

Library Director Report

January 2026

Prepared by Tana Elias, January 30, 2026



It's Cold Out There!

We spent several days in January planning for extreme cold weather, at the library and across the city. Public libraries play an important role in extreme weather events, providing heat in the winter and cooling in the summer. We coordinate with agencies all across the City and the County to prepare and have updated our procedures in these areas. We work with a variety of partners to offer access to snacks, meals, blankets, medical supplies, cold weather gear and medical care through Madison Street Medicine and other partnerships. We also relax our behavior standards for non-violent behaviors during times of extreme weather. Behind the scenes, our facilities crew works extra hard to make sure HVAC systems are working properly, water pipes aren't freezing, and snow is getting shoveled.



1 200 people gather at Central to participate in Puzzlepaloosa. Photo by library staff.

Programming and Community Engagement Highlights:

We're off to a great start with our programming and community engagement for the year, and I'm including a few highlights here:

Puzzlepaloosa

Thirteen teams competed for the shortest time to put together a 1000-piece puzzle in an event hosted at the Central Library. Team spots filled up quickly, and many more people came to watch, to work on puzzles collaboratively, and to take part in a puzzle swap. On a cold January Saturday, more than 200 attendees came to join the festivities, including PBS Wisconsin, which will feature the event as part of a larger piece. In its third year, Puzzlepaloosa is the vision of Michelle Herbrand, and her work is supported by Neeyati Shah and Martín Alvarado, all

Community Engagement Librarians at the Central Library. Organizers cited the joy of witnessing a successful, multigenerational event, working with great colleagues, and “watching people get excited over puzzles” as highlights.

150x150 Scavenger Hunt

Discover 150 artworks for 150 years in 7 libraries through February 28. From our marketing manager Liz Boyd, “I was at Central for Puzzlepalooza, a kid, his mom and grandma rode up in the elevator with me and they were there to find the pieces for the scavenger hunt. They had already visited four libraries and found a new favorite in Alicia Ashman Library. They said they'd never been before and loved the expansive children's book selection there (less "picked over" than Sequoya, their home library). I think it's really serving its purpose of helping people get out and discover new library locations, as well as see all the artwork!”

African Storytimes

A partnership with the UW Madison African Studies Program provides monthly African Story Times at the Pinney Library, promoting greater understanding of the richness and diversity of Africa’s countries and cultures. This popular program was featured in the Isthmus (article link below in media section) and includes the opportunity to see items and taste foods from the featured country as part of the storytime experience.

And more!

Tax assistance just opened, and appointments are filling up fast. This exceedingly popular service will be offered at four libraries this year (Central, Sequoya, Lakeview, and Meadowridge) and offers free tax preparation and filing services for those who meet income and other requirements. Our partnerships with VITA and AARP helped hundreds of folks receive this assistance last year and saved them over \$136,000 in filing and prep fees alone, not to mention any refunds received. With four elections this year, libraries will again serve as **IPAV** (in-person absentee voting) sites and election day polling places. We’ve hosted dozens of school visits across our system, with 9 planned so far for the Central Library (reaching 540+ students) alone. And we’ve already got nearly 1000 events on our calendar for 2026 so far. I encourage you to attend an event (or three, or five) yourself to experience the learning, connection and joy first hand.



2 Exterior and interior of Imagination Center, January 2026. Photo by City Engineering staff.

Imagination Center at Reindahl Park Update

I had the opportunity to walk through the building a few weeks ago and it looks much different now than when we visited as a Board in November. The roof is on, the walls are up, and the interior wall structures are up, giving visitors a better sense of the distinct spaces that will be in the finished building. The weather has affected construction a bit but so far the construction remains on schedule.

The four finalists for the public art piece that will be installed in Reindahl Park through Madison Arts Commission have been released and there is a public survey you can take by February 12. I encourage you to weigh in and share the news. MAC is working to get information out to five area schools, including Sandburg Elementary, and may arrange to gather in-person feedback at schools if time allows.

Collection purchasing and processing, furniture selection, and staff hiring are also progressing. We've conducted first round interviews for the Library Supervisor position and will be interviewing transfer candidates for the Librarian and Library Assistant positions soon, which will leave openings in other libraries which will be filled through our normal hiring process this spring. We are also beginning to work with key partners like Community Development Division for updates on the nearby Bartillon Men's Shelter and Literacy Network, who will host a variety of classes on site. And we've just established the new site as eligible for E-Rate, a federal technology reimbursement program for schools and libraries.

Monthly construction updates are available on the [Engineering Department's project page](#) and shared out through the [Library's email newsletter](#), too.

Planning Update

I've had many meetings about the Meadowridge Library in the last few months and will be presenting the lease renewal to the Board for approval in February. City Real Estate has negotiated some much-needed improvements to the space, and will renew our lease in tandem with the lease of the Meadowood Neighborhood Center. In the meantime, a recommendation to expand or relocate the Meadowridge Library in the future will be included in the City's [Southwest Area Plan](#). The clear desire of the neighborhood to maintain a library presence in the Meadowood/Orchard Ridge neighborhoods will need to be balanced by space concerns and long-term building conditions at the present space as well as the growth we're seeing in the far southwest area of the city.

The Downtown Area Plan is just beginning, and we'll be a part of that planning process as well. In January and February we've piloted closing the Central Library's Ground floor at the same time we close Youth Services. So far we've received little negative feedback from customers overall with this change. In March, we'll open it back up and gather better data on who uses what spaces when throughout the entire building through a multi-month effort to use in-library sensors to measure traffic flow in the building. This data will help us determine which parts of

the building are active when and will help us in rethinking various spaces and problem areas in the building before any effort is underway to make major remodeling changes.

Library Metrics

I'm including our annual Year in Review sheet with this Board report, and you can find an extended version online at <https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/yearinreview2025>

All monthly key metrics, by month and library, from 2015 to the previous month, are also 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:

- Upcoming Library Board meetings – Thursday, February 5, 5pm, Meadowridge Library and Thursday, March 5, 5pm, Lakeview Library
- Library Volunteer Thank You event, Thursday, February 12, noon (see email from me on 1/9/26 – please RSVP by 2/5/26)
- [Lunch for Libraries](#) with Jesmyn Ward, Tuesday, May 5, noon at Monona Terrace – SAVE THE DATE, tickets go on sale February 24
- Library Staff Day: Thursday, May 14, noon-5pm, Central Library – SAVE THE DATE registration link coming soon

Press Releases & News Stories

Library Press Releases

- [Share your thoughts on Public Art Designs for the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park](#) (posted January 30, 2026)

News Coverage

- [Madison Public Library offers 15 date ideas just in time for Valentine's Day](#) (WMTV, January 14, 2026)
- [Most frequently checked-out items from Madison Libraries](#) (Wisconsin State Journal, January 14, 2026)
- [Children's African Story Hour demystifies narratives about Africa](#) (Isthmus, January 14, 2026)
- [The 100th anniversary of Black History Month will be celebrated with many events in Madison and throughout Wisconsin](#) (Madison365, January 26, 2026)
- [Feedback sought on public art](#) (Wisconsin State Journal, January 30, 2026)
- [Give your 2 cents on the public art designs for Reindahl Park](#) (Wisconsin State Journal, January 31, 2026)
- [Madison Public Library Celebrates Black History Month](#) (WMTV, February 1, 2026)