

Library Director Report

June 2025

Prepared by Tana Elias, July 2, 2025



photos: (left) Naturalist-in-Residence Andrea Debbink, (right) Andrea's books, including the story walk selection *If the Rivers Run Free*. Photos by Madison Public Library staff.

Meet Our Naturalist-in-Residence!

Andrea Debbink is a writer and nature lover who has called Madison home for more than two decades. After getting her start in publishing as a magazine editor, she now writes books for children and adults—seventeen and counting—including *If the Rivers Run Free*, *Thrive Where You're Planted*, and the *Wild World Handbook* series. Her newest book is a Madison-area hiking guide called *Urban Trails: Madison*. Although Andrea writes in different genres and formats—from picture books to middle-grade to adult nonfiction—her books nearly always include her favorite themes: nature exploration and environmental stewardship.

As a suburban naturalist, Andrea sees flowers where others see weeds and wildlife neighbors where others may see pests. Her upbringing in the Minneapolis suburbs taught her to seek out nature in unexpected places and appreciate the ordinary wonders that thrive among our streets and shopping centers. Her more recent training as a Wisconsin Master Naturalist and her years spent hiking and paddling throughout the Madison area have fueled Andrea's enthusiasm for connecting people to nature in our community, especially the parts of it that are underappreciated or overlooked.

The Naturalist-in-Residence program is coordinated by Librarian Michelle Herbrand and hosted in partnership with [Madison Parks](#) and [Olbrich Botanical Gardens](#). It is funded with the support of Nancy Leff and Kenneth Lerner. Learn more about Andrea's residency and upcoming events: <https://madpl.org/naturalist>



Imagination Center site showing demolition of park shelter. Photo provided by CCI.

Imagination Center at Reindahl Park Update

It's been an incredibly exciting month for the Imagination Center project, as we've seen the construction of a new bike path in the park, some landscaping work to remove identified trees, and the demolition of the old park shelter. Material removal from the demolition continues through early July. Current work focuses on temporary power installation and site grading operations, which will prepare the site for the next phase of construction. Monthly updates are available on the [Engineering Department's project page](#) and shared out through the Library's email newsletter, too. We will submit our first Flexibility Facilities Program payment request in July and begin the long process to finalize the Imagination Center operating budget at our upcoming July 8 meeting.

We recently had the opportunity to engage with neighborhood residents through a Parks Alive event at the nearby Sandburg Park, with two other Parks Alive events scheduled throughout the summer. In July, we'll put out a call for public art submissions for the new facility through the Madison Art Commission.

Sadly, we lost a dedicated advocate with the recent passing of former Alder Joe Clausius, who has been an integral part of the Imagination Center project since it was just a neighborhood dream. If you haven't already, I'd invite you to review [Alder Madison's blog post & Council resolution](#) honoring Mr. Clausius. I only met him a few times, but his enthusiasm for the Imagination Center and passion for bringing services to his east side neighborhood have inspired me throughout the last year as the Imagination Center became a reality.

National Library Funding Update

There is some good short-term news regarding funding at the national level. IMLS funding for the Grants to States program which supports libraries across the country has been reinstated in Wisconsin at the full amount of \$3.2 million through September of 2026. According to Ben Miller, newly titled State Librarian under a recently announced DPI reorganization, "Federally, we are hoping to see IMLS funding restored in the budget bill as well as Congressional

reauthorization of IMLS as an agency. Both of these actions need to happen to secure LSTA Grants-to-States funds moving forward.”

On another federal front, E-rate technology funding for schools and libraries was preserved by the U.S. Supreme Court in the recent case *Federal Communications Commission v. Consumers’ Research*. Madison Public Library receives about \$15,000 in E-rate reimbursements, but this is a win for public libraries and schools across the nation.

Library Budget Update

In June, we had our agency briefing regarding the 2026 Operating Budget submission, **which included the exciting and unexpected news that agencies who were opening a new facility in 2026 would be able to ask for a supplemental request.** This gives us the green light to ask for additional funds for the operation of the Imagination Center, which you will see included in your board packet for this month. Rather than include reductions as part of our base or cost-to-continue budget request, we are including proposed reductions as part of the supplemental request to show the impact of the request not being granted or fully funded. They are listed separately on the Board agenda so that you can approve each of them individually. That way, if we need to use our backup July 15 meeting to continue to discuss the supplemental request and prioritized reductions, we can move forward with preparing the base budget for submission to City Finance no later than July 18.

The executive operating budget will be announced on October 7, with the final budget approved November 11-13. You can see the entire budget timeline at <https://www.cityofmadison.com/finance/budget>.

Library Metrics

All monthly key metrics, by month and library, from 2015 to the previous month, are available on our interactive dashboard: [MPL Monthly Metrics | Tableau Public](#).

For your calendar

Here are some dates you may want to save on your calendar:

- All Madison Libraries are closed Friday, July 4 (there are no Sunday hours in summer)
- Board meeting on July 8, 5pm, is HYBRID but in-person attendance is encouraged. The meeting will be at 210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, Rm 206.
- Board meeting (if needed) on July 15, 5pm, will be virtual

Press Releases & News Stories

Library Press Releases

- [Summer Fun for Kids, Sewer Explorers Event Friday](#) posted June 12, 2025 (Engineering)
- [Madison Public Library Announces 2025 Naturalist-in-Residence; Programs Begin June 16](#) *posted June 2, 2025*

News Coverage

- [Reading into the Importance of Public Libraries](#) *posted May 29, 2025*
- [Chapter 150: Madison Public Library's past and future](#) *posted May 30, 2025*
- [Imagination Center aims to be an oasis for northeast Madison families](#) *posted June 30, 2025*
- [Get to Know Tana Elias, Madison's Public Library Director](#), *posted July 3, 2025*
- "Parks & Rec & Libraries", *Library Journal cover story featuring Naturalist-in-Residence program, July 2025*