

## Central Arkansas Library System

### Board of Directors Meeting

February 23, 2023, at noon

Hybrid Meeting: Darragh Center & Zoom Video Call

Board members in attendance were Brandon Grice, Bob Brown, Luke Underwood, Alexis Sims, Sybil Jordan Hampton, Esperanza Massana-Crane, Andy Gill, and Dustin McDaniel. Stacey McAdoo, Ryan Davis, Audrey Evans, Madhav Shroff, and Jennifer Jamison were absent.

Staff in attendance were Nate Coulter, Lisa Donovan, Tameka Lee, Eliza Borné, Jo Spencer, Lance Ivy, Nathan Smith, Carol Coffey, Pam Rudkin, Joe Hudak, Katie Adams, Mekkos Barbee, Kate Matthews, Hannah Saulters, Dre Thornton, Mark Christ, Glenn Whaley, and Polly Deems.

Also in attendance was Joe Flaherty with the Arkansas Democrat Gazette, Bobby Roberts, and Richard Prewitt.

McAdoo and Davis were unable to attend the meeting, so Underwood led the proceedings.

#### **Action Items**

##### **1. Approval of Minutes**

Underwood asked the Board to approve the January Minutes as presented.

Grice moved to approve the January Minutes as presented. McDaniel seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

##### **2. Approval of January Financials**

Grice reported that as of January 31, 2022, CALS assets totaled \$111,467,958.57 with a net loss of \$1,052,016.93. Grice said property tax collections were up 0.5%, or \$588K. He directed attention to the \$257K increase on the income statement as a result of the collection of the 2017 bonds. He said there would be a final collection in March along with any further delinquencies.

Underwood filed the January Financials for audit.

#### **Information Items**

##### **1. Director's Report**

Coulter noted that he submitted his report in writing ahead of this meeting, but had a few items he wanted to highlight:

- *Staff News:* Donovan shared news with the board that a longtime CALS employee had passed away suddenly. Tonia Bull would have celebrated her ten-year CALS anniversary

in April working as a library assistant at Milam Library in Perryville. Donovan said that CALS social worker Rebecca Beadle and HR staffer Karmen Cooper were visiting the Milam branch regularly to support grieving staff. She asked the board to keep Tonia's family and coworkers in their thoughts and prayers.

- *Capital Improvement Update:* Coulter asked Ivy to share updates regarding the upcoming renovation of Main Library. Ivy gave the board a brief overview of the architect and contractor selection process since July 2022. He announced that CDI Contractors were chosen by a committee that included CALS staff and board member Dustin McDaniel. He said CDI was a capable and experienced local company with proven ability to work in restricted spaces and stay within project budgets. Sims inquired about the budget and timeline for the Main Library project. Coulter and Ivy said that the budget was \$20M and the current timeline was fourteen to eighteen months.
- *Upcoming Community Sessions:* Coulter asked Lee to speak about the upcoming CALS Media Day and the community input sessions for the Main Library remodel scheduled for March.
  - *Media Day:* Lee invited the board to attend Media Day on February 28 in Concordia Hall. She said the event was open to the public and focused on providing information about several exciting changes at CALS including the renovation project, changes to Summer Reading Club, the Six Bridges Book Festival, Earth Month, and other programs.
  - *Community Input on Design:* Lee also invited the board to two community meetings specifically geared toward gaining community input regarding the Main Library renovation. The sessions were scheduled for March 11 and March 30, with Gabe Holmstrom and Ryan Davis moderating respectively. Lee said the goal of the sessions was to allow community members to offer insight, show what CALS staff and architects have already considered, and collect ideas on what the public wants to see when Main reopens. Massana-Crane asked how the board could help promote the sessions. Lee said she would give the board shareable information for their social media pages.
- *Art Initiatives Across CALS Branches:* Coulter asked Whaley to share about upcoming plans for exhibiting the CALS art collection. Whaley said her team was working to figure out the best way to exhibit materials that are currently stored in the Roberts Library during the upcoming renovation of Main Library. She said Colin Thompson, CALS Art Administrator, was planning several touring exhibitions to be shown at branches including West Ninth Street photographs, movie posters from Ron Robinson Theater, a history exhibit of CALS renovations, and pop-up stores from local artists. She said that the gallery at Children's Library will display K-12 art from the Arkansas Arts Educators collection this summer, and during the fall, art from book illustrator Yuyi Morales will be displayed in conjunction with the Six Bridges Book Festival. Whaley added that the Underground Gallery at the Roberts Library and the Butler Center would remain open during the upcoming renovation.

## **2. African American Civil War Soldiers Monument**

On February 1, in connection with Black History Month, CALS announced the request for qualifications from artists interested in sculpting a monument to honor the over 5,000 Black



Arkansans who fought for the United States in the Civil War. Coulter asked Bobby Roberts, chair of the memorial committee, and Mark Christ to update the board on the memorial project's progress. Giving a brief overview of the history behind the memorial, Christ said that after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, Black soldiers began to be recruited into the Union army. He said in Arkansas, 5,526 Black soldiers served and fought in several engagements along with 10K White soldiers. In response to a question from Brown, Christ said that there were no regiments of Black soldiers in the Confederate army.

Roberts said that CALS has been a leader in collecting and commissioning public art since the library's inception in 1910. He said an unofficial goal of previous CALS boards was to install public art for each library branch, resulting in a current count of eight pieces at branches and three pieces on the Library Square campus. He said the public art pieces were funded in different ways, often with CALS matching a small percentage of raised funds. Roberts said that CALS has committed \$150K to the current project and the entire process would likely take around two years.

Hampton and Sims expressed optimism that the memorial would inspire programmers and parents to tie in related reading opportunities for children. Massana-Crane asked if any pushback was expected. Coulter and Roberts said some complaints were likely. They anticipated some would be about the funding and perhaps some about the subject matter of the art. Roberts pointed out that historically, CALS has contributed more money to other public art projects, so this project is in line with precedent.

### **3. Other**

Brown asked about Senate Bill 81, which would remove certain legal protections for librarians and alter the privacy law relating to libraries in the state of Arkansas. Coulter said he thought the bill was ineffective at protecting children and misguided in that it targeted librarians and educators, who are parents' allies. He said libraries had policies in place to protect children, including the current privacy law that provides an avenue for children to seek help in abusive situations. Coulter feared that the proposed bill, which would give the ultimate authority over whether an item was censored to quorum courts and city councils, would politicize decisions that currently rest with library collection professionals who select library materials in accordance with board-approved policies that emphasize collecting materials for everyone's interests.

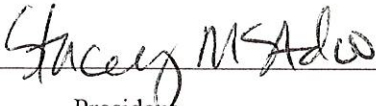
Roberts added that since the bill targets books containing obscenity, which CALS and other libraries do not own, he thought the bill would be unenforceable. Since libraries do not have books with obscenities, he said any objections would likely be made based on content, which would not hold up in court. Coulter added that part of the library's mission is to provide books for the whole community, meaning libraries inevitably own books that some people do not like.

Donovan said some staff had already reported aggressive phone calls from demanding individuals. Hampton highlighted the need for staff training on how to manage confrontational situations if the bill is enacted, including systems for notifying security. Hampton and Underwood encouraged staff to remain resilient and take value from colleagues and supporters during this challenging time.

2/23/2023 4

**4. Move to Adjourn**

Underwood moved to adjourn the meeting. Brown seconded the motion, and Underwood called the meeting adjourned at 12:57 p.m.

  
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President

  
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Secretary