

Central Arkansas Library System  
Board of Directors Meeting  
May 27, 2021  
Hybrid Meeting: Zoom Video Call and In-person  
(In-person: Main Library's Darragh Center)

Board members in attendance were Nancy Rousseau, Brandon Grice, Marian Berry, Audrey Evans, Susana O'Daniel, Andre Guerrero, Marilyn Porter, Stacey McAdoo, John Bush, Stephanie Gibson-Branton, Bob Brown, and Kelly Moss. Mandy Gill was absent.

Staff in attendance were Nate Coulter, David Stricklin, Jo Spencer, Lance Ivy, Joe Hudak, Nathan James, Nathan Smith, Tameka Lee, Carol Coffey, Mark Christ, Eliza Borné, Kay Kay DeRossette, Pam Rudkin, Ellen Samples, Candace White, Kate Matthews, and Lisa Donovan.

Also in attendance was Joe Flaherty, reporter from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

### **Action Items**

#### **1. Approval of the April Minutes**

Rousseau asked the Board to approve the April Minutes with submitted corrections.

Berry moved to approve the April Minutes as corrected. Grice seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

#### **2. April Financials**

Grice reported that as of April 30, 2021, CALS assets totaled \$102,135,441 with net losses of \$3,037,609. He said that revenue from parking has continued to increase, but overall revenue is down for the year. Grice also said that property tax income is up 9 percent over the previous year. He noted that property tax income usually picks up later in the year, and he anticipated this being true in 2021.

Brown noted that major gifts and grants are listed together as a lump sum in the monthly Financial Reports. He asked if it would be possible for the Board to be informed when major gifts and memorial donations are given to the library.

Borné said that she does send regular updates to Finance Director Spencer when large gifts come in, but she can also begin submitting regular updates to the Board as well.

On behalf of the Finance Committee, Grice moved to file the April Financials for audit.

### **3. Approval of Resolution to File for Millage Election**

Coulter said that CALS has been considering holding an election to ask to increase the operational millage for CALS. If it passes, the millage will ensure that CALS remains financially stable and can continue providing a high level of service and keep up with the rising costs of some services. He believes that the library has done its best to be a responsible steward of taxpayer money by eliminating subsidies to nonresidents (including residents of North Little Rock) who do not pay taxes to support CALS services, consolidating retail operations, expanding rental revenues, and by reducing staff by 7 percent to ensure that CALS is providing the best level of service with the current funding it has.

However, these efforts alone will not be sufficient to close the gap in the operational funding caused by the rising expense of materials on multiple formats and the decision several years ago to no longer rely on borrowed funds to meet those expenses. Coulter emphasized that this is not an emergency now, but CALS should do this sooner rather than later to avoid it becoming an emergency and the difficult choices of what services to eliminate in an emergency.

He noted that the current operational millage in LR was set in 2007, and that since that time CALS has added two new libraries, a theater, and numerous larger meeting rooms in LR, all of which have added pressure to the operational budget.

Coulter asked the Board if they had any questions.

Guerrero asked what the board members' role would be if this operational millage does make it onto the ballot this year.

Coulter responded that he has been in conversations with a non-profit organization called Every Library that helps library staff and library boards from around the country find the best way to discuss the millage election without encountering conflict of interest issues. His understanding from those conversations is that CALS staff and CALS Board member can educate the public about the election and make them aware of the election, but not advocate that anyone vote a certain way while acting in their role as a library staff member or a board member.

Rousseau asked if this means that she would not be allowed to email her education list serves to make them aware of the election and promote any kind of stance.

Coulter said this would be a question for Every Library since they would have a better sense of how that approach may be perceived.

Berry moved to approve the Resolution to File for a Millage Election. Grice seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

## Information Items

### 1. Director's Report

Coulter said that he would like to formally welcome new Board Member Susana O'Daniel to the CALS Board of Directors. She graciously agreed to step into the spot formerly held by Karama Neal, who had to resign after receiving an opportunity to work in the Biden Administration. He also wanted to say goodbye to Board Member Kelly Moss, who has had to resign because she felt she could not give her full attention to the board in addition to work and home responsibilities. Moss has been on the board since 2017 and has been a valuable member to the board the last four years. She will be missed, but CALS hopes to have her replacement appointed sometime in June by the City Board of Jacksonville.

He noted that he gave the CALS Board a written copy of his report ahead of the meeting, but he wanted to highlight a few other items of interest:

- *Upward Trending Statistics* – Coulter noted that CALS statistics were becoming more positive as of April. He asked Patron Experience and Library Analytics Coordinator Carol Coffey to speak on this more. Coffey said CALS circulation numbers have almost risen to pre-pandemic levels. She said that door counts have a way to go, but she believes they will continue to rise going into the summer. She added that almost all our numbers are positive, which essentially means the library vital signs look good. Coulter added that Coffey said she reports all the statistics to the Board of the Arkansas State Library.
- *Patron Complaint About Empty Shelves* – Coulter said that CALS staff recently received a complaint from a patron extremely concerned about the emptier shelves at the Main Library. Coulter said that Deputy Director Nathan James could speak to this since he oversees Collection Development Efforts. James noted that weeding, or the process of checking the collection and making sure that items that are not circulating are taken off the shelves to make room for new and more popular titles, is a common practice in all libraries across the country. CALS has historically not done this in a systemic way, which is why the most recent weeding of the Main Library collection looked more drastic. He noted that many of the items removed had not circulated more than a handful of times for more than 10 years, which indicated they are not of interest to CALS community members anymore. James said that weeding is not just done based on circulation numbers; the staff also looks at historical value or special value to a particular location's local community when making these decisions.
  - Rousseau noted that weeding is done regularly at the Little Rock Central High School Library, and it is common practice at many other school libraries.
  - James added that there was a misconception that the items removed from the collection are thrown away; this is not the case. Some of the books do go to the Friends of CALS Basement Book Sale; many of them are donated to Better World Books, an organization that sells books and donates them (CALS does receive

- some rebate money from this); some are donated to other local organizations such as schools and nonprofits; and books in rough shape or not resalable are recycled.
- Brown said he understood that there was an increased desire for digital materials and asked if that was being considered when evaluating the collection and purchasing new materials. James said that while digital items are increasing, CALS digital collection did not increase as much as other places. The Central Arkansas area has a lower level of tech saturation than others (i.e., fewer members of the community have access to personal devices and reliable internet connections), so digital options have not been as popular here as they have in other places. However, CALS is aware of that balance and keeping an eye on it.
- Evans asked if she could get more information about how library users can request CALS purchase specific digital items. The process was not made clear, and she is a regular consumer of digital content. James said it was possible for library patrons to request titles (e-books and digital audiobooks) on both the CALS website and on Overdrive, CALS digital collection platform; Digital Programming Coordinator Nathan Smith will do a quick demo at the end of the meeting to walk the Board members through this process.
- Guerrero asked if it would be worth CALS creating an ad-hoc committee of readers that Collection Development could speak to on this issue. James said that it is something worth considering; CALS definitely wants to receive more input from the community about the collection and the other services it provides.
  
- *Update on Millie Brooks Library* – Coulter said the micro-tech library in Wrightsville, AR, has been very positively received in the community. He said that CALS has decided to boost the number of hours it is currently open and provide more programs there to better serve the needs of the Wrightsville area community.
  
- *CALS Staff Vaccination Rates* – Coulter reported that as of this week 77 percent of CALS staff has been fully vaccinated.

## 2. Other Items

Brown asked if CALS had been in touch with Scott McLane from Pathway to Freedom to see if it would be possible for prisoners to be used as part of the work release program. Coulter said he had been in touch and that he and Director of Operations Lance Ivy have been trying to find ways that it might work. Ivy noted that one issue that has come up is that the prisoners are not allowed to work around children, which means that they would not be able to work on any of our grounds during our hours of operation (9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday) when CALS is open to the public, which greatly limits what is possible. He said that they will continue to communicate and see if something can be worked out even with a more limited scope.

Guerrero asked if CALS had considered using the prisoners help on Sundays when the libraries are currently closed. Coulter said that right now they are only available from Monday through

Friday until 3:30 p.m. so that is not currently an option, but there may be a way to create some early morning shifts for them to do some landscaping/grounds work.

Nathan James said that now that the mask mandate in Little Rock has expired and the CDC has relaxed its mask guidelines for fully vaccinated people, CALS has been considering reopening the Ron Robinson Theater to the public. He wanted to seek the Board members input on whether CALS should reopen, possibly as soon as August, or not.

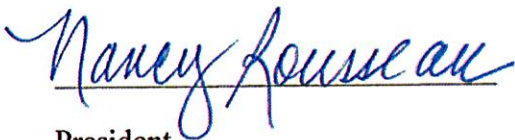
The board members discussed this issue at some length and were in favor of reopening the theater, since at this point safety measures for the pandemic lie largely on the individual now that vaccines are available to everyone who wants one and masks are still acceptable for people more uncomfortable in larger crowds.

Rousseau asked for the Board to formally vote in favor of reopening the Ron Robinson Theater.

Berry moved that CALS move forward with reopening plans for the Ron Robinson Theater. Porter seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Rousseau asked if there were any final points of business. No one had anything else.

Rousseau moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:10 p.m.



President



Secretary