

Meeting Minutes
Cedar Rapids Public Library
Board of Trustees
December 4, 2025

Board members in attendance: [President] Monica Challenger, [Vice President] Jeremy Elges, Chris Casey, Ana McClain, Susie McDermott, Jade Hart (in person); Rafael Jacobo (via Zoom)

Board members unable to attend: Elisabeth Hepworth, 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)

- A. Call to Order
 - Ms. Challenger called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm
- B. Consent Agenda – **Action**
 - Minutes: November 6, 2025

Ms. McDermott moved to accept the consent agenda. Mr. Elges 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 that the Foundation has received another major philanthropic gift for the new Busse Branch. She hopes to make the announcement by the end of year. To celebrate the new branch's opening, they are actively pursuing grand opening gala sponsorships. They have received several confirmations this early in the planning process.
 - The year-end appeal was mailed at the end of November and gifts are starting to come in. Ms. Tyler didn't know how well the mailing would do as the fall Friends and Foundation newsletter, which was sent in mid-October, was slow to receive the typical responses. The GivingTuesday campaign, which generally has low earnings, still exceeded expectations in support of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL).
 - The Foundation is planning an 80th birthday celebration for Dolly Parton on Jan. 17. The event will include activities with library staff and enrollment partners.
 - Ms. Challenger asked if other non-profits are seeing challenges donations. Ms. Tyler believes some are experiencing hesitant donors, operational challenges, and growing concerns around federal and state grants. The Foundation's primary operational concern is the rising cost of stamps. Ms. McClain asked if donors can opt out of posted mailings to save postage and receive information electronically. The Foundation doesn't have a system for that yet but Ms. Tyler is looking at options.
- E. Friends of the Library Report – Libby Slappey
 - Ms. Slappey reported. The Friends will host their final sale of the year this Saturday, Dec. 6 at the Very Cherry Holiday annual open house. They will have books for sale on two floors: the main floor will have giftables and in the basement, shoppers can find a wide range of books. They received a great collection via donation, which should appeal to a majority of readers.
 - Ms. Slappey shared her appreciation for Friends volunteers who helped with a special project to test out and assemble different book cards. Last month, she shared a story about an individual who helped at the large fall sale at the downtown library in November. She saw the individual again in the downtown area and reconnected with him to thank him for his efforts.

F. Board Education: Advocacy Update – Amber McNamara

- As this year closes, we're preparing for the next legislative session. The news already has reported on upcoming priorities for this session. To start, Ms. McNamara wanted to set context.
- In 2023, HF 718 was passed. It was a tax reform bill, making significant changes to the state's property tax system including creating a new Adjusted City General Fund Levy and establishing new caps on tax base growth. Special library specific levies were removed under this bill. Cities have a general fund levy cap of \$8.10 per \$1,000 in taxable value, which has already impacted city budgets across the state.
- Iowa utilizes a rollback system, where a percentage of a property's assessed value is subject to taxation to limit the growth of residential property values statewide to no more than 3% annually. The 2023 law implemented mechanisms to manage property tax growth within the rollback system. If home values increased, this system would ensure taxable value stayed within the limits to prevent tax increases. There are many discussions on how this can help or hurt cities. Ms. McNamara gave examples of how this can harm cities, such as Cedar Rapids, including revenue growth may not keep up with inflation, high growth communities can be constrained, budget volatility, and less flexibility during emergencies. If cities can't make revenues through taxes, they move to fees, permits, and special assessments. This system can affect credit ratings, reduce a city's financial resilience, make municipal debt appear riskier and increase borrowing costs for infrastructure. There's a mismatch between local needs and state rules. Revenue caps set by the state ignore local labor markets, inflation differences, growth or decline, and regional infrastructure needs. Finally, service cuts likely become unavoidable, such as reduced library hours, cuts to recreation programs, delay new fire or police hires, postpone capital projects, and close facilities or consolidate departments.
- SF 2442, which was passed in 2024, is a fine-tuning of HF 718. Last year, HSB313/SSB 1208 was proposed but didn't make it out of session. If enacted, it would replace the "rollback + assessed-value fraction taxed" system with a "full value taxed but revenue growth capped" model. It would change the 3% cap to a 2% cap and shift taxation into a more harmful way for cities.
- In last year's legislation, library staff watched several bills specifically targeting libraries. This included proposals for library board authority changes, removal of obscenity exemptions, and association membership restrictions. In May, a federal judge struck down an Iowa law passed in 2023 banning certain book content in school libraries. We saw proposed cuts to the Institute of Museum and Library Services. And HF 196, which would reestablish library tax levies, died in the first funnel.
- In addition, SF 507 had an impact – prohibiting cities and counties from having DEI offices, training, and certain policies. Implementation is confusing, as we have discussed previously. We are continuing to follow the guidelines as we understand them from the city attorney and discussions with our partner libraries at MLN.
- Ms. McNamara walked through the 2026 session dates, which starts Jan. 12 and ending approximately on April 21. For this next session, we are looking at property tax reform. The Governor has been clear she's working on this and others in the House and Senate have also made public comments. The Governor has been quoted on reducing tax property burden is to: "...find new ways to maybe find better and more efficient ways for government at all levels to deliver services to our citizens."
- The library offers resources, such as an advocacy toolkit, email alerts, and supporting organizations, like ALA, ILA, and United for Libraries, have information on bills to watch. For this year, Ms. McNamara is developing one-sheet conversation starter guides for specific audiences, such as business leaders, parents and caregivers, etc.
- Ms. Casey and Ms. Hart thanked Ms. McNamara for the update and important information impacting the city and library. Ms. McClain asked about states without property tax and how they support their libraries. Without property tax, money comes

from income tax, sales tax, and special levies. Mr. Elges noted that the tax caps don't offer solutions to continue services. For cities to make up on lost revenue, it forces them to go back to the state and ultimately relinquishes control of a city's ability to take care of needs. Ms. Schmidt also noted cities already have limitations on spending, highlighting that collections are purchased with bonding and recently, digital items are no longer eligible and must come from property tax revenue. Our council will be very limited on what they can prioritize. If things continue to move forward, we can't operate the same as we do now. Ms. Schmidt doesn't know what that looks like yet but maintaining is not likely if the cap drops to 2%. We can't ignore what's happening and must think strategically about our future.

G. Library Board Committee Reports

- Advocacy Committee – Elisabeth Hepworth, Committee Chair
 - There is no report as the board education's primary focus was on advocacy.
- Building Committee – Jade Hart, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Hart provided an update on the Downtown Library Plaza. Library and City staff walked through the project area to discuss corrections before Thanksgiving week. Contractors had to remove and re-pour a 20-foot section for ADA compliance and remove a trip hazard. The railing was also installed. Now that it has snowed, final testing for compliance is delayed.
 - In November, we were thrilled to share the Busse Branch with library staff, trustees, and donors through several hard hat tours. Feedback has been positive and generated a lot of excitement as people can truly visualize the scale of the new branch. Now that winter is approaching, most site work will have to pause. The general contractor feels good about the progress made so far into the season. Most of the exterior glass has been installed. The final glass, which will arrive by the end of this year or early next year, is all corner glass pieces. By re-measuring and installing the corners last, contractors can adjust sizing due to construction variances. Contractors will continue to work on the drywall finishes throughout the building. Following this, interior finishes can be painted. Tile installation for bathrooms will start this month as well, starting on the east end of the building. Raised access floor staging has started and installation will begin on the west end. Subcontractors have already started installing and pulling cabling throughout the building for internet needs. Library and City staff are working together to get this branch on the City fiber network. Currently, Ladd is routed through the downtown building for the City network.
- Finance Committee – Chris Casey, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Casey reported on the October financials; she reviewed the memo. At this time, there are no issues with the current budget. No progress has been made on the FY27 budget since last meeting. The Finance committee's conversations have mirror Ms. McNamara's report – they are building a budget in an unknown future. It's difficult to build a budget without knowing about state funding and the City's budget. More than likely, the budget will be submitted and will require amendments. Ms. Casey appreciates the relationship Ms. Schmidt has created with the City is extremely beneficial and important to the library. We have to create relationships and partnerships in times like this.
- Personnel and Policy Committee – Susie McDermott, Committee Chair
 - **Action:** 1.07 Library Finance and Purchasing Policy. This policy notes the process and approval thresholds for purchases. The committee's only discussion was the approval levels for the library director, who wished to keep this the same. It mirrors the City's Policy except for the bolded areas, which designate the library director versus City Manager or Library Board versus City Council. There is no change.

- **Action:** 3.04 Behavior Policy. This policy, which notes acceptable behavior in the library, was reviewed. The committee has no recommended changes. Ms. McClain asked if it was posted anywhere in the building. It is on the public posting boards but we operate under the assumption that people aren't aware it exists when discussing concerns about behaviors with patrons.
- **Action:** 4.05 Non-Smoking Policy. The committee added a line to included that vaping is also prohibited on library property. Updated to include no vaping.

The motion to approve the reviewed policies 1.07 and 3.04 and revised policy 4.05 as presented in the packet passed with unanimous approval.

H. Library Director's Report

- Ms. Schmidt reported. In November, we had the opportunity to tour the new branch with staff on the Nov. 11 all staff day. It was a lot of fun and people seemed thrilled to see the space. Staff day in general was really great and staff seemed to enjoy talking about books, as we focused on readers advisory work.
- Ms. Schmidt has given multiple presentations recently with the Downtown Rotary and the Wise Women Circle. The presentations have been fun because Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Tyler get to see firsthand the excitement over the new branch. They have more presentations planned in the community for December, January, and February.
- This month, Ms. Schmidt attended the Dementia Innovation Forum, which was also hosted virtually at the library. During the forum, she spoke with Mercy staff about the library's commitment to supporting caretakers and those living with dementia by hosting this event and dementia-specific training for library staff. Along those same lines, the library provided an update to the City on our portion of the Age Friendly Action Plan. Details, on library-specific action steps for the City's plan, are included in the packet.
- We are also in conversation with a local non-profit about potentially taking over the café space. In the new year, we expect to meet again to discuss their questions and a plan.

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 5:10 pm.

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held on Thursday, January 8, 2026, at 4 pm in the Conference Room, Downtown Library