

Central Arkansas Library System  
Board of Directors Meeting  
July 25, 2024, at 12:00 P.M.  
Hybrid Meeting: Thompson Library & Zoom Video Call

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

Staff in attendance were Nate Coulter, Jo Spencer, Ellen Samples, Kate Matthews, Tameka Lee, Eliza Borné, Gonzalo Hernandez, Will Gross, Carol Coffey, Pam Bandy, Joe Hudak, Candace White, Amanda Orgel, Glenn Whaley, Hannah Saulters, Shya Washington-Webb, Chris Ketterman, Vicki Lynch, Mark Christ, Nathan Smith, Dawn Perry, Heather Zbinden, Heather Pressgrove, Jennifer Cordell, Katherine Blake, Jessica Frazier-Emerson and Rebecca Beadle. CALS interns Julia Hall, Ayden Cleaver-Vess, Simon Guess, Drew Dillman, Sophie Blomeley, Briana Reyes, Elizabeth Rigsby, Zaylen Pruitt and Kailee Shumate were also at the meeting.

Also in attendance were Lena Miano and Thomas Metthe from the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* as well as Reese Rowland and Amanda Sturgell from Polk Stanley Wilcox and Matthew Lehner from CDI.

### Action Items

#### 1. Approval of Minutes

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

Underwood moved to approve the April Minutes. Shroff seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

#### 2. Approval of March Financials

Spencer reported that as of May 31, 2024, CALS assets totaled \$111,825,225 with a net income of \$1,319,539. As of June 30, 2024, CALS assets totaled \$110,370,224 with a net income of \$52,565. Spencer said that everything was in line with the budget, with revenues and expenses being at 50% of the budget as of June 30. Tax collections for June were \$565,999 and for July they were \$586,832. Year-to-date tax collections are at \$12,369,864 and that is up 4.6%, or \$545,173 from 2023.

McAdoo filed the financials for audit.

## Information Items

### 1. Main Construction Update

Spencer began by showing photos of the new roof on the Dee Brown Library. This roof was installed by the same contractors that replaced the Maumelle roof a couple of months ago. Terry Library has received new interior paint and will be getting new flooring starting the first of August. Other upcoming projects include the McMath Library and further updates to Dee Brown. New equipment has also been purchased for the Ron Robinson Theater and new gates are being installed on the downtown parking garage.

Spencer announced there would be a delay in construction for the Main Library. There is an issue with the site utilities. The location of the underground waterline was not where it was expected to be based on city records. The site for a necessary cap of that line must be moved due to other utilities being too close to that line. Moving to an alternate location involved substantial additional work and a significant rerouting of the main waterline. All the additional costs associated with this work will be covered by the contingency built into the budget. There remains \$750,000 in the contingency fund after expenditure of approximately \$233,000 for these changes.

Spencer then showed a map of the site plan (the original vs the new plan). Matthew Lehner with CDI discussed how the original plan did not work and compared it to the new plan. CDI hired a sub-contractor to hydrovac the space in order to find the best route to place and run the waterline into the building and to the fire hydrant.

Spencer said these issues would cause the project to be delayed approximately one month. Underwood then asked what the estimated date of completion would be, and Spencer responded that it would be in mid-June 2025 (pushed back from mid-May 2025). Coulter said that even accounting for this delay he still anticipates that the completion can occur within the contractor's original estimated range.

### 2. Strategic Planning Update

Neal announced that the committee's work on the strategic plan had begun in earnest, with their first meeting on May 21. At that meeting they discussed the mission statement, previewed who should be contacted for community mapping and talked about the two-dozen member strategic planning team that consists of staff from across the library system.

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On July 10, the team met again and kicked off the community mapping work. There are dozens of line items of people the committee wants to talk to, and these will be divided among the

committee members. Neal gave an example of how she and Blanchard are responsible for contacting the neighborhood associations across town. The team's work is expanding to focus groups, surveys and direct interviews, with each member of the team being charged with contacting at least two different types of groups. So far community members have been gracious in working with CALS staff to help them gather information. Neal reported that Constructive Disruption has been extremely supportive and has helped the team organize different ways for people to make their voices heard during this process including digital and in-person focus groups and meetings.

Neal noted two benefits from this process. The first is getting to learn from the community about the impact the library is having, including what services they would like to see us offer. The second has been the chance for all committee members to work together and learn from others they may not encounter regularly. The community mapping work is scheduled to be completed by September 3. Constructive Disruption has provided the resources to run these meetings and gather the information needed to report back to the committee.

Neal took time to mention the CALS strategic planning survey, live on the CALS website. This is a way for the wider community to give their input on the strategic plan if they aren't part of any other outreach efforts. As of this date, about 5,000 people have completed the survey so far, but any help in sharing the survey with currently underrepresented groups like young people, African Americans, and Spanish speakers would be appreciated. The survey is open until August 5. There are also upcoming virtual town halls where the committee will gather more community input. [Note: Neal originally stated that over 5,000 people had completed the survey when she was unable to locate the data. She later clarified the number of surveys completed was 2,429 later in the meeting when she had found the actual tally.]

### 3. Be Mighty Update

Frazier-Emerson introduced herself and began to give a rundown of the work that Be Mighty does with CALS. Be Mighty is a citywide anti-hunger campaign founded in 2018 that helps provide food and transportation for young people in Little Rock. The programs offered through Be Mighty include after-school meals in various locations, little free pantries and SNAP help, nutrition education and free METRO passes for children and families. Coulter mentioned that he had just approved the purchase of mini refrigerators at several CALS branches to help preserve food that hadn't been distributed during mealtimes, so it didn't go to waste.

Frazier-Emerson went on to talk about how Arkansas now has the highest food-insecurity rate in the nation at 17% compared to the national average of 11%. Frazier-Emerson reinforced the importance of Be Mighty as part of CALS's mission by referencing our mission statement to provide resources to help residents reach their full potential. In 2023, Be Mighty served 47,895

meals, and is on track to serve over 50,000 meals this year. The program recently switched to serving fresh meals which has increased its popularity.

Evans asked what the average meal looked like. Frazier-Emerson answered that there were five components, a required milk, a fruit, a vegetable, a protein and a grain. Be Mighty participants took over 25,000 rides on Rock Region METRO buses in 2023 using passes provided by the program. Meals provided at CALS branches are prepared by Bridge2Success, an organization in southwest Little Rock which prepares the meals every morning for services either in the afternoon during the school year or during lunch in the summer. Evans asked for more clarification on how the meal service works. Frazier-Emerson responded by detailing how branch staff receive the meals daily, set up the room with activities then serve the meals at their designated times, tracking the number of kids who participate with a sign-in sheet.

Through little free pantries and community refrigerators, Be Mighty helps provide food for community members regardless of age. Be Mighty works with community partners like Potluck Food Rescue and the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance to acquire fresh food for these spaces. Of the 12,000 pounds of food that have been put into the refrigerators so far this year, 8,000 have come from Potluck, and 4,000 from local farmers. Evans asked if we paid local farmers for this food. Frazier-Emerson said that we do, but farmers also donate surplus food outside of our purchases as well, emphasizing the strong relationship between Be Mighty and our partners.

Frazier-Emerson went on to talk about Be Mighty's efforts to raise awareness of the USDA's SNAP (Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program) program and our own programs to help library patrons complete applications for the program. Be Mighty's partnership with Rock Region METRO, "Be Mighty METRO," helps lower residents' barriers to accessing library and food resources. Frazier-Emerson said that the program is so popular that nearly half of the people interested are not able to get passes. Evans asked Frazier-Emerson to clarify this statistic and Frazier-Emerson responded that there are approximately 400 students enrolled in the program and that nearly all of them have bus access, but that adults who would like to ride with their children are not always able to get passes.

She mentioned that Be Mighty was negotiating with Rock Region METRO to increase the number of passes available before the program's popularity increases during the winter. Frazier-Emerson emphasized the program is important for not only getting patrons to the library but parents to their jobs. Be Mighty also offers garden and nutrition education classes focused on helping people learn more about food and cooking as part of their food literacy efforts. Be Mighty's team of three partners with dozens of organizations across the city in order to make these programs happen.

McAdoo talked about how her daughter gained her first work experience working with Be Mighty and her appreciation for the program's simplicity of just offering food and the dignity and respect that it offers to patrons and residents.

#### **4. CALS Summer Intern Program**

White began by mentioning the history of the summer intern program which has extended since before she started at CALS in 2017. Interns work in both branches and in departments within the system including our social work program and the Butler Center. The goal of the program is to introduce the interns to the possibilities available in library careers. CALS hosts both our own interns who we interview and hire as well as interns hired and placed through Easter Seals and the City of Little Rock. White then introduced all the interns present at the meeting, including where they worked and where they were attending school, allowing them to speak on their experiences as interns if they wanted to.

Rigsby talked about her work at the Roberts Library, creating videos to give overviews of the archives held at the center and writing entries for the Encyclopedia of Arkansas. Guess spoke about the kindness and passion he saw from the staff of Fletcher and those in the city. Dillman spoke on how he was always excited to go into Sanders during his summer internship. Hall mentioned her appreciation of the people she worked with at Terry and her enthusiasm to get the chance to learn something new every day. Blomeley talked about her love for the Children's Library and her joy at being able to work in a place she had already spent so much time in. Cleaver-Vess talked about how much he had enjoyed working at Williams and how his previous volunteering experience prepared him for this internship which is his first job.

Massana-Crane thanked the staff for bringing the interns to the meeting, noting that it is good to see the things CALS was doing in person as opposed to just in the director's reports. She also went on to talk to the interns about how the skills they gained will help them in their future careers and congratulated them on their work.

#### **5. Director's Report**

Coulter highlighted a few items from his monthly written Director's Report.

Coulter congratulated Orgel on her first summer leading the Summer @ CALS program, which had 10,704 participants at the time of the meeting. This number is a high-water mark for the program since the pandemic. Orgel went on to talk about how proud she was of the work the branches did to make the program shine. Coulter congratulated Lee for her appearance in *Soiree* magazine's "Women to Watch."

Coulter mentioned Hernandez' work on various issues across the system, highlighting the recent work with HVAC units at the Milam branch. He then talked about how in 2018, Little Rock was in the running with six other cities to receive money from the National League of Cities for food nutrition development projects and how the city approached the library to coordinate the grant Little Rock received. This became the Be Mighty program. Unlike the other five cities that received money, Little Rock's program has been sustained after the NLC grant funding ran out. Coulter attributed this to the CALS staff who have done so much to sustain and enhance the program. Coulter also introduced Blake, the new manager of the CALS Cruiser.

## 6. Other

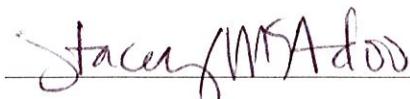
Neal corrected the number of survey completions she mentioned during the strategic planning update to the accurate number of 2,249. She then stated that when the survey reached 2,500 completions, we would be well within the margin for statistical significance and would be representative of the community we serve.

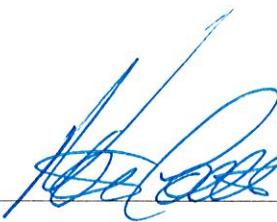
Gross announced that he would be leaving his position at CALS on August 2 and that this would be his last board meeting. He thanked the board of directors and staff of CALS for their dedication to the community. Coulter thanked Gross for his exemplary service and lamented that he would be leaving Arkansas and CALS to return home to Kansas with his fiancé

## 7. Move to Adjourn

McAdoo moved to adjourn the meeting; Neal seconded.

McAdoo adjourned the meeting at 1:00 P.M.

  
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Stacy McAdoo  
President

  
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Heather Gross  
Secretary