Slappy and Lois Buntz – for their invaluable help as well.
- E. Friends of the Library Report – Libby Slappey
 - Ms. Slappey reported. The Friends made a substantial contribution to the Busse Branch campaign, which has been a motivator to sell books. This summer was incredible for Farmer's Market sales. Typically, as the summer goes on, sales taper off. Even at the last sale, and moving to the drive-up lane due to the Urban Plaza construction, the Friends had a successful sale.
 - The big Fall sale is coming up at the end of this month. Shoppers can come to the downtown library on Friday, Oct. 31, Saturday, Nov. 1, and Sunday, Nov. 2. This year, Friends added a preview night for Friends' members on Thursday. Membership is only

\$10 and open to anyone to participate in the preview. Dealers are also welcome to come in and use their scanner at no additional cost; some Friends groups will charge extra for dealers and scanners.

- Ms. McClain asked if the Friends feel like they have too many books? Ms. Slappey said the Friends keep pushing the limits of available storage, maximize available storage space, and move books out with their sales opportunities.

F. Board Education: Celebrate Freedom to Read – Amber McNamara

- Community Relations Manager Amber McNamara presented. It's that time of year where we are approaching Banned Books Week, which runs Oct. 5-11. This week is an opportunity to focus on the freedom to read and what that means. Ms. McNamara discussed how we'll approach it this year.
- This year's goals are: celebrate the freedom to read and highlight the importance of intellectual freedom; encourage engagement with the library; and raise awareness of challenged books without focusing on conflicts. This year, we'll do a large social media campaign and also incorporate graphics into our digital displays. The graphics include a generic header to identify the campaign's content; Ms. McNamara also showed a sample promotional piece, which came from questions to staff, trustees, foundation board and others to share why the freedom to read matters. The Freedom to Read timeline, which has been displayed in the buildings, has been updated with recent impacts to our community for an online presence only. Every year, the American Library Association (ALA) released challenged book data. While it appears there has been a drop in challenges from 2023 to 2024, the challenges are different. Instead of individual complaints, threats to freedom to read come from organized groups and through legislative action.
- Ms. McClain asked how a parent of a young child can be informed of a book's content. Ms. McNamara noted that library staff can help with recommending books and content. Staff can point to online resources, which summarizes the content and highlights general topic areas to be aware of. Materials Manager Erin Horst also shared that the library's catalogue will note major subject and themes of most books in the respective book's record as well as reader levels.

G. Library Board Committee Reports

- Advocacy Committee – Elisabeth Hepworth, Committee Chair
 - The committee did not meet this month; however, Ms. McNamara shared an update for Ms. Hepworth. Last week, the FCC ended e-rate support for school and public library hotspot lending programs, and school bus WiFis. While this doesn't directly impact our library but it could affect our school districts. ALA will continue to advocate for expanded broadband access. Schools have been filing the gaps for students who need access but Ms. McNamara is unsure how this change will impact schools and students.
- Building Committee – Jade Hart, Committee Chair
 - September's weather gave contractors another great month to complete work around the Busse Branch. Paving around the site is almost done: main parking lot, northeast parking lot, book return/pick-up window lane, and staff access lane and south parking lot. This month, contractors plan to complete the public trail along 20th Ave and sidewalks from the street up to and around the library building. They also plan to add topsoil and spread grass seed to the library's land as well as the future park lawn. Trees, which can be planted in the fall, will be planted soon; any trees that need planting in the spring will wait. Inside the building, contractors continue to prepare the space: electrical, interior framing, and mechanical ducting. Soon, areas can be drywalled. The glass, which will make up the curtain wall, will be on-site in early October for installation. Once it's all in, the majority of the building will be enclosed. Behind the scenes, library and

Foundation staff are reviewing the signage package for accuracy. Library staff and trustees will review final selections for furniture as well.

- At the Downtown Library, work has been steady on the Urban Plaza. All of the pavers, concrete, and knee walls have been removed from the site. The crew is preparing the plaza to first form and pour the walls around the sculpture, and then the accessible paths to the building. Once these areas are verified as ADA compliant, they will pour the remainder of the plaza. Work remains on track.
- The RFQ for a new café vendor closes on Monday, Oct. 6. The selection committee will meet on Wednesday, Oct. 8 to review submissions. Following this meeting, we should have a good idea of next steps. Roasters Coffeehouse has officially moved out of the space as of September 30.
- Finance Committee – Chris Casey, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Casey reported. We're two months into the new fiscal year and there is not a lot to report on financials at this time. Ms. Casey highlighted several areas on the finance memo. The Café RFQ, the process of which is being handled by the Building Committee, was written broadly to attract a variety of café vendors. An RFP was released for the janitorial contract, which asks for current service levels and an addition of the Busse Branch. The new library has been designed to use the same janitorial supplies – such as paper towels and toilet paper – that we currently get from the City's Facilities team. Ms. Casey highlighted the \$200,000 deficit in the Materials budget due to a new opinion from the City's bond attorney on using bonds for digital materials. This change impacted FY25 funds, which the board approved an amendment, but still remains a discussion point for the current fiscal year. The committee anticipates changing around funding in various line items to cover the deficit. Ms. Casey stressed that everything is on the table and that the committee is looking at all options. That also includes looking at staffing needs for the Busse Branch and downtown library. She noted it's a large amount of money and may require coming from multiple places. While changing around line items does not require a formal board vote, Ms. Casey plans to keep the full board informed of the final decision. She expects it to occur by the end of November to coincide with the FY27 budget planning process.
- Personnel and Policy Committee – Susie McDermott, Committee Chair
 - **Action:** Policy 6.02 – Human Resources Authority. The committee is suggesting one change to this policy. The intention behind the change is to make it clearer that the listed examples are not inclusive. The board's responsibilities, outlined in City code, does not include day-to-day human resources oversight for library staff.

The motion to accept the revised policy as in the packet passed with unanimous approval.

H. Library Director's Report

- Ms. McNamara reported for Ms. Schmidt, who is co-presenting with OPN about the new library branch at the Iowa Library Association (ILA) annual conference in Sioux City. We have received a lot of positive response about the Busse Branch. Ms. McNamara added her thanks and appreciation to Ms. Tyler and the Foundation. The announcement garnered great news coverage, bringing more awareness to the project.
- A patron favorite event, the Tiny Art Show, opens today at the library. We are hosting two opening events at both the downtown and Ladd libraries. Artwork will be displayed at our libraries, as well as Marion, Hiawatha, and North Liberty, through Oct. 26 before moving to the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art. This is a great collaboration project. There has been a lot of excitement around this year's event.
- The inaugural Cedar Rapids Storytelling Festival started last night with a program called Stories from the Stump. Storytellers read live in the Commons and the Mayor was present to make a proclamation. This is part of TellersBridge, a local non-profit organization, who worked with us to organize the event. Events will continue through Oct. 4.

I. Old Business

- There being no old business, the meeting continued.

J. New Business

- The FY25 Annual Report was debuted at the board meeting. Ms. McNamara walked through some of the highlights and articles to showcase work that has been done throughout the year.
 - A Spot at the Table focuses on the Dungeons & Dragons Club that started by Programming Specialist John Zbanek-Hill. It started in 2022 with a small group and has grown into an average of over 27 players a week. They have multiple tables for on-going games as well as a table for new players to learn the game.
 - Growing a Love of Reading outlines all the ways we support the library's goal of early literacy with the Growing Readers program, 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten, and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.
 - A Different Kind of Story Time delves into the Books by Delivery program – how it works and the immense impact it has on the participating patrons.
 - Library Services Bring Big Value details how the library supports small businesses and entrepreneurs. In the article, we discuss the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) Business Value Calculator, a tool that allows libraries to calculate their impacts on businesses using their statistics. When you don't charge a fee for things, there is a perception that there is no value to it. The tool allows us to show we provided nearly \$2.5 million in value to entrepreneurs and businesses in FY25.
 - Looking at data, we have crossed the one million mark for materials circulation for first time since 2019. Ms. McNamara noted that while the number is fantastic and we may wish to say we're back to pre-pandemic figures, the way people are using materials is very different. The number of digital items circulated is different than physical items circulated. Now, more than 50% of our circulation is driven by digital content. She also noted the database uses statistic also includes pay-per-use items such as Freegal and hoopla, which are also digital. The data shows that people are consuming content differently with a heavier focus on digital and instant access. It's important to consider this as digital content is still paid for out of our Materials budget, which has not increased since 2019, and digital items are much more expensive. We have the \$200,000 gap as discussed earlier in the meeting due to digital materials and demand is only increasing. We will have one more normal year of statistics before the Busse Branch opens, which will distort statistics again. Ms. McClain asked if trustees' hours are calculated in the volunteer hours. Yes, they are included in the counts. Ms. McNamara noted that the value calculation is an industry standard but also certain types of volunteer roles have a different value based on the work provided.

K. Adjournment

- There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:06 pm.

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held on Thursday, November 6, 2025, at 4 pm in the Conference Room, Downtown Library