

Director's Report for July 24, 2025

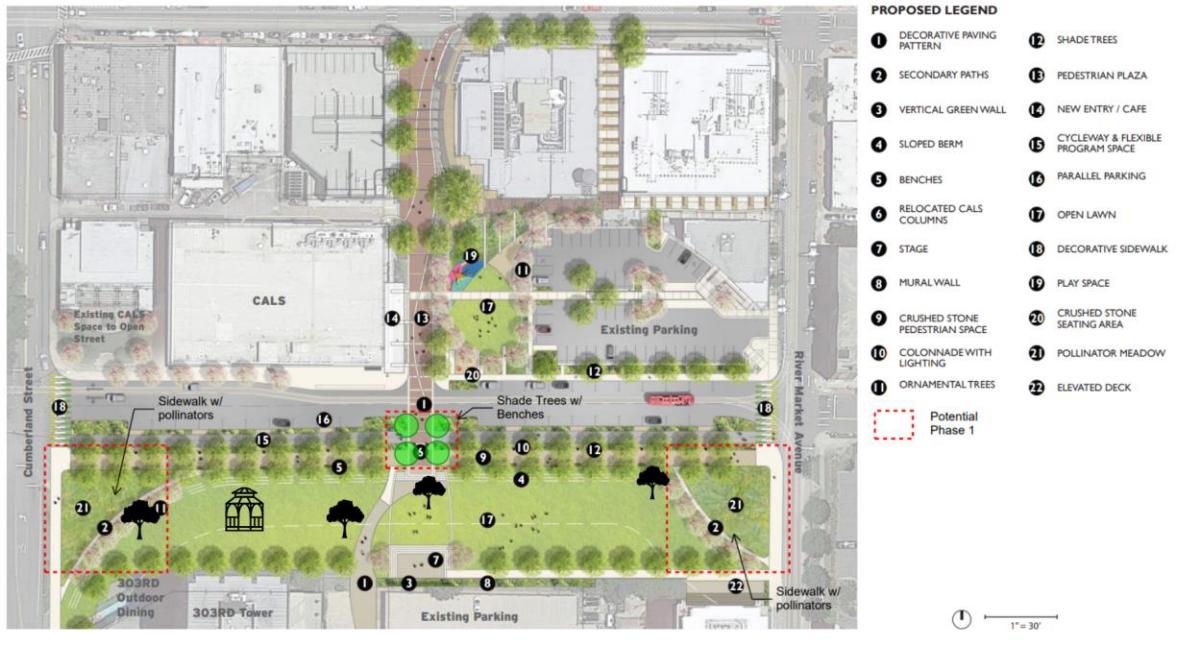
Action Item – AEDC grant: The Arkansas Economic Development Commission has a funding opportunity currently open called the Arkansas Community Assistance Grant Program (CAGP). This is the first fiscal year this grant program has been funded, and AEDC has allocated \$15 million for these grants, which will support community and economic development projects statewide including renovations, new construction, new equipment, or additions to publicly owned buildings including libraries. The amount of funding available to any one project is limited to \$1.5M. The applicant must provide matching funds at a rate of 20%.

CALS would like to apply for this grant to support the addition of a new ramp at Roberts Library, which will vastly improve the accessibility of this building. Kate East and James Sullivan from AMR presented a plan for the ramp at the April board meeting. A requirement of the application is a resolution passed by the CALS board authorizing the library to apply for this grant. Eliza will introduce the resolution at the board meeting. Find more information about the grant program at the link below. We expect this to be a very competitive grant, but we know we can make a compelling case about our project. It's a longshot but worth the effort.

<https://www.arkansasedc.com/community-resources/community-assistance-grant-program>

Main Remodeling: CDI still believes that “there is a path” to “substantial completion” by September 1. They moved that back from August 1 after our May meeting. I told CDI last week that we are opening on September 20, unless they don’t get a city certificate of occupancy before then. Matthew Lehner will attend the meeting to answer questions and share his confidence in CDI meeting their completion date. Eliza, Tameka, and I have been taking people on tours of the building the past few weeks. One of the scenes our guests see is our maintenance staff putting up bookshelves and our collection development staff reshelfing books. We step around scores subcontractors’ workers. Last week I was in the elevator with a woman who said she was a painter. I asked her if she was working 40 hours a week at Main. She said, yes, but starting next week, it would be more hours. That was encouraging. For the next 60 days it’s all hands on deck for both CDI and CALS. We will include in your packet our **Main Reopening Timeline/FAQ**.

The Open Space Across Second Street from Main: As we near the reopening I am resuming an effort I initiated back in the 3rd quarter of 2022 to get the city to help CALS make the area between Cumberland and River Market match the degree of excellence that will soon be available in the remodeled Main library. I had hoped back then the city would respond positively. With their endorsement we could have had some modest improvements on the public space by the time we reopened. That did not happen. I will keep trying to persuade the city to provide our patrons, staff, and the thousands of others who work, live, or visit the area with an inviting green space across 2nd St. from Main where the freeway ramps sat until 2021. It is possible to enlist master gardeners to maintain parts of the space so that the city would not have to shoulder all of the cost of upkeep. The area is already irrigated, thanks to some private donors who installed a sprinkler system late last year. Here is a proposed rendering of that space that I have circulated for 2 years. It needs updating but you can get the idea.



LR Visitor Center on the CALS Campus: The staff at the LRCVB has approved and forwarded their lawyers a proposed lease with CALS that would allow their Visitor Center to locate down the street from the Roberts Library. When we get something back, we'll circulate to our lawyer and then share it with you for input.

The Purchase of 319-323 Clinton Ave: I reported in May that we had a right to buy this if we wanted to match the pending offer. You authorized me to let that option pass. The sale closed on July 2. The new owner is Josh Malone. With the sale and transfer of ownership, CALS' obligation to lease an apartment in the building has ended. Our subtenant will continue to occupy the apartment and pay rent directly to the new owner now. I have sent Mr. Malone an email welcoming him to the neighborhood and telling him we look forward to working with him.

Pigeon Abatement: The company cleaning up and installing the deterrence system will start work on August 5. Pam says they estimate it will take 21 to 28 days to finish.

Strategic Planning: Following the adoption of the new strategic plan in May, Carol has been working with software vendor Envisio on planning and setting up a performance management system which will help us with accountability. The program will show monthly updates and offer a dashboard for a quick read on how we're faring. These tools will be available starting in late 2025/early 2026. They will be accessible to the board and public to facilitate monitoring our progress on the goals of the plan. Evisio has shared a few links to dashboards from their other library customers to give you a sense of the range of internal and external facing options for sharing strategy and metrics updates. Here are dashboards from New Orleans, Denver, and Louisville: <https://performance.envisio.com/dashboard/nopl4198>

<https://performance.envisio.com/dashboard/denverpubliclibrary4411>

https://lfp1.app.envisio.com/corporate/performance_analytics/published_static/km0Jqnvr

Please let Carol or me know if you see things here that you like or can think of things that are missing from the other dashboards that we can ask Envisio to help us report.

Video Production: Tameka's department and our collection development personnel continue to work on a short video to help educate the community on how we select books at CALS. We hope this short highlight video will be entertaining, informative, and ready for the reopening of Main on September 20. They will follow up with another segment on the work the staff does to make sure that books are shelved in the appropriate location of our libraries based on the content and readers' age and reading ability. These videos that I have dubbed "CALS Cares" will, I'm confident, demonstrate the high degree of professionalism of our staff.

Program Updates: Outreach Coordinator Courtney Jones was honored by Pulaski County Youth Services recently as a Champion of Youth for supporting programs for teens and children. Courtney was recognized along with several other honorees at a luncheon on July 9. Several of her colleagues attended the luncheon to cheer her on. Way to go, Courtney! And thank you!



Summer @ CALS programming is wrapping up this week. This summer we have also worked with local art studio Zig Zag to create a community mural. Artists visited each branch to create an art piece which will all be combined into one mural to be displayed in the expanded children's department on the ground floor of the remodeled Main Library. Included below are some photos of the mural art from Dee Brown and Thompson branches.



Looking ahead, CALS will host author Elizabeth Oldfield on Sunday, August 24 at 5:00 pm. Oldfield's book *Fully Alive: Tending the Soul in Turbulent Times* was the subject of a popular weekly book study hosted by CALS in partnership Christ Episcopal and Second Presbyterian churches earlier this year. More info on the author event can be found here: <https://events.cals.org/event/14090292>.

We are firming up plans for the **Six Bridges Book Festival** that will run from **September 28-October 5**. Several authors have already been announced on the Six Bridges social media pages (Facebook & Instagram) with more exciting author announcements coming in the weeks ahead.

CALS Used Book Sale: We hosted our last CALS Used Book Sale at 7773 Sloane Drive from July 10-12. We grossed more than \$12,000 over the 11 hours the sale was open and welcomed nearly 1500 shoppers. This Little Rock Public Radio segment gives a great taste of the festive atmosphere at the sale and the enthusiasm of our shoppers:

<https://www.ualrpublicradio.org/local-regional-news/2025-07-14/cals-used-book-sale-draws-crowds>

We sold the leftover used books in bulk to Better World Books, a nonprofit in Indiana that sells used books online, donates books to developing countries, and recycles any they can't place. CALS will continue to accept used book donations at branches during this transition period and keep them in a storage unit at the library's Maintenance shop until we can move them to the first floor of Roberts Library and plan our next sale.

Capital Campaign: To date we have secured more than \$1.2M in pledges and gifts to the Next Chapter capital campaign in support of the Main Library renovation from 50+ donors. Over the past couple of months, Eliza has given more than 20 tours to prospective donors, with more to come! It is heartening to hear positive feedback about the building from donors who walk through. Our deadline to Polk Stanley Wilcox is August 1 to deliver names for the first-floor donor wall and plaques for spaces connected to naming opportunities. All donors who give

\$1,000 and above will be included on the donor wall, and everyone who gives at any level will be invited to a donor preview reception on September 18. If any board members would like to pledge or give, please see Eliza for more information and a pledge form.

Our capital campaign goal is \$2M. We still have a number of promising prospective donors who have not yet made commitments, and we have applied to a local foundation for a “challenge grant” that would provide matching funds to motivate donors to contribute to the campaign in the final weeks before re-opening and after the building is open.

Development: The development department is working on a few projects, in addition to the capital campaign, the book sale’s move to Roberts, and ongoing volunteer needs.

Our contract with the City of Little Rock’s Office of Community Programs in support of Be Mighty has been renewed at \$50,000 through the end of this year. Historically, this contract has been for \$100,000 over twelve months (July – June). To accommodate a different reimbursement and reporting cadence, the current contract will be for six months, then we will submit another renewal this fall for a year-long contract beginning in January 2026. We are grateful for the City’s continued partnership; their contribution covers salaries, mileage, Be Mighty Metro expenses, and supplies for nutrition education programming. **City Director Kathy Webb** has been instrumental in sustaining Be Mighty since the city and library initiated it in 2018.

Including sponsorships, grants, gifts, pledges, and ticket sales to date, we have so far raised \$124,000 in support of this year’s Six Bridges Book Festival. On June 5 we announced our Six Bridges fundraising event headlined by **Shelby Van Pelt**, author of best-selling novel *Remarkably Bright Creatures*, which will be held on the evening of October 5, the last night of the festival. We are selling tickets for \$100/each and all proceeds support the free festival programming. To date we have sold 126 tickets. We anticipate a sell-out by October 5, or close to it. Buy your tickets here:

https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/CentralArkansasLibrarySystemF/shelby_van_pelt.html

Brian Robertson, Senior Archivist and Manager of the Butler Center, has sought our help raising funds for the digitization of the Carolyn LeMaster Arkansas Jewish history collection, which was donated to CALS in 2008. LeMaster spent almost three decades researching Jewish families across the state, and this collection contains a wealth of information, such as newspaper clippings, genealogical information, transcripts of oral histories, correspondence, research notes, and other documents. In addition to family files, there are files on general Jewish history in Arkansas, including information on businesses, congregations, and organizations such as the Arkansas Jewish Assembly, the Concordia Association, and the Jewish Federation of Arkansas. The collection includes more than 6,000 images (photographs, negatives, and slides) and twenty-four oral histories on cassette tapes. We are aiming to raise at least a \$100,000 to make this collection more readily accessible (costs include sending off approximately 60,000 items to be scanned and the labor to upload the items to our website and add metadata so everything is

searchable). We've been working on this project for about four months and have to date confirmed \$50,000 in gifts or pledges from four funders.

Circulation and Traffic: Library usage is cyclical, which is why we usually compare June to June, rather than June to May, but it can be interesting to see the effect Summer @ CALS has on our usage numbers. Physical circulation generally goes up in June compared to May due to the increased traffic from Summer @ CALS participants and that is what we saw this year. Although June circulation decreased by 5% compared to June 2024, it increased by 8% over May 2025. In 2024, June circulation rose by 9% compared to May 2024. While we know that many libraries are experiencing similar years-long declines in physical circulation, particularly since the pandemic years, we're hopeful that the reopening of Main and renewed access to its larger collection will slow the decline and perhaps even reverse it to some extent. Door counts rose by 9% in June compared to May 2025. That's what we generally expect to happen and is a welcome change from 2024, when the door count actually went down from May to June.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting will be on August 28th. We will meet at the UA Little Rock Downtown space across from the Roberts Library. After that, we can look forward to meeting in the new CALS Board room on the 5th floor of the Main Library.