



Agenda: Board of Trustees
October 2, 2025, at 4 pm
Conference Room, Downtown Library

Access, Connection, & Service

Library Board President – Monica Challenger

- A. Call to Order
- B. Consent Agenda – **Action**
 - Minutes: September 4, 2025
- C. Public Comments and Communications
- D. Foundation Report – Charity Tyler
- E. Friends of the Library Report – Libby Slappey
- F. Board Education: Celebrate the Freedom to Read – Amber McNamara
- G. Library Board Committee Reports
 - Advocacy Committee – Elisabeth Hepworth, Committee Chair
 - No Action
 - Building Committee – Jade Hart, Committee Chair
 - No Action
 - Finance Committee – Chris Casey, Committee Chair
 - No Action
 - Personnel and Policy Committee – Susie McDermott, Committee Chair
 - **Action:** Policy 6.02 – Human Resources Authority
- H. Library Director's Report
- I. Old Business
- J. New Business
 - Annual Report
- K. Adjournment

The next Board of Trustees meeting is **November 6, 2025 at 4 pm**, in the Conference Room, Downtown Library.

Anyone who requires an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in a City program, service, or activity, should contact Jessica Musil, Library Administrative Assistant, at 319.261.7323 or email musilj@crlibrary.org as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the meeting.

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

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

Board members unable to attend: 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: August 7, 2025

Ms. Hart moved to accept the consent agenda. Ms. Hepworth 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. This week, auditors visited the Foundation for their annual audit. The team is also planning the Van Vechten Society brunch this Sunday. Over 90 people have RSVPed to attend the event. Ms. Tyler thanked Foundation team members and Library events staff for their work to make this event possible. Ms. McDermott asked how many individuals will be recognized at the event. Ms. Tyler noted that seven will be recognized and this year, multiple families are bringing several people to honor their loved one. At this time, we'll have another two names to add to the wall next year as the memorial gifts were received after the deadline. We didn't have any additions last year so it's special to add seven this year.

Mr. Elges joined the meeting at 4:06 pm.

- Ms. Tyler continues to talk with donors about the capital campaign. She hopes to have a campaign announcement soon.
- E. Friends of the Library Report – Libby Slappey
 - Ms. Slappey reported. Friends still have two Farmers Market book sales remaining this summer on Sept. 6 and 20. Construction on the Urban Plaza work will prevent the Friends from being out front on Sept. 20 but they are grateful to shift slightly to take up space in the drive through. Friends love participating in the Farmers Market as sales have a built-in audience to catch market attendees. They are hopeful to have the same amount of traffic even if they can't be right on the library's front steps.

Ms. Casey joined the meeting at 4:11pm.

- Following the Farmers Market sales, Friends will focus on their big fall sale on Oct. 31-Nov. 2. With the café's closure, the Friends plan to use their seating area to place better book sale displays. They also plan a Thursday preview night on Oct. 30 for a member only event, which they have done in the past and are bringing back this year. Friends are

hopeful that collectors are enticed to visit and purchase books through this event without an extra fee for scanning. Ms. Challenger asked about the donated train collection. Ms. Slappey said one book sold as recently as yesterday and they have continued to sell well.

F. Board Education: Summer Reading Challenge – Kevin Delecki

- Mr. Delecki provided an overview of the Summer Reading Challenge for this past summer. The main goals for the program were to: simplify the program, launch Mega Readers for kids in all day care, and increase participation rates, which was measurable through challenge completions, total minutes read, and program attendance.
- Responses from staff and patrons alike about the simplification of the program continued to be positive. An example of making the program easier was the addition of a large print reading log for outreach in care facilities and Books by Mail/Delivery patrons. This special log was appreciated by those who needed it. Overall, we saw an increase for completions in most age groups comparing 2023 to 2025 numbers: children 0-5 (363 vs 52), teens (111 vs 10), and adults (523 vs 143).
- The Mega Readers program started with individual marketing sent to day care facilities, which resulted in 16 locations registering 46 classrooms with 828 children. Of those, 10 locations completed the program, impacting 31 classrooms and 413 children. Collectively, they read 247,800 minutes. Through support with the Library Foundation, all the kids got to pick out books to keep.
- Participation in the program remained steady for enrollments and completions from 2024. For the second year in a row, our Library was a runner up from Beanstack, the software to track minutes read and program completions, based on enrollment, minutes read, and social media engagement. In total, our community logged 2,667,195 minutes read. Of those, 17 Books by Mail/Books by Delivery outreach patrons recorded 217,620 minutes.
- The Programming Team felt the summer reading challenge found growth and success in several ways: testing and evaluating outreach methods to the community; increasing social media engagement; expanded partnerships with school-age children; and using and promoting Maker Space technology to create prizes. The team looks forward to 2026 as they evaluate feedback and update collateral.
- Ms. Challenger praised the team for creating a wonderful opportunity for daycares and their kids. Mr. Delecki shared a story about the excitement and anticipation one-year-olds demonstrated to their care providers. Ms. Hepworth noted her daughter's excitement for the 3D printed prize. Ms. Hart asked about the price for materials to create the prizes. Mr. Delecki said it's about \$19 for a spool of filament, which produces about 200 items. There's labor involved but a great team of maker space volunteers kept the printer and laser cutter going to produce these.
- Ms. Schmidt shared that the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) has chosen Cedar Rapids as a Summer Learning Award winner. This is not a library-specific award but a learning award. Ms. Schmidt shared NSLA's statement about the library. Our programs exemplify NSLA's values by creating a sense of belonging and purpose for all youth, especially those in need of more support and connection. Outreach to those in detention centers and community parks with support, materials, and connection serves youth who may not experience those opportunities. Ms. Schmidt thanked the programming staff and Mr. Delecki for their tireless work focusing on reaching children in our community, who may not otherwise experience the library.

G. Library Board Committee Reports

- Advocacy Committee – Elisabeth Hepworth, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Hepworth reported. During the meeting, the committee members discussed Institute for Museum and Library Service (IMLS) funding. The presidential administration recommended to defund and eliminate IMLS in 2026. However, before the August recess, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a small increase to LSTA funding, which authorizes funding for libraries through

IMLS. The Senate committee that writes the funding bill for agencies like IMLS did not follow the administration's proposal to eliminate IMLS and instead proposed a continuation and increase of funding for LSTA. If Congress does not include funding for library programs in its budget, those services will end regardless what happens with the administration or in court proceedings. The issue will next be taken up with the House of Representatives. This fall is a critical time for libraries at the federal level and is a good time for citizens to communicate with their representatives. The library's website has more information on the local impact of IMLS funds.

- Building Committee – Jade Hart, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Schmidt reported for Ms. Hart. The downtown's roof is almost done following the substantial completion inspection. Work will conclude in the next few weeks. The Urban Plaza work will start the week of Sept. 15. The only programmatic impact is the last Friends sale for the Sept. 20 Farmers Market – they will move to the café drive-up. Work should complete in 6-8 weeks, dependent on weather. The 4th Avenue entrance will remain open with access from the sidewalk on the 5th Street. The work site will be enclosed for the duration of the project as phasing construction would add significant time to the completion. One of the major goals of the project was to improve accessibility with multiple ADA path ways as well as long-term sustainable for maintenance. The Westside Library project is going well – August had great weather. Some library staff have been able to walk through the space. Interior walls have been framed so you can see the layout and scale of the different rooms. The goal is to enclose the building by the end of October and move on to more interior work. Library staff are working on an internal project to understand owner supplied purchases and timelines for installation. At the last Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment meeting, Materials Manager Erin Horst and Materials Supervisor Jill Martinez met with OPN and a shelving vendor to discuss shelving types, collection sizes, and collection accessibility for various patrons.
- Finance Committee – Chris Casey, Committee Chair
 - Ms. Schmidt reported for Ms. Casey. The July finance memo is broad as it is the beginning of the new fiscal year. The committee discussed the current café contract, which is ending. They decided to move forward with a Request for Qualifications (RFQ). We have received interest in the space. Ms. Schmidt was surprised at the interest as there have been challenges for the previous vendors to be successful. However, it is fiscally responsible to pursue an RFQ as café rent is a revenue. If we reclaim the space, there will be a construction cost. We are working with City Purchasing to release a formal RFQ and will better understand a timeline then. The City will help distribute the information through their list and we'll communicate with those who have reached out to us. Ms. McClain asked about challenges in the café's success. Ms. Schmidt noted that library clientele may not have money to purchase items. A catering component for the meeting room uses has been essential to keep the business fiscally viable. It can also be challenging to prepare for catering while also serving the counter. Ms. Schmidt also discussed that chains would be open and the goal is to have a café that can be open when the library is open.
 - The janitorial contract is ending in November. Purchasing is working on releasing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the downtown and Ladd libraries as well as cost estimates for the Westside Library. Ms. Schmidt anticipates it will be approved at the November board meeting.
 - The committee has been discussing options and possibilities to recover the \$200,000 materials gap created by the new bonding interpretation requiring digital materials to be paid out of operations. They are working on a plan that

can be sustainable to the library long-term and have appropriate staffing for the new facility. More will come to the full board as the decisions are made. The FY27 budget process is expected to begin in October.

- Personnel and Policy Committee – Susie McDermott, Committee Chair
 - **Action:** Policy 2.01 Reconsideration Policy. This policy outlines the process for Cedar Rapids residents to ask library staff to reconsider materials as part of the collection. The committee did not recommend any changes.
 - **Action:** Policy 3.08 Right to Protest, Petition, and Assemble. For this policy on community members' right to protest, petition, and assemble in and around the library, there are no recommended changes.

The motion to accept the affirmed policies as in the packet passed with unanimous approval.

H. Library Director's Report

- Ms. Schmidt reported. The library was in the news over the weekend in association with an incident. A man approached a child, said inappropriate things to her and touched her. The mother was right there and handled the situation, calling the police. When staff understood what was happening, they supported the mom and child. The adult was apprehended outside the library later on and has been trespassed from the library. He did not behave in any way to not allow him entry. For now, he has been trespassed for a year; however, depending on outcomes of his charges, this may be extended by law. Ms. Schmidt expressed thanks to and pride for the staff who responded and supported the family during and following the incident. Staff followed the procedure and board policy regarding behavior.
- Recently there has been a law change that any new board or commission member must take a virtual training on open meetings and public records. The City has decided that all active members should go through the training. Early dates have been full so Ms. Schmidt encouraged trustees to sign-up for future trainings – more will be offered.
- On Monday, Ms. Schmidt with the senior managers team will be at an off-site retreat. They plan to work through plans for staffing models, the November all staff day, and the Westside Library opening tasks and timelines.
- Ms. Challenger thanked Ms. Schmidt for her openness and sharing positive and not so positive news. It is unfortunate and could have happened anywhere. She noted we are fortunate to have the staff we have to address and take care of that situation.

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 5:15 pm.

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held on Thursday, October 2, 2025, at 4 pm in the Conference Room, Downtown Library

Detained in I.C.

Plainclothed feds arrest man on Pedestrian Mall

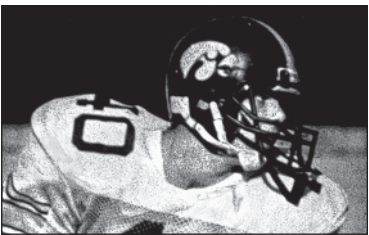
Iowa Today, 2A



Iowa football

Looking back 40 years to the 1985 Hawkeyes

Sports, 1B



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C.R. man faces life for kidnapping, strangling



Dakota Van Patten reacts as the verdict of guilty is read for the charges of first-degree murder, kidnapping and conspiracy to commit a forcible felony Thursday at the Linn County Courthouse in Cedar Rapids. Van Patten is now awaiting sentencing and faces life in prison. (Savannah Blake/The Gazette)

34 Iowa candidates fail to meet deadline to be on ballot

Williamsburg candidate will launch a write-in campaign

By Maya Marchel Hoff, Gazette-Lee Des Moines Bureau

DES MOINES — Thirty-four school board and city candidates across seven counties will not be listed on ballots in the November election due to errors made by filing officers, according to Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate.

Pate on Wednesday said the candidates will need to begin write-in campaigns after school board secretaries and city clerks failed to submit candidate filing paperwork by the noon deadline on Sept. 19. The affected jurisdictions include six cities and three school districts.

State code requires school board secretaries and city clerks to deliver all candidate nomination petitions to the county auditor's office the day after the last day that the petitions can be filed. The last day to file petitions for the Nov. 4 city and school elections was Sept. 18.

Pate said these errors were made despite "extensive" training sessions on filing guidelines, where resources listing the deadlines were provided. "We are disappointed to hear of the errors made by multiple school board secretaries and city clerks, considering we have provided these



Paul Pate Iowa secretary of state

Family of Melody Hoffman reacts with tears, hugs as verdicts read

By Trish Mehaffey, The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — A Linn County jury Thursday convicted Dakota Van Patten of kidnapping, beating and strangling 20-year-old Melody Hoffman in February of last year. The jurors, who deliberated about three hours, were indi-

vidually polled by 6th Judicial District Judge Chad Kepros to confirm the guilty verdicts for first-degree murder, first-degree kidnapping and conspiracy to commit a forcible felony were unanimous. As the verdicts were read, the Hoffman family reacted with tears, then hugs after the jury left the courtroom. Melody's mother, Megan Hoffman,

hugged her mom for a long time at the back of the courtroom. Both cried and held each other. Van Patten, 19, of Cedar Rapids, didn't show much reaction as the verdicts were read, or when he was handcuffed by Linn County Sheriff's deputies and led out of the courtroom. He faces life in prison without



Melody Hoffman Killed in 2024

► VERDICT, PAGE 8A

► CANDIDATES, PAGE 7A

Fundraising for C.R. westside library reaches \$10M goal

'Transformational gift' from Busse Foundation puts capital campaign over the top

By Grace Nieland, The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — The fundraising campaign for Cedar Rapids' new westside library has officially concluded thanks to a "transformational," multimillion-dollar donation. The Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation on Thursday announced the conclusion of its \$10 million "Inspiring Big Dreams" capital campaign for the new library being built near 20th Avenue and Edge-

wood Road SW. The campaign was supported significantly by a \$3.5 million donation from the Busse Foundation, a family-run charitable foundation. To honor the capstone gift, the new branch will be named the Cedar Rapids Public Library Busse Branch. "It's humbling really," said Charity Tyler, executive director for the library foundation. "To see that kind of belief in libraries and what libraries do for communities, ... I don't

know if the words exist to appropriately express our gratitude." The campaign and the more than 500 donors who contributed to it are one portion of the funding pool for the larger \$25 million effort to replace the current Ladd Library, which is located within leased space at 3750 Williams Blvd. SW. The Busse Branch — expected to open in the fall of 2026 — will span roughly

► LIBRARY, PAGE 8A



This rendering shows the planned design of the Cedar Rapids Public Library Busse Branch, a new library currently under construction near 20th Avenue and Edgewood Road SW. (OPN Architects via Cedar Rapids Public Library)

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October 4 & 5, October 11 & 12

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3015 Bryant Blvd SW, Cedar Rapids

Verdict/Van Patten ‘was directly involved’

► FROM PAGE 1A

the possibility of parole on the first-degree murder conviction. His sentencing is set for Nov. 14 in Linn County District Court. The judge could run the convictions consecutively or concurrently.

“Today we stand in solidarity with the family of Melody Hoffman,” Linn County Attorney Nick Maybanks, in a statement, told The Gazette after the verdict. “They have endured unspeakable loss and grief, but they showed up in full force to honor her during this trial just as they did for the trial of McKinley Louisma. We were proud to fight for them and for Melody.

“We are grateful to the Linn County citizens who saw this case for what it was, a heinous and depraved act of terror and violence. Justice has been served, again,” Maybanks said.

PROSECUTION
CLOSING ARGUMENT

During closing arguments earlier Thursday, Maybanks said the evidence showed Van Patten and Louisma, who was convicted last year and is serving a life sentence, were partners in this “heinous real-life horror story” in which Hoffman suffered “unspeakable atrocities.”

She was “beaten, tortured, strangled and mutilated,” Maybanks said in his closing argument. There is “no conceivable way” Van Patten could have done it without Louisma and no way Louisma could have done it without Van Patten, he said.

Maybanks said there wasn’t a “single piece of evidence to suggest” Van Patten was an “innocent bystander,” as his defense implied throughout the trial.

“That is fiction,” Maybanks said. “Van Patten didn’t even say it. That assertion isn’t based on evidence. Quite frankly, it’s ridiculous. He assisted and was directly involved.”

Hoffman was a “vi-



Dakota Van Patten is handcuffed Thursday at the Linn County Courthouse in Cedar Rapids after being found guilty by a jury of first-degree murder, kidnapping and conspiracy to commit a forcible felony. (Savannah Blake/The Gazette)

brant and energetic” young woman, Maybanks told the jury. She was “caring, loving and compassionate.” Hoffman wasn’t a typical 20-year-old because of a mild intellectual disability, which made her mind more like a 14-year-old’s.

The young woman was “susceptible to manipulation and control at times” and Louisma took advantage of this, Maybanks said. The two broke up in January 2024, but he continued to string her along, even after he got back together with his former girlfriend, who was pregnant at the time and gave him an ultimatum to choose her or Hoffman.

On Feb. 17, 2024, Louisma had arranged to secretly meet Hoffman and enlisted Van Patten, who was “more than happy” to help him, Maybanks noted.

Logan Kimpton, who also is charged in this case, told police there

was a plan to kill Hoffman, but he backed out after going with Louisma and Van Patten to Walmart to purchase machetes and gloves.

Hoffman had no idea what was going to happen. She thought they were going out for a good time. She thought they were her friends.

Maybanks said the prosecution presented evidence — some minute by minute — which included cellphone location and health data and surveillance video, of what happened that night. Louisma and Van Patten restrained, assaulted and strangled Hoffman at Morgan Creek Park in Cedar Rapids and then mutilated her body as she was dying or after death, at Lily Pond in Amana.

The location information from Van Patten’s phone showed he was with Louisma and Hoffman. Van Patten also obtained Hoffman’s cellphone password, which

he had in a photo, and her phone was connected to his internet hot spot.

Van Patten admitted to police that he entered his password into a phone with a “flower case” — Hoffman’s phone — because he needed to give an explanation of how that happened, Maybanks said.

Van Patten also documented Hoffman’s assault by taking a photo of her with duct tape over her mouth. She had a bloody nose in the photo, and appeared to be crying.

The prosecution also had DNA evidence of Van Patten’s involvement in the crime. His DNA was found inside a glove and on a roll of duct tape, which also had Hoffman’s blood on it.

Maybanks said a paracord, used to strangle Hoffman, had DNA from three individuals. And the bundle of cord, pieces of which were found in Louisma’s trunk, was



Linn County Attorney Nick Maybanks pauses as he makes the prosecution’s opening statement during the trial of Dakota Van Patten on Sept. 17 at the Linn County Courthouse in Cedar Rapids. (Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette)

found in Van Patten’s basement.

The knife used to stab and slash Hoffman’s back also showed DNA from three individuals.

Maybanks said Van Patten also took a “souvenir from this nightmare” — Hoffman’s glasses. They were “covered” in his DNA, and investigators found more than 200 selfies Van Patten took while wearing the glasses.

Taya Meyer testified that Van Patten came over to her apartment on Feb. 18 and told her he killed someone — “that Melody girl.” He told Meyer he was with Louisma.

Maybanks pointed out that Van Patten defended Louisma to police, saying he couldn’t kill someone, he was a “soft, chill dude.” He also wanted to know what evidence was found on his phone and what physical evidence police had.

Van Patten never told police he was present but hadn’t participated in the crime.

The evidence “overwhelmingly” showed Van Patten was involved

“every step of the way.”

Maybanks said there was “no rational motive for what happened to Melody Hoffman.”

DEFENSE CLOSING

Erin Carr, one of Van Patten’s lawyers, in his closing, focused on reasonable doubt and said most of the evidence pointed to Louisma as the killer. He said “presence doesn’t equal participation.”

He told the jury to look at the crime, which he called “personal and brutal.” Hoffman and Louisma had the relationship. There was no connection to Van Patten. Why would Van Patten hurt Hoffman, Carr asked.

Carr said the jurors needed more than “presence.” They needed evidence that showed the actions Van Patten took, and they had to be sure — beyond a reasonable doubt — that he was aiding and abetting Louisma, which he said prosecutors failed to do.

Comments: (319) 398-8318; trish.mehaffey@thegazette.com

Library/Many make contributions to project

► FROM PAGE 1A

40,000 square feet, compared to 28,405 square feet at Ladd Library. Cedar Rapids Library Director Dara Schmidt said the larger footprint would allow for expanded material storage, as well as additional programming and meeting space.

“The weight of the responsibility that comes from hundreds of people believing in this project, ... makes us want to make this the best thing we possibly can for the community,” Schmidt said. “And we just hope the community is proud of us when we’re done.”

BUSSE GIFT LATEST IN LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Tyler said discussions around replacing the Ladd Library had been going on for more than a decade.

That goal began to truly materialize in 2020, however, when the late Nadine E. Sandberg made a nearly \$2 million estate gift to purchase the property on which the library is being built.

The project also received \$10 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds — \$6 million allocated from the city of Cedar Rapids and



This drone photo shows progress of the Cedar Rapids Public Library Busse Branch, currently under construction near 20th Avenue and Edgewood Road SW. Once complete, it will replace the existing Ladd Library. (Sovern Photo, via Cedar Rapids Public Library)

another \$4 million from the Linn County Board of Supervisors.

The Cedar Rapids Library Foundation — a nonprofit dedicated to supporting library services — launched its capital campaign in January of 2024 to identify and collect private dollars to further support the project.

The result was a cascade of small, medium and large donations from library fans across Cedar Rapids and beyond — including the Busse Foundation’s \$3.5 million contribution.

“It’s been transformational gift after transformational gift that

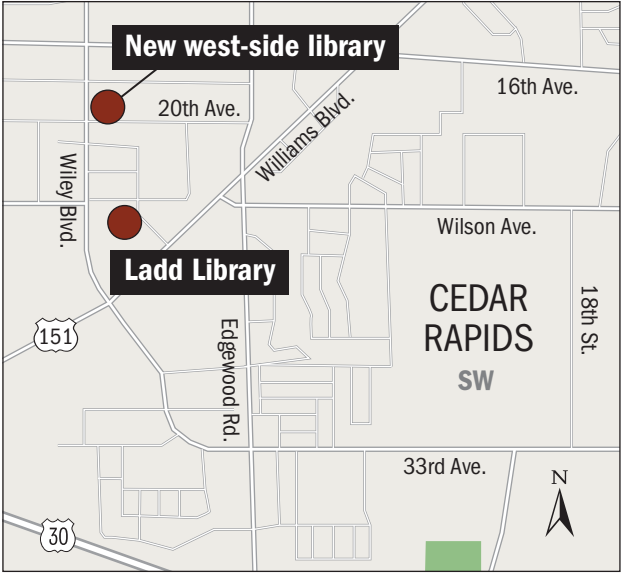
has really made all this possible ... along with a community of volunteers and library supporters who came together to get this project right,” Tyler said.

The Busse Foundation has made several significant charitable donations in recent years, including \$2 million toward the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Corridor for its new downtown Busse Unit.

In a written statement, Jeff Busse — executive director of the family’s foundation — said the library donation was inspired by the family’s love of reading and prior positive experience with

Westside library project

The Cedar Rapids Public Library is working toward building a new westside library to replace the Ladd Library.



Source: City of Cedar Rapids Gazette graphic

the Cedar Rapids library system.

“Our three daughters have always been avid readers and the library played an important role for them growing up,” he wrote. “Clearly the library plays an important role in literacy development, but it has grown to be so much more: A place for people to learn about community resources, a place to gather ... and a

safe space.”

WHAT’S PLANNED?

Schmidt said the Cedar Rapids Public Library’s Busse Branch would act as a new, permanent community gathering space on the city’s west side.

Once open, its collection will be almost 50 percent larger than that currently available at the Ladd Library, with some

of the largest expansions planned for the children’s and young adult sections.

The new building also will have significantly more meeting and community rooms than the Ladd Library, and the new rooms will be better equipped to serve patrons in terms of function, accessibility and privacy.

“We always kind of found a way to make things work (at the Ladd Library), but that doesn’t mean it always works very well,” Schmidt said. “This building was designed from the very beginning with a lot of intentionality behind each decision.”

The facility was laid out to offer increased accessibility features for patrons with disabilities, as well, and visitors also will be able to access a new city park that will be built adjacent to the library.

Crews broke ground on the project last year, and Schmidt said the project remains on track for the planned fall 2026 opening. For future updates on the project and the eventual grand opening, visit crlibrary.org/westside.

Comments: grace.nieland@thegazette.com

To: Chris Casey, Finance Committee Chair
From: Dara Schmidt
Date: 9/25/2025
Subject: September Committee Meeting Financial Report

FY26 Budget

August Financials

There are no significant concerns at 17% of the way through the fiscal year. While total revenues are only at 10% and expenditures are at 20%, these will even out as the year continues. The high expenses are primarily due to annual software contracts that come due in July.

Café Contract

An RFQ for a new café vendor was released on September 23 and stays open until October 6, 2025. Interested parties should apply here:

<https://citycrbids.ionwave.net/PublicDetail.aspx?bidID=1597&SourceType=1>

Janitorial Contract

The current contract with FBG expires in November. An RFP was released: that includes current service levels and an amendment for later add-ons is expected once Westside Library service begins.

Materials Budget

In the midst of FY25, the City of Cedar Rapids received a new opinion from their bond attorneys stating that digital collections where the library does not hold permanent ownership cannot be purchased through bond funds. For FY26, the Library Director and Finance Committee are exploring several scenarios to find the needed \$200K while thinking of future staffing needs for the Westside Library. A finite plan for FY26 will be complete by November to coincide with FY27 budget planning.

FY27 Budget

The FY27 has begun. From now through December the Library Director and Finance Committee will work with the City to create budget requests for FY27 with approval in the spring.

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General Fund - Library

Note - The adjusted budget is to track amendment requests that will be submitted to City Council. Requests are not approved until approved by Council by resolution as part of budget amendment process.

2025-08-31

Account	Current FY 2026 Adjusted Budget	Current FY 2026 Actual	Favorable (Unfavorable) Variance	Percent of Budget Received/ Spent	Current Month FY 2026 Actual	Current FY 2026 Adopted Budget	Budget Change
Revenues							
Taxes							
	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
Licenses & Permits							
	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
Intergovernmental Revenue							
422001 State Operating	115,000.00	-	(115,000.00)	0%	-	115,000.00	-
423000 Local Govt Grants and Reimb	300,000.00	47,330.91	(252,669.09)	16%	(141,992.73)	300,000.00	-
	415,000.00	47,330.91	(367,669.09)	11%	(141,992.73)	415,000.00	-
Charges for Services							
431006 Printing & Duplicating of Form	25,000.00	6,347.94	(18,652.06)	25%	3,242.30	25,000.00	-
431012 Dept Charges-External to City	272,367.00	13,805.68	(258,561.32)	5%	151.25	272,367.00	-
431201 Library User Fees - Not Fines	10,600.00	7,409.08	(3,190.92)	70%	6,766.85	10,600.00	-
	307,967.00	27,562.70	(280,404.30)	9%	10,160.40	307,967.00	-
Fines & Forfeits							
	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
Proceeds of Long Term Liabilities							
	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
Other Revenue							
461001 Building Rental	43,455.00	6,057.45	(37,397.55)	14%	1,004.25	43,455.00	-
471002 Contributions & Donations	70,000.00	-	(70,000.00)	0%	-	70,000.00	-
471003 Sale of Inventory	2,000.00	170.79	(1,829.21)	9%	74.99	2,000.00	-
471005 Other Miscellaneous Revenue	3,500.00	-	(3,500.00)	0%	-	3,500.00	-
471007 Cash Over (Under)	-	2.95	2.95	0%	0.25	-	-
	118,955.00	6,231.19	(112,723.81)	5%	1,079.49	118,955.00	-
Transfers In							
	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
Total Revenues	841,922.00	81,124.80	(760,797.20)	10%	(130,752.84)	841,922.00	-
Expenditures							
Personal Services							
511100 Regular Employees	4,570,526.00	805,836.87	3,764,689.13	18%	386,841.55	4,570,526.00	-
511200 Temporary/Seasonal Employees	43,368.40	14,295.75	29,072.65	33%	10,582.50	43,368.40	-
511300 Overtime	114,773.40	9,140.66	105,632.74	8%	7,846.51	114,773.40	-
511400 Other Special Pays	13,180.00	4,066.12	9,113.88	31%	4,066.12	13,180.00	-
512100 Group Insurance	889,723.00	136,143.14	753,579.86	15%	68,027.58	889,723.00	-

General Fund - Library

approved by Council by resolution as part of budget amendment process.

2025-08-31

		Current FY			Percent of	Current Month	Current FY	
		2026	Current FY	Favorable	Budget	FY	2026	
		Adjusted	2026	(Unfavorable)	Received/	2026	Adopted	Budget
512200	Social Security Contributions	361,272.00	68,564.15	292,707.85	19%	41,313.40	361,272.00	-
512300	Retirement Contribution	446,664.00	85,100.83	361,563.17	19%	51,028.05	446,664.00	-
512400	Unemployment Compensation	-	(5,155.37)	5,155.37	0%	(5,155.37)	-	-
512500	Workers' Compensation	147,525.00	29,690.45	117,834.55	20%	17,809.71	147,525.00	-
512600	Other Employee Benefits	3,658.00	960.42	2,697.58	26%	658.42	3,658.00	-
		6,590,689.80	1,148,643.02	5,442,046.78	17%	583,018.47	6,590,689.80	-
Discretionary Expenses								
521100	Advertising & Marketing	5,000.00	350.00	4,650.00	7%	-	5,000.00	-
521101	Architectural Services	-	-	-	0%	(372.00)	-	-
521104	Consulting & Technical Service	10,000.00	-	10,000.00	0%	-	10,000.00	-
521105	External Contracted Labor	52,274.00	5,725.00	46,549.00	11%	5,725.00	52,274.00	-
521108	Other Professional Services	9,523.63	20.07	9,503.56	0%	(1,424.00)	9,523.63	-
521109	External Banking/Financial Fee	20,700.00	463.81	20,236.19	2%	213.81	20,700.00	-
521110	Security Services	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
522100	Computer Hardware	40,000.00	26,949.58	13,050.42	67%	-	40,000.00	-
522101	Computer Software	222,220.00	161,489.72	60,730.28	73%	113,347.98	222,220.00	-
522102	IT Services - External	40,000.00	12,542.05	27,457.95	31%	6,925.00	40,000.00	-
522104	Building & Grounds Services	25,000.00	845.14	24,154.86	3%	-	25,000.00	-
522105	Equip/Furniture/Fixtures Serv	15,000.00	2,580.00	12,420.00	17%	-	15,000.00	-
523107	Phone Services	32,950.00	5,481.85	27,468.15	17%	2,442.46	32,950.00	-
524101	Rental of Equip & Vehicles	500.00	-	500.00	0%	-	500.00	-
525102	Printing, Binding, & Duplicate	16,950.00	-	16,950.00	0%	-	16,950.00	-
531102	Awards & Recognition	250.00	-	250.00	0%	-	250.00	-
531103	Books & Subscriptions	127,171.80	12,954.04	114,217.76	10%	49.99	127,171.80	-
531105	Cleaning & Janitorial Supplies	1,250.00	115.55	1,134.45	9%	115.55	1,250.00	-
531106	Computer Supplies	5,000.00	465.96	4,534.04	9%	193.30	5,000.00	-
531109	Equipment/Furniture/Fixtures	17,800.00	1,564.77	16,235.23	9%	713.22	17,800.00	-
531116	Office Supplies	15,320.00	1,113.24	14,206.76	7%	394.07	15,320.00	-
531117	Paint Supplies	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
531118	Program Supplies	37,000.00	4,657.18	32,342.82	13%	899.94	37,000.00	-
531119	Shop Supplies	250.00	1,181.99	(931.99)	473%	226.47	250.00	-
531120	Sign & Signal Supplies	-	22.34	(22.34)	0%	22.34	-	-
531123	Uniforms	1,694.00	-	1,694.00	0%	-	1,694.00	-
531124	Personal Protective Gear	-	171.98	(171.98)	0%	43.88	-	-
533100	Building & Grounds Supplies	20,741.28	13.66	20,727.62	0%	-	20,741.28	-
533101	Equip/Furniture/Fixtures Parts	-	71.84	(71.84)	0%	22.80	-	-
542102	Conferences, Training, Travel	23,200.00	1,393.37	21,806.63	6%	1,213.37	23,200.00	-
542103	Dues & Memberships	10,000.00	4,850.00	5,150.00	49%	-	10,000.00	-
542106	Licensing Fees	-	30.00	(30.00)	0%	30.00	-	-
542108	Postage & Freight	13,500.00	599.58	12,900.42	4%	488.59	13,500.00	-

General Fund - Library

approved by Council by resolution as part of budget amendment process.

2025-08-31

		Current FY 2026 Adjusted	Current FY 2026	Favorable (Unfavorable)	Percent of Budget Received/	Current Month FY 2026	Current FY 2026 Adopted	Budget
542111	Mileage Reimbursement	3,000.00	469.49	2,530.51	16%	351.40	3,000.00	-
		766,294.71	246,122.21	520,172.50	32%	131,623.17	766,294.71	-
Other Expenses								
521106	Health Services	-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
522107	Routine City Facility Charges	349,135.23	705.88	348,429.35	0%	352.94	349,135.23	-
522108	Routine City Fleet Charges	899.00	-	899.00	0%	-	899.00	-
523100	Electricity	243,800.00	28,510.15	215,289.85	12%	28,510.15	243,800.00	-
523103	Natural Gas	4,500.00	24.18	4,475.82	1%	24.18	4,500.00	-
524100	Rental of Land & Buildings	249,000.00	220,955.79	28,044.21	89%	181,670.45	249,000.00	-
525104	Liability Insurance	63,422.00	11,527.56	51,894.44	18%	5,285.17	63,422.00	-
525107	Property Insurance	171,950.00	28,658.34	143,291.66	17%	14,329.17	171,950.00	-
525108	Vehicle Insurance	1,500.00	250.00	1,250.00	17%	125.00	1,500.00	-
532101	Gasoline Fuel	498.58	58.28	440.30	12%	58.28	498.58	-
		1,084,704.81	290,690.18	794,014.63	27%	230,355.34	1,084,704.81	-
Capital Outlay								
		-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
Debt Service								
		-	-	-	0%	-	-	-
Transfers Out								
571100	Transfer Out-Inter	20,000.00	20,000.00	-	100%	-	20,000.00	-
		20,000.00	20,000.00	-	100%	-	20,000.00	-
Total Expenditures		8,461,689.32	1,705,455.41	6,756,233.91	20%	944,996.98	8,461,689.32	-
Net Revenues Over / (Under) Expenditures		(7,619,767.32)	(1,624,330.61)	5,995,436.71		(1,075,749.82)	(7,619,767.32)	-



Human Resources Authority

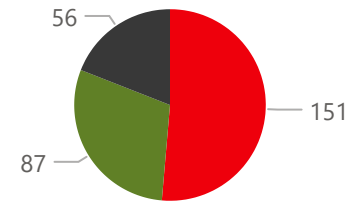
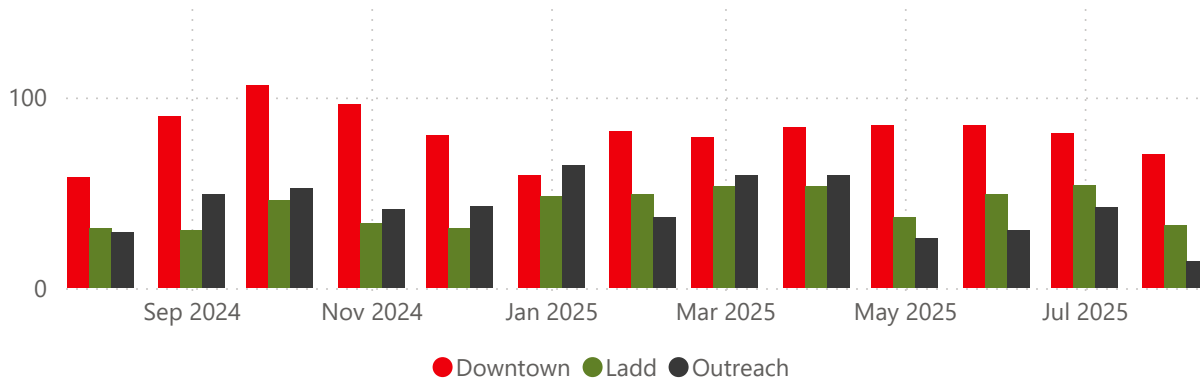
The Cedar Rapids Public Library Board of Trustees delegates its authority for human resources matters (including but not limited to recruitment, evaluation, direction, and terminations) to the Library Director.

Adopted: 12/01/2011

Revised: 10/02/2025

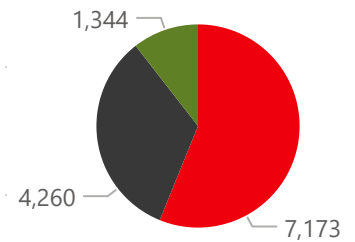
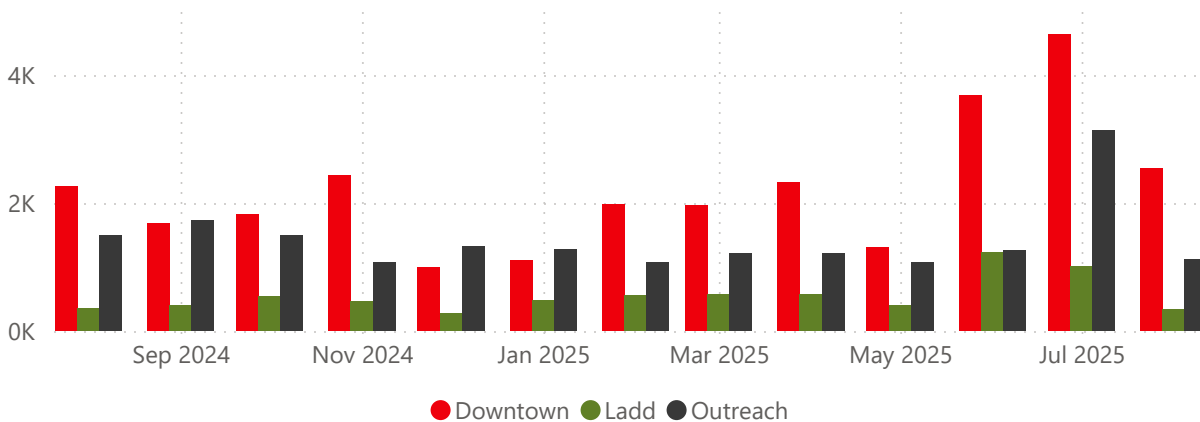
Reviewed: 2013, 02/04/2016, 10/03/19, 1/6/2022, 7/11/2024

Programs



294

of Programs



12,777

of Attendees

Programming kicked off the fall programming season with a return to many regular programs and the additions of some very new! Tiny Art returned, and over 500 patrons registered to pick up their supplies and create a 3x3 piece of art for display. The Exposure Fashion Show gave new and creative designers a chance to showcase their talents and meet with interested patrons. A Book Tasting gave patrons the chance to get their hands on hundreds of new and popular titles with personalized recommendations from the library staff. A number of new programs focused on teen patrons were introduced including a teen hangout program at Ladd, an a teen art program Downtown. And in one week, we welcomed real bats, fake vampires, and real llamas into the library (though not all at once!)

A staff member included me in an email exchange with a volunteer about a craft project for our Books By Mail patrons. As the staff member was thanking the volunteer for all of the thoughtful and generous work her family was doing to support the library and our patrons, the volunteer responded, "Thanks for the opportunity to help our family serve our community! Some of my husband and I's primary goals for our girls are to form meaningful connections with others and know how they can be a part of serving their community even while children. CRPL has been a perfect place for both!"

It is so rewarding to know that volunteers feel the impact of their work in the community! - Jessica Link, Volunteer Supervisor

While helping register a patron for a library card, I heard that one of his dreams is to write his own memoir. It was neat to see how the library became part of his planning process to write his life story as I helped him place holds on writing themed books and access HelpNow by Brainfuse to use its Writing Lab. - Joy Williams, Patron Services Specialist

Borrowing & Collections

47,586

Databases

35,203

Digital

87,632

Physical

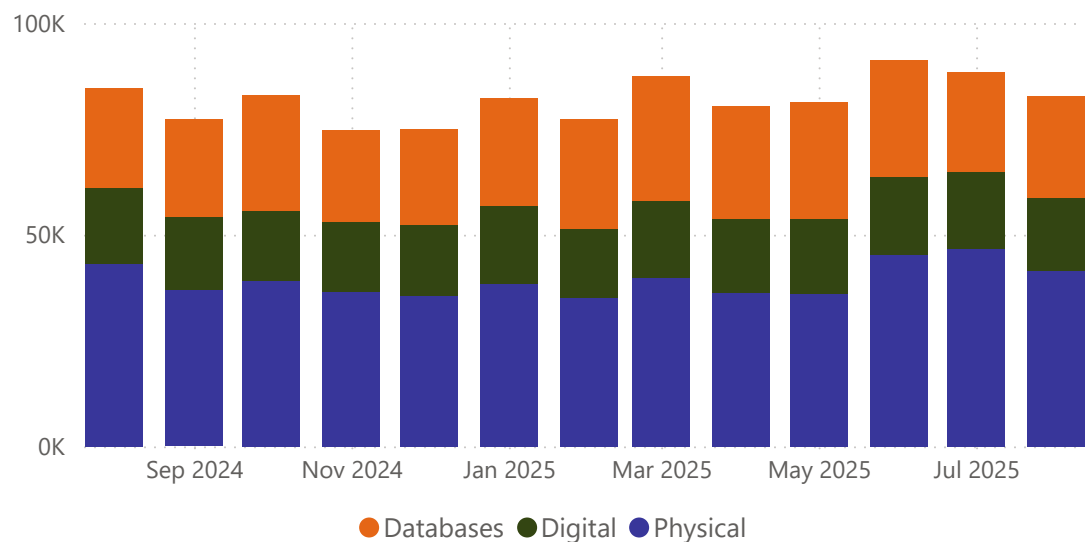
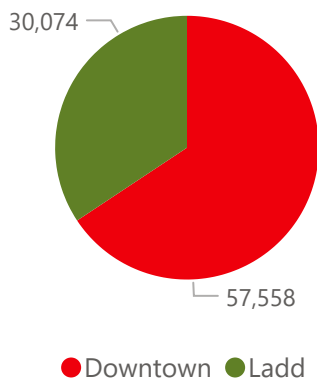
634

Technology

171,055

Total

Physical Circulation, by Location

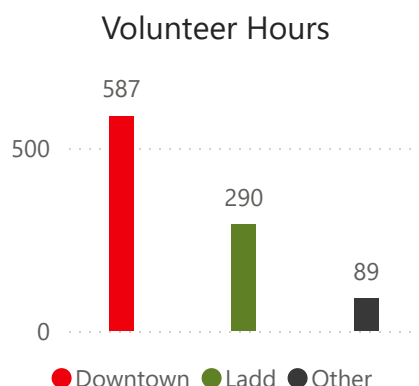


The Materials Department is working through the Fall publishing season when most major authors have new releases coming out. We put these records in the catalog ahead of the release date so patrons can place holds and reserve their spot in line as soon as they hear about the new release. We purchase multiple copies based on anticipated demand and how much budget we have available. Looking at the author's releases in previous Fall publishing seasons can help inform how many to purchase. We've also added another large batch of Tonies to the collection, including children's audiobooks in Tonie format. Tonies have been seeing heavy circulation since they were introduced last year and have been very durable, considering the use by our youngest patrons.

Volunteers

966

Total Hours

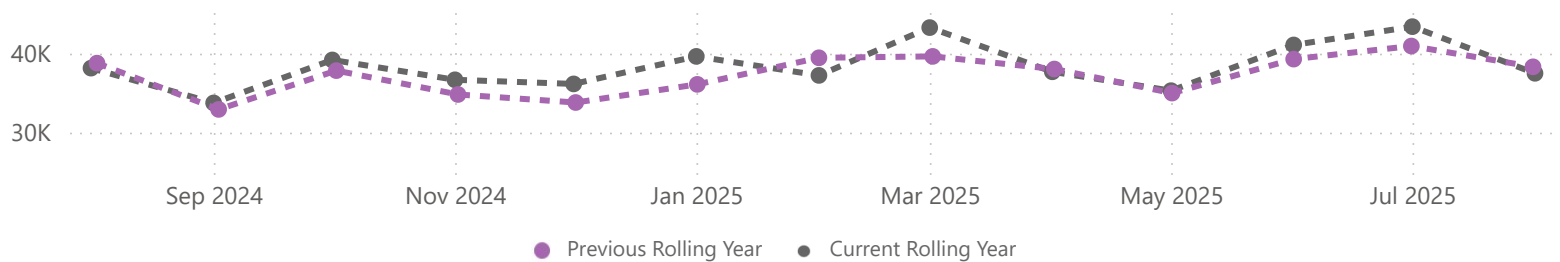
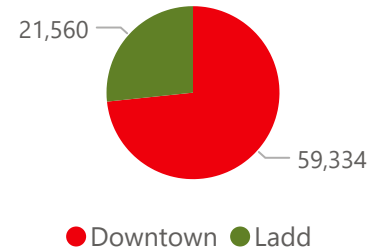


With the start of the school year, we are busy welcoming back our student volunteers. We have groups of students from the Prairiewoods Transition Center and Jefferson High School. These youth are further developing their job skills, gaining experience in working with the public, and learning how to be successful in a work environment as they transition from school to independent work. It is rewarding to see them grow and to hear how much they value being a part of the Library's team. Volunteer Hours in August 2025: 410

Visits

80,894

Physical Visits

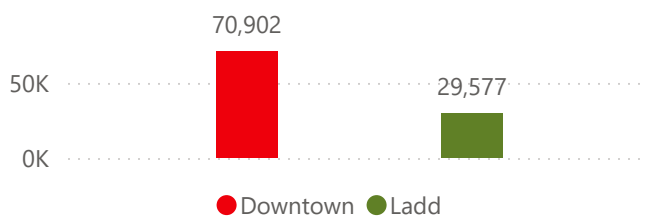


We have seen a very smooth start to the school year. Previous work to address last year's issues along with ongoing work during the summer have proved to be successful thus far. The Public Service Department has remained engaged and committed to this work. As fall has now started, the team will start reviewing and making plans for our winter months. Typically the change in weather sees a shift in usage and this is a good time to review procedures, practices, and potential issues we typically see associated with winter months.

I was able to help a patron find some books from the Book Nook to share with some friends of his -- one is a young person of Native American heritage, so we found a book on multicultural families and embracing our differences. His other friend is a middle aged woman struggling with mental illness who can't leave her home, so he wanted to find books that are both approachable and inspirational. The patron was thrilled that we had books that met these needs, and handed me cash to donate to Friends twice within our conversation, because he was so thankful for what the library does. I was encouraged by his intentionality to bless a couple people in his life. He said, "at my age I realize I can't save the world, but I can help one or two people as best I can." I think that is a beautiful picture of our community, and a great goal to strive for in our work each day! - Alyssa Telecky, Patron Services Specialist

Technology Access

PC Uses



274,276

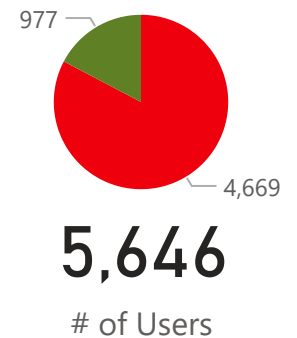
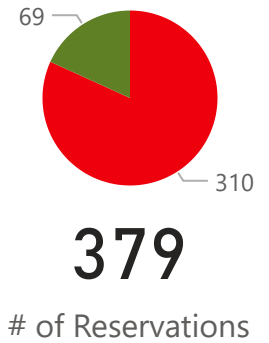
Virtual Visits

131,967

WiFi Sessions

The Technology Solutions team has been busy working on timelines for equipment purchases for the new Westside Library. Thankfully, many of the supply chain issues during COVID have eased so hardware and equipment doesn't require as much lead time on orders. The IT team has also been overseeing updates to the materials handling system (the sorter). The physical components get regular maintenance to keep them running smoothly but the software also gets regular updates too. The vendor performs these updates but the IT team handles troubleshooting and day-to-day issues themselves.

Meeting Room Use



During this month, the library was still fairly busy despite vacations and back to school preparation, hosting with 187 reservations for 2591 people. Several businesses and non-profits took advantage of the space with trainings and meetings as well as local education events, such as study groups, planning sessions, and meetings. The Heartland Marimba Concert and a screening of the documentary *Plastic People* attracted interest and attendees.

Events that create social connection, such as prayer groups, book clubs, naturalists and photography clubs and youth sports teams, also met in our spaces.

Community Relations has been working on some fall pieces for our programming team, as well as finalizing our big project for this time of year: our annual report. We have had the chance to gather stories all year long that tell the impact of our library on our patrons and community. Our report will share stories of connection, creation, and innovation by our staff and the people who work with us throughout the year. It's a wonderful chance to reflect on the work we do and to celebrate.

We are also working on supporting the new Cedar Rapids Storytellers Festival, happening Oct. 1-4 in a few different locations around the city. We're lucky to be hosting most of the programs, and the amount of talent presenting at this festival is incredible. Everyone should check it out.

Amber set up our voting information table this month (and it looks terrific). Not two minutes after Amber was finished, the very first patron who walked into Ladd went straight over to the table (it's impossible to miss), took a look over everything, and grabbed several forms to take home before the patron headed over to get their holds. Having these types of community election/voting educational materials available to every patron is so valuable!
- Jo-Ann Cook, Public Service Associate

ANNUAL REPORT

fiscal year 2025





From the Director & Board President

At the Cedar Rapids Public Library, we are always looking for ways to grow – to reach more of our community, build more connections, and welcome more people in.

We are looking for ways to turn big dreams into bigger realities.

We broke ground on the new Busse Branch in October 2024, and as the walls have gone up, we've reflected on how this building symbolizes so much more than a physical space. It's a manifestation of our dedication to serving all parts of our community with the very best we can offer them.

We could have been content with the status quo, but that's not who we are.

Instead, we've been busy finding more ways to encourage literacy and learning for our youngest readers, and we've been working to increase access for our oldest patrons, even when they can't make it here physically.

We've planned programs for teens in need of a fun place to be after school and for kids just learning to read. We've supported jobseekers and small business owners. We've provided books for every age, every reader, and every interest. We've tried to reflect our community, and to welcome everyone in.

We'll hold the grand opening for the new library in 2026. It will be a celebration, and the start of a new chapter - one where we continue to grow alongside our community.

We can't wait to welcome you in.



Dara Schmidt
Director
Cedar Rapids Public Library



Monica Challenger
President, Board of Trustees
Cedar Rapids Public Library

Cedar Rapids Public Library Board of Trustees FY2025

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Member of the Foundation Board

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Building Committee Chair &
Member of the Foundation Board

Rafael Jacobo

Board Member

Susan McDermott

Board Member
Personnel & Policy Committee Chair



Vision:
My library
 champions discovery,
 builds connections, and
 strengthens community.

Mission:
Welcome to all.





Mega Readers has Mega Impact

At Little Cupcakes Child Care, Assistant Teacher Alyssa Henry just had to pull out a stack of books for the room of one-year-olds to gather around, excited to hear a story.

The eight toddlers in the room were among the 385 kids who completed the library's Mega Readers program over the summer.

The program was a new addition to the Summer Reading Challenge this year. It invited daycares, preschools, and summer learning sites across Cedar Rapids to track their reading together.

The library dropped off Mega Readers game boards to each class, and students marked off a space on the board for every 15 minutes they read. When the class reached 600 minutes, the library delivered a free book for each student and a Mega Readers certificate for the classroom.

"Mega Readers was created to give schools and daycares a way to easily participate in the Summer Reading Challenge as a group, and to encourage them to incorporate regular reading time into their summer programs," Library Programming Manager Kevin Delecki said. "One of the library's goals is increasing literacy, and we want to help teachers with tools to motivate their students and to make reading fun."

At Little Cupcakes, Henry said her classroom increased the number of times they were reading to the children each day, from once a day to two or three times a day.

"All the kids loved reading the books. We found the kids enjoy it a lot more than just doing activities," she said. "A lot of them had a lot more attention on us, and it really made the day go a lot smoother."

At St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Director of Early Childhood Education Julie Hanlin said their five summer daycare classrooms participated, with 55 kids ranging from infants to 10-year-olds.

"It's been super fun. I love that the chart got the kids excited. A bright, colorful chart has been fun for them to engage with," she said.

She also said participating led them to increase the frequency of reading in each classroom, and that the older kids were more motivated to read by themselves during free time. Their teachers took them down to the church's library to pick out books, something they hadn't done before.

"It energized them," she said. "And it reminded them how fun reading is, and that it's not just something to do during the school year."

Older children benefited from the program, too, such as the middle school students – called scholars – at Tanager's Freedom Schools. The scholars met for six weeks throughout the summer at Roosevelt Creative Corridor Business Academy, with reading a key part of each day. Tanager School Based Therapist Paula Cox said their scholars improved an average of almost two grade levels in reading skills over the summer.

Jordan Pinckney is Tanager's Freedom Schools Project Director. He said when he heard about the Mega Readers program, he immediately knew he wanted his scholars involved.

"I was like, we are going to compete with the rest of the city," he said. "When you eat an elephant, you start with a single bite. Six hundred minutes sounds like a lot, but when you're tracking it each day, you realize it's possible."

One seventh grade girl participating in the program said she liked reading books that told stories of Black history she might not learn in a traditional classroom. She said the Mega Readers program helped her realize just how much she was accomplishing.

"Tracking the reading every day, I really got to see my efforts and everything I put into it. I didn't know it was that much," she said.

Another scholar agreed.

"It was a reflection of how much work you did. So when I looked at it, I would feel honored," she said.

Servant Leader Intern Abby Bartz, who helped lead the program, said she saw the impact over the summer.

"I thought the chart was a good visual, and it gave them a sense of accomplishment," she said. "It gave them something to work toward."



"During the Summer Reading Challenge kickoff at Ladd Library, a patron noticed the summer QuickPicks that had just been put on display and was thrilled to find three books that she had really been wanting to read.

"She couldn't believe that we had them all in since all three are popular titles currently. She showed them to her young children and told them that their mom had found some great books to read this summer too, which just shows how the Summer Reading Challenge is fun for all ages!"

– Elizabeth G.,
Public Service Associate



723 children registered,
in **38** classrooms,
at **13** locations,
including schools,
preschools, and daycares



385 children completed
the program,
in **26** classrooms,
at **10** locations



231,000 minutes of
reading logged by
Mega Readers





Building Big Dreams

What started as a big dream began growing into a reality this fiscal year, as community members and local leaders came together to break ground on the new Busse Branch on Oct. 18, 2024.

“As we break ground today, we’re not just building a library, we are creating a space for endless adventures that will inform, inspire, and empower generations to come,” Library Board of Trustees President Monica Challenger said at the groundbreaking ceremony. “Libraries are gateways to adventures, where every book opens a new world. This new branch will bring those worlds closer to enrich the lives of our Westside community and the communities beyond.”

Work has been steady since then. The structure of the building is in place, walls have gone up, the roof is on, and framing has begun inside. Meanwhile, the library team has been busy finalizing decisions about interior furnishings and furniture.



The new library is located behind Aldi’s between Edgewood Road and 20th Avenue SW. The site will also include a new park, under development by Cedar Rapids Parks and Recreation Department, as well as a new road. Sandberg Lane will honor Nadine E. Sandberg, a library lover whose transformational estate gift helped kick off this project in 2020.

The new library will cost less than \$25 million. The City of Cedar Rapids has allocated \$6 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and the Linn County Board of Supervisors has allocated \$4 million in ARPA funds. The Sandberg gift of \$2 million to the Library Foundation was used to purchase the land, and additional funds have come in from private and corporate gifts and grants to the Foundation’s Inspiring Big Dreams campaign. A \$3.5 million gift from the Busse Foundation closed out the capital campaign. In recognition of this extraordinary gift, the new library facility will be named the Cedar Rapids Public Library Busse Branch.

If you drive past the site of the new library, you will see that construction continues, with a grand opening anticipated in 2026.



“A new U.S. citizen and first-time voter came into Ladd Library wanting to get some help understanding what to expect on Election Day. I sat with her, and we looked up her sample ballot together and printed it out so she could take it home. I explained to her how she would need to fill in the circles and to read the instructions carefully, because sometimes you could only select one candidate, but other times you could select two, or three, etc. I also explained that if she didn’t want to make a selection, she could leave it blank, and that was OK, too.

“I told her what to expect when she checks-in on Election Day and that I was going to be one of the election workers. She then shared with me that she was an election worker from her native country (Democratic Republic of Congo), and we had an interesting chat together. I congratulated her on her new citizenship, and she told me she felt more at ease after talking with me, because she knew better what to expect. We make so many important and meaningful connections during our day, and this is one that will sit with me for a long time.”

- Jo-Ann C., Public Service Associate



A Spot at the Table

Walk into Beems Auditorium at the Downtown Library on any given Wednesday evening and you'll encounter epic battles, mythical creatures, and magic spells. This is the library's Dungeons & Dragons club, where people of all ages gather each week for campaigns and camaraderie.

Programming Specialist John Zbanek-Hill started the club in 2022, with just a handful of participants. It has since grown to an average of 27 players each week.

"It's for everybody. There really is a spot for you around the table, regardless of your age or ability," he said. "A lot of people who have been looking for a place of welcome have found that here."

Lexi Bolin, 21, has been participating since the club's early days. She's played Dungeons & Dragons since middle

school but couldn't find a place to play after graduating – until the library started the group.

"I remember coming here with like three other people," she said. "I haven't stopped coming since."

Dungeons & Dragons is an interactive role-playing game, so participants create their own characters and then work together to build the story as they go. That's its own form of magic.

"You can't do it on your own. You need the collective narrative and team effort to make sure everything works," said Library Volunteer Stephen Swiderski, who helps with the club. "Everybody gets the opportunity to have the spotlight and be the special one, but they also have to work together."



Bolin said she likes the fantasy aspect, but she also enjoys the social aspect of Dungeons & Dragons.

"I like the whole role-playing aspect. I like that it's creative," she said. "I've also made a lot of friends here that I probably wouldn't have made in real life."

The club was originally designed as an after-school program aimed at elementary and middle-school students, but all ages showed up. Kids, teens, and adults all participate alongside each other. Some parents come with their children to play together.

"You get different walks of life, different age groups, telling the same story, and that really impacts the story," Zbanek-Hill said. "It's the idea of welcoming, of the social interactions, of finding your place in the community, of connecting people. Some of our players have become leaders, with their own tables."

Swiderski is one of them. He said volunteering with the club is about more than loving a game.

"There is an abundant lack of third spaces in society now," he said. "It's nice to have a place where people can

come and spend time where they don't have to spend money and can just be with other people. I thought, I have an obligation to do what I can to support the library. If I believe a place like this should exist, I should do what I can to make sure it does."

The library has also hosted Magic the Gathering and Trading Card Game groups. The Trading Card Game group will meet again next summer.

Zbanek-Hill and Swiderski said these programs are fun, but they're also teaching different forms of literacy.

"We kind of covertly teach kids good life skills – basic math, reading comprehension, and teamwork," Swiderski said. "And we create a pretty welcoming environment where everyone can be themselves. I wish that something like this existed when I was younger."

On a recent Wednesday, Kelvin Witmer, 14, wasn't concerned with what he might be learning. He said he just likes the club because it is fun.

"It's a good stress reliever," he said. "Because you get to do stuff you don't get to do in real life. You get to kill monsters and cast magic spells."



"I recently had a shift in the Teen section Downtown, and a coworker and I were chatting with a couple of teen patrons. It's really admirable how open these young people are to share about their lives, what they are learning, and the changes they want to see in our society. We talked about art, voting, the housing crisis in our city, and personal dreams for the future.

"The teens involved in the conversation had very different backgrounds and experiences from one another, so it was especially interesting to hear from both of them and have all of our perspectives grow by learning from each other. Because the library is a safe space to just 'hang out,' we get to build these connections!"

- Alyssa T., Patron Services Specialist





Growing a Love of Reading

In September 2024, the library launched a new reading challenge, 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten – and participating pre-K children have read almost 54,000 books since then.

Caregivers track each book they read with their child, from birth until they start kindergarten. A simple way for families and children to build a love of reading together, the program is part of a national effort to help prepare kids for school by building reading habits. It also seeks to encourage caregiver and child bonding through reading.

“1,000 Books Before Kindergarten was started to encourage parents to read with their children before school begins, because literacy development starts at a very young age,” said Programming Manager Kevin Delecki. “It was designed to follow our Growing Readers reading program and complement Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library.”

Growing Readers encourages expectant parents to develop a reading habit even before their child is born, and Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library sends free books to Cedar Rapids children each month until they turn 5.

Delecki said all three programs work together toward the library’s goal of supporting literacy.

According to 1,000 Books, the nonprofit that started the nationwide initiative:

“Numerous studies estimate that as many as one in five children have difficulties learning to read. Reading has been associated as an early indicator of academic success. Public formal education does not typically start until ages 5-6. Before then, parents and caregivers are the first education providers during the 0-5 early critical years.”

In the first nine months of the program, more than 300 children registered, and 21 read more than 1,000 books.

“Finding ways to motivate kids and build excitement around books is fundamental to what we do,” Delecki said. “We’re excited to watch this program continue to grow.”

Learn more: CRLibrary.org/children/1000books



“On my phone back-up shift, last Friday, I received a call from a patron asking if we had any resources/programs for people learning or speaking German language. My immediate answer was ‘no, I am sorry we do not’. But then I started peeling the layers in the question and gave her not one but several options: Mango Languages, Foreign Language Films (DVDs) in German, Books on Learning German, Suggestion to Post on Cedar Rapids-specific social media groups and making meeting room reservations at the library (yes, free of cost!) for the group’s weekly/monthly meeting and last but not the least...a suggestion to use the ‘suggest a program’ link on the library’s website. It was a win-win situation. Patron felt satisfied with the options that they had and felt they were set for success after our conversation. I felt satisfied that we have so much to offer and ‘no’ is never an answer here.”

– **Sampurna G.,**
Patron Services Specialist





A Different Kind of Story Time

Maxine Valenta, 93, has lived a life worthy of stories.

Her husband Don passed away three years ago, after 71 years of marriage. They had married at age 20, after dating in secret for years – he was Catholic, and she wasn't, and their families didn't approve. Valenta had left her parents and their farmhouse at age 15 and moved into town alone, where she worked as a waitress to support herself while finishing high school.

"My father didn't want me to go to high school, but my mother insisted," she said.

The couple had three children, and they ran a restaurant in Traer in the 1960s while he went to college. She later worked as an administrative assistant in different offices and even got her CDL license so she could drive a truck hauling fertilizer.

She moved to Cedar Rapids in 2019 from Traer to be closer to her daughter. Living with macular degeneration, she has been slowly losing her sight since 2001.

"But I'm not complaining about anything at all," she said. "I can't travel, but the library has kept me involved."

That's because she gets regular visits from Cedar Rapids Public Library Books by Delivery volunteers. The program matches homebound library patrons with volunteers, who bring them books and other materials on a regular basis. The library also has a Books by Mail program, which sends books to homebound patrons via the mail.

"At its core, the Books By Delivery program facilitates access to the library and fosters meaningful community connections," said Patron Services Specialist Michele Prostine, who coordinates the Books by Mail and Books by Delivery programs. "It's a two-way exchange — volunteers give their time and compassion, and in return gain a strong sense of purpose. Patrons not only reconnect with library services, but also with the community around them. It's about mutual support, shared experience, and building relationships that might not happen otherwise."

The Books by Delivery program started as a pilot with five patrons and four volunteers. This year, it grew to 12 active patrons and seven volunteers, with more coming on board soon. One of the newest volunteers is Valenta's housekeeper and friend, LaDonna Jacobson, who told Library Volunteer Coordinator Jessica Link she was so moved by the impact she saw the program making that she wanted to get involved.

"It's a win-win-win," Link said. "The volunteers really get a lot of personal satisfaction from participating, the patrons feel connected to the library and the community, and the library is able to overcome barriers for members of our community we wouldn't be able to reach otherwise."

Books by Delivery visits also bring social interactions and camaraderie. Volunteers Martha McClurg and her two daughters deliver audiobooks to Maxine's house. She often has treats set aside for their visits.

"They're so sweet, and I just love them," Valenta said. "Books by Delivery keeps me involved in the community."

She has kept active even as her eyesight has worsened. She still makes her own bread and cooks as much from scratch as she can, and she makes a point to go on regular walks around her neighborhood with her walker, up to 2.5 miles a day.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Maxine was in four book clubs – two at the Traer Public Library, one in her Cedar Rapids neighborhood, and one at Ladd Library.

Since she can't drive anymore, she has relied on books to expand her world. And they do – she said she often reads and listens to audiobooks four or five hours a day.

She listens to audiobooks on Libby with her library card, gets audiobooks from the Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, and gets Playaway audiobooks from the Cedar Rapids Public Library via Books by Delivery.

"My books are mostly what I do. I'm reading pretty much all the time," she said. "I read a lot of books. I always have. I love libraries."

Get involved:

Learn more about Books by Delivery and Books by Mail at [CRLibrary.org/books-by-mail](https://crlibrary.org/books-by-mail)

Learn more about volunteering at the library at [CRLibrary.org/volunteer](https://crlibrary.org/volunteer)



"While working at the front desk, a woman came in with her elderly father. He was hard of hearing and of sight. He spent time using a study room, where his daughter was able to use the space to assist her father with some paperwork he needed to complete.

"As they were leaving, the father approached the desk and told a story of how he had always loved Ladd Library. Everyone was always so kind to him and, though he couldn't really read anymore, it always made him happy to interact with friendly staff and listen to our Christmas CDs every year. He then thanked staff for all they did for him over the years and left happily."

- Lexi B., Public Service Associate





Library Services Bring Big Value

When Missa Coffman and Marios Liolios were planning a class on Japanese stab binding, a form of book binding, they needed to cut very precise holes in dozens of book covers, plus the paper to go inside each book. To do so by hand would have been extremely time consuming – and it wouldn't be as neat and precise as they needed it to be.

"This would have taken several days, if not a week," Liolios said.

So they turned to the library's Maker Spaces, where a laser cutter made the project easy to complete quickly. They were able to offer book binding kits to class attendees, as well as create book kits to sell at their small business, Tree of Liminality.

"It's just a nice thing for us to have access to," Coffman said. "I think it's wonderful to have the Maker Spaces as a community resource center. It's really impressive."

The Tree of Liminality has a small retail space and the Staircase Gallery, where local art is displayed, at 1301 Third St. SE in the New Bohemia neighborhood. They offer a variety of artistic services, from art matting and framing to typing poems to consulting on creative projects.

In conjunction with the Farmhouse Art Collective, a nonprofit they help run, they also teach a wide range of art classes, including the book binding class.

"The Maker Spaces offer equipment that would be cost prohibitive for us to own a whole closet of," Coffman said.

That equipment, which also includes 3D printers, sewing machines, Cricuts, and more, are just one way the library helps small businesses and drives economic development in Cedar Rapids.

The library also provides Wi-Fi and computer access, printers, copiers, scanners, and fax machines people utilize for their business needs. Library spaces also make an impact, with study rooms for taking video calls, meeting rooms for business gatherings, and a quiet place for remote workers. Library staff help patrons use all of these resources, plus navigate the internet, find information, and more.

Then there are digital databases, where people can do market research, learn new skills, and do things like apply for grants.

The Cedar Rapids MICRO Loan program is also co-hosted by the library – people interested in a small business loan from the program can meet with trained librarians to work on their business plan and application. A small collection of business reference books complements the program.

And at the Opportunity Center at Ladd Library, staff help job seekers with classes on resume building, interviewing, and job searching, as well as offer one-on-one help for people navigating the job market. RIVA AmeriCorps Vista members joined the team in FY2025 to help connect immigrants and refugees to jobs and resources.

"The Opportunity Center takes the resources and services the library offers – like access to technology, information, and support – and actively uses them to improve people's lives in visible, meaningful ways," Opportunity Center Program Coordinator Erin Norwood said.

Together, all these programs lead to a big impact. Using a formula from the Urban Library Council, the Cedar Rapids Public Library provided nearly \$2.5 million dollars in value to entrepreneurs and businesses in FY2025.

"It's not just about helping people find employment—it's about empowering individuals with the skills, tools, and confidence they need to improve their lives," Norwood said. "The services support workforce development, reduce inequality, and promote social mobility. That, in turn, strengthens the local economy and builds a more resilient, self-sufficient community."



Learn More:

Maker Spaces: [CRLibrary.org/maker-spaces](https://crlibrary.org/maker-spaces)

Opportunity Center: [CRLibrary.org/opportunity-center](https://crlibrary.org/opportunity-center)

Micro Loans: [CRLibrary.org/micro-loans](https://crlibrary.org/micro-loans)

Tree of Liminality: treeofliminality.com



 **Mission:
WELCOME
TO ALL.**

"A patron who has been coming into the library to work on her college degree just graduated. She often would ask for my help or other staff members to assist her with understanding her assignments or help with Excel. She was a regular for over a year in the evening, diligently working on her degree after working during the day.

"She was so excited that she had passed that she came into the library and showed me her graduation photos. I was so proud of her and congratulated her on her hard work."

- Elysha H., Patron Services Specialist

OUR LIBRARY IN 2025 BY THE NUMBERS



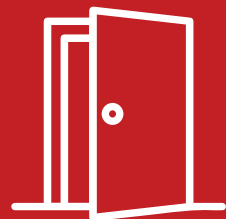
Website Users
231,378



Connections
to Wifi
111,858



Public Computer
Sessions
86,773



Visits
458,843



Meeting
Room Users
42,398



Total Programs
2,031



Program
Attendees
51,002



REVENUE*

Intergovernmental Grants	\$367,180
Other Revenue	\$73,978
Charges for Services	\$352,668
Transfer in	\$302,203
City of Cedar Rapids	\$7,481,070
Expected Total Revenue	\$8,577,099

EXPENSES*

Personnel Services	\$6,153,120
Discretionary Expenses	\$1,076,855
Other Expenses	\$1,015,521
Capital Outlay	\$9,400
Transfers Out	\$322,203
Total Expenditures	\$8,577,099

*General fund only



Database Uses
304,694



In-House Circulation
23,792



Physical Materials
Circulated
467,039

Digital Materials
Circulated
210,352

Total Circulation
1,005,877

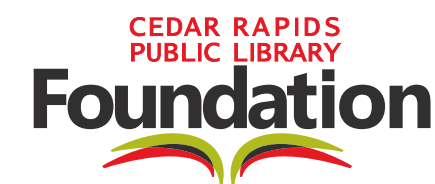
Volunteers
199

Volunteer
Hours
5,026

Volunteer
Value
\$100,358



**Our Supporting Organizations Make
the Above and Beyond Possible**





Phone: (319) 261-7323 | website: CRLibrary.org | email: info@crlibrary.org

Calendar of Initiatives: FY26-27 Plan Year One									
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