

Director's Report for February 27, 2025

Main Remodeling: Except for some cold weather complications, the pace of the project has been good over the past month. The contractor has started to finish out some of the interior with carpet, paint, lighting, millwork and glazing. The steel stair tower on the east side of the building has reached its peak making connection with the roof level. Next week they will start on the rooftop patio trellis. CDI says that the project is still on time to finish in June within budget. We are about to sign the change order to add "phase 2" of the project. Phase 2 includes finishing out the old Darragh Center for the new children's programming area along with some work in and around the surface parking lot. The Board's resolution last month to put the funds from the sale of Hillcrest Hall toward the remodel of the Main Library is enabling Phase 2 work.

Other Capital Improvements: Our maintenance team is currently working on finishing the facelift of our Rooker branch which includes new paint, flooring, and a few new fixtures. Rooker will be closed for a short time this week to install flooring. Rooker is also in the process of having a new roof installed with our deferred maintenance funds. Thompson is the next branch on the calendar for renovations. They will receive new flooring.

Possible Partnership with LR Convention & Visitors Bureau: Last June I invited the President and CEO of the Little Rock Visitors and Convention Bureau, Gina Gemberling, to have coffee with me. I wanted to explore whether the LRCVB had any interest in a presence in some of our space along Clinton Avenue to provide visitors with information about the city. I understood that they had only a mobile visitor center after all but closing the one in Curran Hall on Capitol Avenue. Over the years that the Roberts Library has been open, our staff has often fielded inquiries from people walking in to ask for guidance on things to see and do in the city. After a number of meetings, the LRCVB is serious about trying to rent some of our street front space. They are specifically interested in about 2500 sq ft that we will have available in Concordia Hall after Main reopens. They have toured our space with an architect and a member of their commission. Gina has also traveled to a couple of other cities to see their new Tourist Centers that might serve as models for what Little Rock would do in our building. Jo has communicated with the LRCVB's chief financial officer a proposed rent rate for our space. We will report back to the board if there is any formal proposal from the LRCVB to develop this space that is next door to the east of where CALS will operate its used book and merchandise store. LRCVB has been a supporter of the Six Bridges Book Festival in some recent years through their marketing partnership program. I would hope that any expanded partnership with the LRCVB would include a commitment to continue supporting our book festival.

Pigeon Patrol: Pam received some more information from our architects on what we might do to retrofit the building and eliminate the problem. Unfortunately, their plans did not include any cost estimates. The only two options with a price tag for future consideration by the board are the in-house work that would shroud the many open I-beams to try to stop the pigeons from roosting above Roberts library, and the "invisible fence" option advocated by the Dallas, TX firm Avian. A representative of this company will be available at the meeting to answer questions from the board. I would like the board to make a decision by April, if possible.

Update on Safe Routes Project: In early February I was asked to make a short virtual presentation to some other library directors around the country about a successful project CALS helped steer. In early 2020 we received a \$12,500 grant from an organization that seeks to develop more routes to parks for rolling, walking, and biking. During the midst of the pandemic the library held several virtual town hall meetings and a “road diet” along Jonesboro Drive in front of our Children’s Library and across I-630. The goal was to collect neighborhood input and to experiment with reduced vehicle traffic to make it easier to walk or bike to War Memorial Park. We used some of the grant funds to get an architectural firm to draw improvements to bike and foot paths along Jonesboro Drive in front of our library and over the freeway. The city participated in the design discussions in 2021 and then used these drawings to secure a \$750,000 grant from Metroplan that year. The city has added \$200,000 to the grant. The project was a model of how the library can convene a conversation among private and public stakeholders and help forge a consensus that enables funding for improvements. Three years later I had begun to doubt if the project would ever actually be built. At long last, the engineer drawings are finished, and we understand from the city that they hope to put the job out for bids later this year. I’m assured the work won’t take long once it’s underway. When finished children and adults will have a safer and more attractive route to Children’s library from the north or south.



RENDERED PLAN VIEW

Nonresident Library Cards: As discussed in the January Board Meeting, we are moving ahead with the increase for the Non-Resident Card fee to realign the Non-Resident fee, so it more closely approximates what resident taxpayers spend on library taxes to CALS each year. The rate will go from \$54 to \$72, and the change will go into effect on April 1, 2025. If patrons renew their cards before March 31, they can keep the current rate until it's time to renew the card again in 2026.

Hoopla: Hoopla is a leading provider of our online resources. As we discussed last month, Hoopla pricing model requires CALS to set a cap on our daily content usage to stay within our

annual budget for Hoopla. For a good long while we had been reaching that cap very early each morning, making it impossible to check anything else to anyone later in the day. We recently added more money to allow us to increase our Hoopla daily budget cap. Since then, we've been reaching our limit much later in the day and the number of blocked check-outs has declined. Short of spending more, we have other options that we might implement to allow more checkouts on this service. One would be to decrease the number of monthly check-outs per cardholder. We currently allow seven per month but have considered lowering that to five. We will hold off on lowering the monthly check-out limit per card holder for now so we can see how much improvement we get from having added more money in January.

Strategic Planning: The Strategic Planning Team (SPT) met on Tuesday of this week to begin developing language and goals for the final plan. Consultant Stephanie Chase will attend the board meeting on February 27 to report on that meeting and bring the board up to date on the progress the team has made toward the final plan.

Program Updates: We are expecting a full house at Ron Robinson Theater Thursday night for a CALS Speaker Series program headlined by popular historical novelist, Victoria Christopher Murray, author of *Harlem Rhapsody* and co-author of *The Personal Librarian*. This program will be moderated by Jennelle Primm. During the day on Thursday, Victoria will be visiting a classroom of 24 students at Philander Smith University as part of CALS's Writers in the Schools program. This author event honors Fred K. Darragh Jr. for his commitment to civil liberties and education. Funding for this author and event comes from the CALS Foundation's Distinguished Lecture Fund.

Over the past weekend, in partnership with Second Baptist Church Downtown, we hosted a screening of the documentary *God + Country* and a Q&A session with one of the film's contributors, author and religious historian Jemar Tisby, who also signed books afterwards. The program drew 150 attendees. We are also looking ahead to another author's visit to our theater on March 19. Jeffrey Toobin, bestselling author and CNN legal commentator, will join Dr. Jay Barth of the Clinton Presidential Library and Museum in a conversation about Tubin's new book *The Pardon*. This event will start at 6:30. You can register and learn more here: <https://events.cals.org/event/13018970>.

Capital Campaign for Main: The capital campaign committee members meet monthly. They and Eliza are staying busy paying visits on potential donors to encourage support for the transformative renovation of the Main Library. They will host a group of potential donors for a hard hat tour of the building on April 10. To date, pledges total \$912,790.

Development: We held a successful Used Book Sale over Valentine's Day weekend, welcoming 1,188 shoppers and collecting \$17,812.48 after taxes and fees. Currently, the development team is primarily focused on the capital campaign, securing sponsors for upcoming CALS events (including the Rock Paper Run 5K and the Six Bridges Book Festival), and preparation for Library Giving Day. This year, Library Giving Day falls on April 1. We will encourage unrestricted donations to the CALS Foundation on this national day of giving. The evening of

April 1, in celebration of Library Giving Day, we will host a free preview screening of the new documentary *Free For All: The Public Library*, a film by Independent Lens, the award-winning PBS documentary series. The film will premiere on PBS stations nationwide on April 29, but our community will have the chance to watch it early on the big screen from Ron Robinson Theater. We have received a grant from Indie Lens to host this screening. Following the film, Board President Karama Neal will moderate a panel discussion with Judy Calhoun (retired Director, Southeast Arkansas Regional Library), Adam Webb (Director, Garland County Library), and me. Save the date and hope you can join us.

Communications: Community Engagement Coordinator Jessica McDaniel led the annual Black Family Expo on February 1, 2025, at the Dunbar Community Center in Little Rock. Between 11:00 am and 2:00 p.m. almost 200 attendees participated in various activities designed to celebrate and preserve Black family histories. Roberts Library staff assisted families with digitizing historical documents, photographs, and slides, using our mobile memory lab. Each participant received a flash drive containing their digitized materials. The CALS Cruiser was on hand and there was a family portrait station where attendees could take professional photos. Library staff facilitated library card sign-ups and provided information about resources available to the community.



In celebration of National Library Week, the Rock Paper Run 5K, hosted in partnership with the North Little Rock Public Library System, will take place on Sunday, April 6. This year's course features a scenic loop, starting and ending at North Little Rock's Argenta Branch and winding through the River Trail in Little Rock. The week will conclude with a special event at Laman Library on April 12. For details and registration, visit rockpaperrun.org.

Circulation and Traffic: In January, CALS patrons checked out 110,200 digital items. That is the highest monthly circulation of digital materials since we began offering digital checkouts in 2009. OverDrive alone accounted for 90,236 of those checkouts. Digital circulation was 54% of total circulation, the highest since the early months of the pandemic. Physical circulation continues to decline, down 7% from last January, but up 5% from December. It is not unusual to see a circulation bump in January as the holiday season ends and people have more time to read, watch, or listen. The door count in January was up 13% over last January, which is a nice bump. As of January, we are no longer tracking curbside pickups separately in the door count. The total number of curbside pickups had decreased so much by the end of 2024 that it no longer makes sense to track that number separately.

Next Board Meeting: Our next meeting will fall during spring break. I have suggested to Karama that you should consider whether you want to bump it back a week or up a week to avoid that as the board has done in prior years. Whatever date you pick, it's Maumelle's turn to host.