

Meeting Minutes
Cedar Rapids Public Library
Board of Trustees
June 5, 2025

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

Board members unable to attend: Hassan Selim

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

Others: Libby Slappey, President, Friends of the Cedar Rapids Public Library (in person)

- A. Call to Order
 - Ms. Challenger called the meeting to order at 4:01 pm.
- B. Consent Agenda – **Action**
 - Minutes: May 1, 2025

Ms. Casey moved to accept the consent agenda. Ms. McDermott seconded. The action carried with unanimous approval.
- C. Public Comments and Communications
 - There being none, the meeting continued
- D. Foundation Report – Charity Tyler
 - Ms. Schmidt reported for Ms. Tyler. She is very excited about how the capital campaign is going for the new Westside Library. The Foundation is close to an announcement with the last major donors and looks forward to sharing good news soon.
- E. Friends of the Library Report – Libby Slappey
 - Ms. Slappey reported. This Saturday is the first Farmers Market sale of the summer. Friends will host eight total sales starting in June through September.
 - The Friends are asking for more children’s books. They posted on social media and sent an email for this request. In response, one local organization will host a children’s book drive in June with their employees.
 - Ms. Slappey shared more stories about the wide reach of their Amazon sales including an update on the donated railroad collection. Most recently, they sold one book from the collection to a buyer in North Carolina for \$200.

Ms. Hart joined the meeting at 4:09 pm

- The Friends are preparing a payment toward their contribution for the capital campaign.
 - Ms. McClain asked how well the Houbby Day sale was, hosted at Lion Bridge Brewery. Ms. Slappey will look up the information and report back. She said it was a cold and windy day so many people came in for a drink and to browse books.
- F. Board Education: Strategic Plan Update – Amber McNamara
 - Ms. McNamara reported on the last strategic initiative of the current plan, which ends this fiscal year. The initiative, under Access, is to ‘create infrastructure to welcome new community members and provide access to community resources. The staff committee started work at the end of 2024 with a pause in February.
 - At the beginning, the committee researched other libraries to understand what has been successful in other areas. They specifically reviewed Hartford Public Library’s The American Place welcome center as well as their We Belong Here toolkit and strategies to develop a welcoming and inclusive library. The toolkit was designed for any library to replicate a similar model in their respective space. Libraries are a natural place for a

welcome center to exist. The committee also reviewed resources from the American Library Association (ALA) and the City of Cedar Rapids's own Gateway to Growth project, which identified priorities to be a welcoming community. The project involved major organizations to help people to reach their full potential, such as economic development, and created Welcoming Week, online resources, and more. In addition, the committee also identified local organizations so as we move into developing a Welcome Center, we can utilize their expertise or reach their populations.

- The committee had three main recommendations. The first is to develop a Welcome Center, a physical space, within the Westside Library, just outside the Opportunity Center. The goal is to select furniture with flexibility and mobility so we can easily adapt to future needs and changes in resources. The second is to challenge assumptions through surveys. The committee didn't feel we could adequately understand community needs. This summer, we'll survey individuals during outreach events and through community partners to understand what types of resources people have needed or heard what others need. This will help develop the Welcome Center and other resources available for our community. And the third recommendation was to develop a Vision for the Future. While the committee has concluded its work, the idea was to create a statement to ensure any future work, changes or updates stay true to the intention of being inclusive to everyone and embrace community members. This vision will complement and inform the library's overall mission, vision, and strategic plan. It's strictly an internal guidepost.
- Ms. Challenger asked if there is a plan to survey community partners to identify their gaps. Yes, we have a specific survey for organizations as well. In addition, we'll ask people if they are interested in follow-up conversations on how we can supplement each other.

G. Library Board Committee Reports

- Advocacy Committee – Elisabeth Hepworth, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Hepworth reported. In the past month, the Foundation hosted a beam signing event for staff and donors at the Westside Library. It had great turnout and celebrated an exciting milestone, showcasing progress on the project.
- Building Committee – Jade Hart, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Hart reported. The Westside Library project continues to go well with structural steel and masonry walls going up. Contractors will start pouring concrete in the basement as well as first floor areas in June prior to preparing the future Sandberg Lane. Fixtures, Furniture, and Equipment (FFE) meetings are starting and will meet every other week to make furniture, shelving, and finishes selections.
 - The downtown library's Urban Plaza project also continues. Library staff received the bid document set with pricing that remains in budget. Although the project is paid for by the Foundation, it's considered a Capital Improvement Project (CIP) and must go through the three required City Council readings. City Facilities identified extra money to increase the budget to \$230,000, which adds a contingency budget. In addition, library staff are working with a public art restoration specialist from UNI to help identify care needs for the Regeneration sculpture within the construction area during the work phase and general restoration after. They will also provide guidance on Generations at Ladd Library, and help with restoration needs before it moves to the new Westside Library.
- Finance Committee – Chris Casey, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Casey reported on the April 2025 financials. We're 83% of the way through the fiscal year with 82% of revenues collected and 84% of expenses are spent. Expenses are trending a bit high, primarily in tuition reimbursements, and others are trending lower. We may need to move funds between line items to cover any overages. Ms. Casey reminded the board that in our Operations (151 account), we can't roll over funds. However, we can use funds from 7010 to cover over spending as 60% of the funds are unrestricted. The Finance Committee is not

concerned and will provide updates as they are available. An example of a possible transfer of funds is to pay for the new mobile wall in Beems Auditorium based on timing issues.

- Ms. Casey also shared that Ms. Schmidt with the committee about the costs and cost-sharing amongst the Metro Library Network (MLN). The MLN MOU, which will be voted on later in the meeting, outlines how the libraries will work together and share costs. The MLN works through relationships and sharing resources for discounts. Ms. Casey appreciates that our library collaborates with the City and MLN libraries to be fiscally responsible.
- Nominating Committee – Monica Challenger, President
 - Ms. Challenger noted that a committee has formed and will make a recommendation to vote on the slate of officers at the July meeting. Traditionally, a President and Vice President serve for two one-year terms.
- Personnel and Policy Committee – Susie McDermott, Committee Chair
 - **Action:** Policy 1.00 Mission Statement. Ms. McDermott reported that the committee made a recommended change to the Mission and Vision statements. The proposed mission is: Welcome to All; and the proposed vision is: My library champions discovery, builds connections, and strengthens community. The committee, using feedback from the strategic planning process, felt the statements encompassed best what the library does in a few words. The committee also intentionally used 'my' instead of 'we' in the vision as the community is invested in the library. Mr. Elges noted a mission and vision statement are intended to be easily remembered and more helpful as a touchstone.

Ms. Schmidt brought a discussion forward of a word choice in the Vision Statement. Ms. Challenger asked if the word 'discovery' should be replaced by 'curiosity'. The intention behind 'discovery' is the act of finding/discovering something for yourself while in the library; whereas, 'curiosity' signifies more about critical thought and encouraging people to delve further into areas of interest. Use of 'curiosity' also resonated with Ms. Schmidt because while at a recent conference, a speaker said 'We replaced curiosity with fear and that is why we no longer have civil discourse.' The board agreed that the word choice discussion should go back to committee with a recommendation at the next board meeting. The action item has been tabled for now.

Ms. Schmidt also shared that the committee may need to update the Guiding Principles. Two days after the committee met, HF856 was signed into law and is effective on July 1. The law essentially disallows, cities and other public entities, from engaging in DEI activities; concerns are centered around Section 1e of the law, which notes entities cannot promote DEI related items as the official position of the entity. Equity is a Guiding Principle. Ms. Schmidt has requested more information from the City Attorney will discuss it with the committee. There does not seem to be a consequence if the word remains, other than we will be told to change it. Ms. Schmidt's preference is get clarification before making changes. Mr. Elges noted that appropriations tied to the bill starts July 1 but it is effective immediately. Ms. Challenger asked if there are ways to keep the intention. Ms. Schmidt believes so but would like to see what the City Attorney says.

- **Action:** Strategic Plan. The board reviewed the draft strategic plan in the packet. It currently has draft vision language and will be updated to align with the final language adopted in Policy 1.00. This plan came from feedback from staff, trustees, and the community, and was honed down to reflect major themes. Ms. Schmidt will work with senior managers to develop timelines, goals, and

operational plans to enact the plan. The plan has three strategic priorities – Access, Connection, and Service – with initiatives under each. Access focuses on ensuring everyone can experience the power of the library; Connection is fostering meaningful relationships between people, ideas, and resources; and Service is to support the library as a thriving institution, now and into the future.

After the plan was written, Ms. Schmidt was at the conference and reflected on changing one initiative: Ensure the Library is safe and welcoming for all. At the conference, library directors had a deep discussion about the safety of libraries. As much as we want to have safe work environments for our staff, safety is not something we should try to achieve as an organization. The words and concepts in a library should challenge and not make people feel safe. We are also a public building and invites various levels of friction – what is comfortable for one person may not be comfortable for another and while being welcoming to one may feel unwelcome to another. This goal as written may not be achievable although parts of this are very important. Ms. Schmidt suggested that this goal should be replaced with: Ensure the Library offers the opportunity for dignity, autonomy, and enjoyment. A discussion was held on safety and how it can be defined by others in many different ways. The suggested replacement allows everyone's experiences to be valid – giving everyone the choice for dignity, autonomy, and enjoyment for their physical presence in the library, use of the collection, and attendance in programs.

Ms. Schmidt read through the plan. The general consensus is that the plan is well-written and encompasses many important areas to pursue in the next two to three years. Some grammatical feedback was provided. The trustees agreed to move forward approving the plan with replacing the first bullet point until Access and other typos. A revised final copy will come back to the board at the July meeting.

Ms. Hart moved to accept the revised strategic plan. Ms. McDermott seconded. The action carried with unanimous approval.

H. Library Director's Report

- Ms. Schmidt appreciates the board's ongoing support for continuing education. She just returned from the Urban Library Council's (ULC) CEO Roundtable for library directors across the United States and Canada in urban areas. She had great conversations with peers that brought back considerations on the strategic plan, as previously discussed about safety. She is also processing a presentation that noted it takes 20-30 years to come back from pandemic and its after effects on society, such as civil discourse, mental health, education, etc. We will need to figure out how to exist as a public entity in this changing landscape. A professor at the University of Toronto, who is the chair of civil discourse after 47-day closure of the university after protests, has thought-provoking perspectives on fear as well as civil discourse is the ability to think out loud together. Based on his research, until we can figure out how to do that again, we won't do well to move forward with community challenges, such as a pandemic and political division. The challenges to overcome the discourse are: technology, significant generational gaps in communication, and fear. Ms. Schmidt also heard a presentation by New York Public Library on how much reading for pleasure supports mental health and libraries re-embracing readers advisory. She also shared the Chair of Social Prescribing for Canadian Health System's presentation on connecting medical resources with social resources. The challenge is with medical providers embracing and understanding that community supports impact people to seek on-going healthcare. An example is that those that received supports to care for their pets when seeking treatment were more likely to undergo the treatment.

- Ms. Schmidt passed around a social impact report by the Toronto Public Library. They have 12-point measures in four areas – emotional impact, intellectual impact, social impact, and creative impact – and ways to measure them all with collections, programs, spaces, staff, and technology. We won't try to replicate this but we can learn some interesting things from the report and learn from our existing systems.
- I. Old Business
- There being no old business, the meeting continued.
- J. New Business
- FY26 Calendar. The FY26 board meeting calendar was reviewed. All of the board meetings will be on the first Thursday of the month with exception to the January 2026 meeting. It will take place one week later on January 8 due to falling on New Year's Day.
 - **Action:** MLN MOU FY26. This is a renewal of the MOU, which was signed in 2020. Ms. Schmidt noted there are not significant changes and the document outlines how the partnership currently operates. The dates of the agreement are aligned with the ILS contract, which is the largest expense that the libraries share, so all libraries are committed to paying their respective shares. There is an out clause for the libraries; however, there are no concerns that a library will drop from the agreement because it is financially beneficial to share resources. This document re-affirms for another five years the existing partnership between Cedar Rapids, Marion, and Hiawatha public libraries. Ms. Hart asked if other libraries have expressed interest in joining the MLN, which is possible based on the agreement. Ms. Schmidt noted that other Linn County libraries have not but want the possibility to remain open.
- Mr. Elges moved to accept the MLN MOU. Ms. Casey seconded. The action carried with unanimous approval.*
- **Action:** Purchase Order and Payment Approval – cost of Microsoft license for staff and patron computers. \$52,307.94 total for three years to IT Outlet. This quote came after Finance Committee and was not discussed there. Microsoft offers discounts for their products. However, they recently changed public libraries' designation from educational institution to non-profit licensing. Previously, the agreement was under \$50,000 and now it's over the threshold, requiring board approval. This would allow Microsoft products on both staff and patron computers. Ms. McClain asked if the library has considered moving to Google products. We investigated this in the past – we're too large of an entity and we'd have to pay Google Business. In addition, there are concerns about network safety under Google as well as being able to offer Microsoft products to patrons.
- Ms. Hart moved to accept the purchase order and payment approval to IT Outlet for \$52,307.94. Mr. Elges seconded. The action carried with unanimous approval.*
- K. Adjournment
- There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:43 pm.

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held on Thursday, July 3, 2025, at 4 pm in the Conference Room, Downtown Library