

Central Arkansas Library System

Board of Directors Meeting

January 25, 2024, at 12:00 P.M.

Hybrid Meeting: Fletcher Library & Zoom Video Call

Board members in attendance were Ryan Davis, Stacey McAdoo, Joyce Elliott, Karama Neal, David Finkbeiner, Audrey Evans, Luke Underwood, Alexis Sims, Dustin McDaniel, and Brandon Grice. Madhav Shroff, Jennifer Jamison and Esperanza Massana-Crane were absent.

Staff in attendance were Nate Coulter, Jo Spencer, Ellen Samples, Kate Matthews, Tameka Lee, Eliza Borné, Gonzalo Hernandez, Will Gross, Carol Coffey, Amanda Orgel, Pam Bandy, Polly Deems, April Smith, Nathan Smith, Dre Thornton, Tara Protiva-Brown, Brad Mooy, Hannah Saulters, Brant Collins, Nishita Patel, Chris Ketterman and Joe Hudak.

Also in attendance by zoom were Stephanie Chase, Christina Fuller-Gregory and Judah Hamer from Constructive Disruption, as well as Joe Flaherty in person from the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

Special Items

1. Appointment of Joyce Elliott to the Board by Judge Barry Hyde

McAdoo opened by introducing the first special item of the agenda. Coulter then said that as of about 30 minutes before the meeting he had received word that Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde would be late, but that he had previously sworn in the county's most recent appointment to the CALS Board. Coulter then introduced the three new members of the Board, including Joyce Elliott, representative from Pulaski County, Karama Neal, representative from the City of Little Rock and David Finkbeiner, representative from Perryville.

Action Items

1. Approval of Minutes

McAdoo asked the Board to approve the December minutes as presented.

Evans moved to approve the December minutes as presented. Grice seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

2. Approval of December Financials

Grice reported that as of December 31, 2023, CALS assets totaled \$111,438,634.14 with a net income of \$2,327,132.38. He attributed this income to one off events including property tax collections, but noted it was offset by lower than expected parking revenue and state aid. Property tax receipts as of the end of December were up about 10.1%, and through January property tax receipts were at around \$970,000 putting them up 30%.

Evans moved to file the December financials. McAdoo filed the financials for audit.

3. Election of Board Officers for 2024

McAdoo asked if the Board would be comfortable re-electing the current slate of officers to continue their service for the next year. She then said this would mean she would continue as Board President, Ryan Davis would continue as Vice President, and Brandon Grice would continue as Treasurer. McAdoo then called for a motion to re-elect the current officers.

Evans moved to re-elect the current officers. Sims seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

4. Hiring of Constructive Disruption to Develop Strategic Plan

Coulter invited Coffey up to talk about the Strategic Plan. Coffey recounted how four years ago, the system created the current strategic plan, and with the success of that plan it was now time to create a new one. CALS staff looked at three different firms to put together the plan and was recommending Constructive Disruption. Coffey introduced Stephanie Chase, the head of Constructive Disruption, which is a cooperative consulting firm. Coffey detailed Chase's experience in public libraries, both as an executive for public libraries and as part of the Public Library Association's board of directors. Coffey turned the presentation over to Chase.

Chase introduced herself and her colleagues Christina Fuller-Gregory and Judah Hamer. She talked about her plan to walk the board through developing and implementing the strategic plan. She asked Fuller-Gregory and Hamer to introduce themselves. Fuller-Gregory introduced herself and noted that she is the director of a performing arts school library in South Carolina. Hamer introduced himself and brought up his experience working in public libraries in New Jersey and Vermont, with experience working in both rural and urban areas. During his 20 years of working in public libraries Hamer also taught information science part-time at Rutgers University.

Chase highlighted how their group has had experience working on large-scale projects, both in terms of system size and geographical area covered. She noted how this experience makes them feel very comfortable taking on a project assisting a system of our size. Chase then turned it over to Fuller-Gregory to describe the process of how the group approaches these projects.

Fuller-Gregory described the plan as a roadmap for the library. She emphasized that the plan should provide a large amount of flexibility so the library can help address the changing needs of the community. She also focused on community engagement, which would help ensure that the plan could meet the needs of an ever-changing community. She continued to describe the multi-step approach the group would take when developing the plan. This process involves analyzing the data and taking input from community members.

Chase then had Hamer discuss the underlying methods behind these steps. Hamer talked about the importance of talking to internal and external stakeholders through a variety of methods like surveys, interviews and focus groups that would be analyzed to discern the reasoning behind the data they uncover. All their findings would then be brought back to the strategic planning team at CALS to help plan next steps. Hamer continued to talk about the community-focused methods that the group would use to collect data, including a focus on data justice.

Chase concluded by emphasizing that the strategic plan should be both a usable document as well as a resource with a lot of deep research behind it.

After their presentation concluded, Sims asked if Chase could talk about what data justice looks like in applications, Chase explained that the main idea was that when a valuable piece of data was found, the best practice was to go back to the group that is most impacted by the data findings in order to get a better grasp on what the data means. An example she gave was to go back to parents of teens to ask them about the implications of data involving teens rather than asking parents of younger children about that information. McDaniel then asked how the group planned to ensure that their data samples would consider not only demographic differences but the urban-rural divide in the system. Chase responded that a major part of the group's process was to work with their client to identify the important groups to survey, and that CALS can help guide the focus to ensure that everyone in the system's service area is accounted for.

McAdoo then asked for a motion to continue with the hiring of Constructive Disruption. Sims then asked if the board could see the financial details of what it would cost to hire the group, McDaniel also asked this question. Spencer then said that the hiring of the group would cost \$70,000 and that the plan was to pay for that over two operating budgets. Coulter then noted that this was the market rate for this kind of work and that one of the two other firms staff had considered was considerably more expensive and the third one was comparable to Constructive Disruption's fees.

McDaniel then moved to approve the hiring of Constructive Disruption. Evans seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Information Items

1. Director's Report

Before going into his director's report, Coulter noted that Judge Hyde had arrived. Coulter thanked him for appointing McDaniel and Elliot and invited him to address the board. Hyde talked about the importance of the unincorporated areas of the county and urged the board to be diligent in ensuring that CALS does the outreach necessary to ensure that it serves these areas properly. Hyde mentioned the work being done to help expand broadband access to the entire county and noted that he had appointed Coulter to serve on the Pulaski County Committee that would promote efforts to have an appropriate share of the \$1B in federal funding for broadband go to the county. Hyde noted that an earlier allocation of federal funding by the state had unfortunately excluded Pulaski County and that the numbers the state was relying on to gauge the number of Pulaski County residents who were without access to high-speed internet substantially undercounted the number of people in the county with no broadband service.

Elliott then asked about how after the initial work is done reaching those that the county knows don't have access to broadband, how they planned to continue their work identifying those who are still underserved. Hyde then said they were in round two of the work, with round one focused on serving the previously identified areas. He said the work was now focused on challenging the maps that existed previously to ensure they can do outreach to find people that hadn't been

identified as still lacking services. They would then take this information back to the state to see how much money they would need to reach these people.

- *Construction Update for Main and Williams:* Coulter said that the progress on construction at Main was slower than he would have liked and that the delay was attributable to the efforts of the architects and CDI to squeeze out some of the costs to make the project fit within our budget but without significantly altering the architects' original vision. He noted that the architects and CDI had been going through the building to find everything that they could possibly re-use to save money. He then asked Hernandez to detail what this work looked like and why it was necessary. McDaniel asked how much they were trying to "value engineer" at this point, and Spencer said it was about \$1 Million. Coulter said that there was a range the contractors had offered and that it could potentially be up to \$4 Million, but that the expectation is that it would be close to the range Spencer suggested. The architects and contractor were identifying parts of the project that could be removed to lower the total construction costs to the goal of \$25M. Evans asked if there was anything the board could do to help at this point, Coulter said that the bulk of the work was in Spencer and Hernandez's hands now, but that McDaniel was helping. McDaniel asked if Williams' construction was still on plan and on budget, which both Coulter and Spencer said it was. McDaniel then asked if there was more about the construction at Main that he should be concerned about. Coulter said that the board should be worried, but not panicked, that the focus now was to find things that were expendable in the construction of Main that wouldn't impact the character of the building. Coulter then said that in talking to David Sargent, Reese Rowland and Amanda Sturgell [the architects for Main] they were confident in their numbers and that we would see the final design drawings in early February. He went on to talk about how most of the work being done now was between Hernandez and the contractors to ensure that everything came as close to the cost and vision of the architects as possible. McDaniel then talked about how in his line of work, he had run into similar situations, and he planned to stay in touch to help ensure the project stays on track. Evans then offered her help and encouraged the board to help in whatever way they could. Sims then asked if any of the money from the capital campaign could help contribute to the difference in cost. Spencer then said that the budget for the construction was already accounted for, and that the capital campaign was focused on raising money to buy things to outfit the building after construction was completed. She was confident that the contractors would get to the place they needed to be. Coulter then mentioned Shroff's absence was due to him and his wife having their first child.
- *Communications:* After discussion of the construction at Main was finished. McAdoo asked if anyone had any other questions for the staff. Evans then pointed out the Communications department update in the Director's Report which mentioned the Family Dinner Night event to celebrate Williams' reopening. Evans raised concerns about tickets for the fundraiser costing \$75 per person, and that this may make the event inaccessible

for many members of the community. Coulter said the event was the idea of Latina Sheard [Manager at Williams] and staff at the branch and was conceived as a way for those who do have the resources to help contribute to the programs that they attend at the branch. He then talked about how this would support programs at the branch including their existing Family Dinners and new teaching kitchen. Lee then said that the goal was to do something special for Williams to celebrate their reopening. She noted that the cost was considered and to avoid confusion, the marketing would emphasize that this was a twist on their usual Family Dinner program. Lee and the staff at Williams saw this as an opportunity to raise funds specifically for the branch and saw it as a chance to bring in people who may not necessarily be current patrons of that branch to help build support. She noted that similar events at other institutions typically cost more and that this program would be supplemented with a large free program that weekend. Samples mentioned that it was common practice for CALS to host a smaller event the night before a building opens, and this was just continuing that practice. Evans then made a point about how the optics of hosting a public fundraising event like this would look after the library had recently passed its new millage. Borné used this as an opportunity to ask the board about their opinion about fundraising events in general, using an example of an exclusive author fundraising event at Six Bridges being used to fund all the free events. McDaniel had to leave, but he wanted to say before he left that he appreciated Evans' comments but thought the fundraising events were important to support the programs and events the library hosts. Brant Collins was recognized and spoke about how as an active member of the Dunbar community that Williams serves, he and the rest of the communications team were extremely conscious of the needs of the community that Williams serves and did their best to facilitate a fundraising program that would not only benefit the work that the branch does, but was as accessible as possible to that community. Evans thanked Collins for his thoughts, and then emphasized that with the library having raised \$22 Million in public funds, we had to be careful about these kinds of events. Elliott asked what the plan was to find people who would be willing to buy tickets for the event. Lee said there would be a marketing campaign but also wanted the board's help to reach out to people they know to help find participants. Elliott suggested that an organized effort be made to reach out to members of the community and hoped that this could increase the chances of raising the necessary funds. She also raised the idea that this was an opportunity to help reconnect members of that community who have moved to other parts of the city with the community. Borné made a point that while the taxpayers were willing to fund our millage, the community has also shown a strong willingness to offer financial support outside of that. Coulter brought up that the money the Foundation raises now exceeds the money CALS receives from the state, and Borné used Summer @ CALS being more than halfway funded by the Foundation as an example of the community's willingness to support the system. Evans reemphasized that her concern was more about the event's optics in relation to the taxpayers and not with fundraising in general.

2. Other

After the discussion, McAdoo asked if there were any other questions or things the staff would like to raise. Sims asked if someone would talk about the Wall Breaking event. Lee said it would be on Tuesday, February 6, at 11:00 A.M. and asked that board members interested in attending contact her.

McAdoo asked the board whether they would prefer to meet in June or July over the Summer, with her proposing they meet in July. Sims seconded this.

Samples then highlighted the Black History Month programs happening across the system in February.

3. Move to Adjourn

McAdoo called the meeting adjourned at 1:24 p.m.

President

Secretary