

Meeting Minutes
Cedar Rapids Public Library
Board of Trustees
November 6, 2025

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

Board members unable to attend: Rafael Jacobo, Hassan Selim

Staff in attendance: Dara Schmidt, Amber McNamara, Kevin Delecki, Erin Horst, 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); – J'nae Peterman, Homeless Systems Manager, Housing Fund for Linn County

- A. Call to Order
 - Ms. Challenger called the meeting to order at 4:04 pm
- B. Consent Agenda – **Action**
 - Minutes: October 2, 2025
Ms. Hart moved to accept the consent agenda. Ms. Casey 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. Things continue to move quickly in the Foundation's work as they approach the end of the calendar year. Ms. Tyler is preparing to make another generous gift announcement after working with the donor over the last several months. The Foundation held two donor tours of the Busse Branch this week with two more scheduled next week. Everyone loved the tours and giving positive feedback. Next week, the Wise Women Circle brunch is scheduled with Ms. Schmidt attending to provide firsthand updates.
 - The Foundation is convening a newly formed Grand Opening Gala Committee to discuss the intention and logistics behind an event to celebrate the new branch's opening. Sponsorship conversations for the event have already started.
 - In the last month, the fall Focus newsletter, which is a joint printing for the Friends and Foundation, was mailed out. Ms. McDermott noted that it contained a lot of great information to share with the community.
- E. Friends of the Library Report – Libby Slappey
 - Ms. Slappey reported that the weekend fall sale was very successful. She appreciated and was thankful to those who contributed their time and donations to benefit the library. The Friends met their sales goal for the event and will exceed their annual earnings from last year following their next sale on the first Saturday of December at the Cherry Building. She is confident they'll out-earn the approximately \$400 needed at the Very Cherry Christmas Sale to exceed last year's earnings.
 - Ms. Slappey also shared a story about an interaction with a homeless individual. She made a connection with him while he was browsing during their setup – he found some books that were meaningful to him and she encouraged him to help the Friends in exchange for five free books. He committed to assisting for the entire sale and was a positive force in the group for the weekend.

F. Board Education: State of Homelessness in Linn County – J'nae Peterman, Homeless Systems Manager, Housing Fund for Linn County

- Ms. Schmidt introduced Ms. Peterman, who has worked with the library as a community partner in multiple ways since 2014 when Ms. Schmidt was hired as director. Ms. Schmidt asked Ms. Peterman to give an overview of local services for those experiencing homelessness. Staff proactively work with patrons ahead of winter months when we tend to see an increase of behavior issues.
- Ms. Peterman shared about recent initiatives within Linn County to support those that are experiencing homelessness. She noted that homelessness has become more visible in our community, especially in the downtown area. However, overall numbers have decreased over the last few years. The Lived Experience Advisory Council was established with seven members to use their experiences to shape receipt of resources, review and modify policies, work with local organizations wishing to help, and provide valuable insight on outreach services. In addition, the Street Outreach team has moved their focus to finding and helping the unsheltered or in an emergency shelter individuals. Prior to this, anyone could call and be put on a state-wide list for services; spaces were only filled from that list. And while that list helped those individuals, the on-street counts continued to increase. Through the Lived Experience Advisory Council, the program leadership understood and worked towards building relationships and connections with unsheltered individuals. Overtime, they have less people refusing services, especially because the outreach team is listening to the person on what they actually need. In addition, the City has partnered with the County to support 37 dorm room style units at Margaret Bock for unsheltered individuals with high needs to help transition them successfully to a community landlord living situation.
- Ms. Slappey asked about lockers for people to store items. Ms. Peterman said there is a place to install lockers later this month inside the overflow shelter. These initial lockers will trial the system before expanding or increasing counts. Individuals can access the lockers using biometrics. It'll also allow for mail delivery to the lockers. The advisory council advocated for the lockers to keep items safe so individuals can feel supported while receiving services. Ms. Challenger noted she really appreciates bringing those voices to the table so they can be heard and make an impact. Ms. Casey asked how long the council has been in place. The council started in March. In addition, they helped to advocate for better aligning the overflow shelter's open and close times to align with the library as well. On average 75 individuals use the shelter though it can be slightly over 100 for really cold nights.
- Mr. Elges asked about the availability of affordable housing. Ms. Peterman noted that can a difficult question to answer. Currently, we don't have many units that meet the 30% Area Median Income and are high quality. She reported they are piloting a way to incentivize landlords – offering bonuses to recoup a lower rate for individuals. They are also seeking more local buildings, rental rehab programs, and way to improve quality units. Mr. Elges also asked about ways they are preventing individuals of slipping into homelessness when they are in danger of slipping into it. The County used funding from 2020 to target these individuals and saw how impactful it was. The State committed money to the City to work on the initiative as soon and they are seeking donors for further support. Rental assistance is helpful in the moment but it doesn't address the core issues that put people into danger of losing their home.
- Ms. Peterman thanked the board and library staff for the support they provide to the community. She has heard repeatedly that her clients really rely on, appreciate, and value the library's support.

G. Library Board Committee Reports

- Advocacy Committee – Elisabeth Hepworth, Committee Chair
 - Ms. McNamara reported that while the local City Council members and Mayor did not change in this week's elections, meetings with candidates were still a great opportunity for conversations and advocacy. Ms. Hepworth reminded everyone that the Advocacy Toolkit remains a resource on the library's website.
- Building Committee – Jade Hart, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Hart provided an update on the Busse Branch. It has been another great month of progress including completion of most exterior paving and anticipated seeding, fall trees and shrub planting on site. The exterior glass curtainwall is mostly installed, which is equipped with bird frit to deter birds from hitting the glass. Inside the basement, contractors are staging and hooking up the air handling units to the main HVAC and geothermal systems. Contractors setup temporary heating solutions for crews to work comfortably in the building throughout the winter. Drywall is being installed and restroom tiling will start later in the month. Another major milestone will be to stage and install the raised access floor in the collection spaces – this requires coordination between multiple subcontractors. The furniture package is coming along and on schedule. The team no longer needs to meet as items are finetuned prior to going for bid before the new year.
 - The Downtown Urban Plaza has officially opened for use. The poured accessible paths passed the ADA inspection and all lights have been installed. Contractors have a few punch list items that remain and will be done no later than next week: reinstalling the bike posts, installing the handrail, and fixing minor parts of the concrete. Staff have already received positive feedback from patrons about the improved access to the library.
- Finance Committee – Chris Casey, Committee Chair
 - **Action:** Approval of Line Item Transfer of \$176,776.17 from Acct 511100 to Acct 522101 for digital services.
 - Ms. Casey reiterated that the committee has been working with Ms. Schmidt and City Finance on how to overcome a deficit of \$200,000 because bonding funds can no longer be used for digital materials. The change came at the end of FY25 and the City Finance department paid for the materials. The library was expected to find the funds in FY26 after the budget had already been approved. City Finance noted that the money will be allocated in operations in FY27. The committee reviewed multiple options, looking at everything, in order to address the shortfall and setup the library for future staffing to open the Busse Branch. Ultimately, the committee decided to lay-off five 28-hour benefitted positions and cut cloudLibrary services. It was a hard decision and has affected library staff and leadership. Ultimately, it came down to staffing changes or no longer offering digital services. While the positions have been eliminated, funding will be held until FY27. At that time, the library can hire the necessary positions to support the new branch. Ms. Casey also noted that the board would not typically vote for a change of funds between line items; however, she asked for a vote in support of Ms. Schmidt. Ms. Hepworth reminded the board that the committee met with the City Finance director and his team to advocate for the importance of digital materials and their value to library patrons. While that didn't change the ruling on how these funds could be used, it helped build relationships between the library board and City Finance department. Ms. Schmidt clarified for Mr. Elges that the former bonding money has been reallocated to other appropriate funds outside of the library.

The motion to approve a line item transfer of \$176,776.17 from Account 511100 to Account 522101 for digital services passed with unanimous approval.

- **Action:** Janitorial Contract

- With the help of the Purchasing department, the Library had a formal bid process for a janitorial vendor. We received multiple responses with our current vendor as the lowest bidder. It was evident that they want to stay with us because their Ladd Library bid price is lower than current price. In general, the total price is about \$50,000 more a year when we remove Ladd and add the Busse Branch. Ms. Schmidt noted that the contract in the packet had the incorrect signature page. Mr. Elges asked for clarification on the day porter part of the contract. Ms. Schmidt noted that we have a day porter at the downtown library. This individual supports refreshing bathrooms and other cleaning needs during the library's opening hours. We anticipate it may be a good role to have at the new branch.

The motion to approve the janitorial contract with FBG as presented in the packet passed with unanimous approval.

- Ms. Casey shared that the library did not receive any bid submissions for the café space. The Building Committee is looking at options. As we did not receive any submissions, we have permission to fill the space with other opportunities without another bid process. Ms. Schmidt noted she discussed an opportunity with a local community partner as of yesterday. She hopes to bring more to the board in future meetings.
- Ms. Casey also noted that there are no concerns with the financials so far. She also shared that the committee has reviewed an initial draft of the FY27 budget.
- Personnel and Policy Committee – Susie McDermott, Committee Chair
 - Ms. McDermott stated that the committee did not have anything to report for this month.

H. Library Director's Report

- Ms. Schmidt wanted to note that while they made the right financial decision, it was a very hard decision because it impacted good employees. Affected staff will be considered internal candidates for any future openings in the next three years, if they wish to apply. It has been a very emotional time for all staff including the management. The funding for these positions will be held to create appropriate staffing for the new Busse Branch. Ms. Schmidt understands that this is a frustrating situation that has created anger.
- Next week, the library will be closed to the public for a professional development day. Ms. Schmidt hopes that staff tours to the Busse Branch will be uplifting and that staff can really see the future of our library. Ms. Schmidt provided an overview of the day's agenda.

I. Old Business

- There being no old business, the meeting continued.

J. New Business

- There being no new business, the meeting continued.

K. Adjournment

- There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:07 pm.

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