

Library Director Report

March 2025

Prepared by Tana Elias, April 1, 2025



Federal Funding & Threats to Library Funding

I continue to meet regularly with City of Madison colleagues and professional library colleagues across the South Central Library System, the State of Wisconsin, and nationally to share information about the fast-changing federal landscape and anticipated local and regional impacts on a wide variety of budgets and services that affect the City and the Library.

March was a disheartening month for libraries: on March 14, a new Executive Order required that the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) “be eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law”. By March 18, the President appointed a new acting head for the organization, who, through a statement, committed to “revitalizing IMLS and restoring its focus on patriotism.” By March 31, all 75 staff at the IMLS had been placed on administrative leave for up to 90 days. With no staff other than the acting head, it’s unlikely that any libraries or museums will receive promised IMLS funds during this time.

What does this mean?

We are wrapping up one IMLS grant for the Observation Deck (odeck.org), a partnership between Madison, Waupaca, and Skokie Public Libraries focused on program evaluation. While we may not see the rest of the funding, we have a plan for completing the project. At the system level, 2024 funds (FY July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025) have been received and used to fund core system services, to add a library (Amherst, WI) to the shared ILS, for professional development, and for a backup and digitization project. This funding totaled 4% (\$110,460) of its budget. 2025 funds have not yet been authorized. And at the state level, IMLS funding is a significant portion of the DPI’s Division for Libraries & Technology funding, including the salaries of most DL&T staff. DL&T distributes both IMLS and State funds to library systems and libraries, provides professional development, leadership and executive level support for libraries (like the Trustee Handbook and new director training), as well as support for outerlibrary loan management and Badgerlink, a statewide research database provided to public libraries and schools throughout the state at no charge. Loss of these services would have a significant impact on references service for libraries across the state, including Madison.

What can you do?

- Contact your legislators directly
- Write a postcard (or several) for National Library Week to be shared with legislators

- Share a video testimonial with DPI
- Continue to read updates from me when they come out and follow along at madpl.org/advocacy

We'll no doubt have additional advocacy opportunities throughout the year.

In addition to IMLS funding concerns, a recent Supreme Court case challenged Erate funding for libraries and schools. Erate is a program offered through a different federal agency that provides discounts on qualifying technology based on income levels of service populations. Many of our technology purchases qualify for Erate discounts, and the loss of this funding would be a significant increase to our technology budget or a steep reduction in the technology services we could offer without other funding to fill the gap.

Programming & Service Highlights: Dancing, Seeds, Wiggles & Mocktails



top left: Pinney Library patrons at Saturday music event; top right: seed library at Alicia Ashman Library; bottom left: Wiggles and Words at Goodman South Madison Library; bottom right: Book & Mocktail pairing before Wisconsin Book Festival event with Nancy Reddy at Central Library. Photo credit: library staff

Our libraries host hundreds of programs each month which foster connection, healthy living, early literacy skills, and a love of reading & learning. Here's a sampling of what happened in March:

Pinney Library hosts live music on the first Saturday of every month. In March, Nostalgic Groove played to a standing room-only crowd for an hour. The event kicked off with "Love Shack" by The B-52s and got the crowd to their feet for the last song, "Dancing Queen" by ABBA. The [video](#) captures the joy and connection in the room.

Garden seeds are here! We have thousands of packets of free seeds spread across **eight library locations** available for library visitors to pick up from our Seed Libraries. There are more than 50 different varieties of seeds in this year's giveaway, including favorites like tomatoes, greens, pumpkins, zucchini, and many types of flowers and herbs. A special thank you to the seed library volunteers who helped package seeds in a series of volunteer events. Learn more at madpl.org/seedlibrary

Wiggles and Words storytime at **Goodman South Madison Library** is a multi-age, drop-in group each Monday morning this winter and spring. When children engage with books, songs, and play, they develop communication skills, patience, empathy, and pre-reading skills - all of which help to build a lifelong love of reading. This is one of dozens of early literacy events happening each week in all our libraries or at outreach sites.

A book and mocktail pairing at **Central Library**, created by librarians Neeyati and Michelle, offered a chance for around 40 folks to come to the library, find their next great read, sip mocktails, and then transition to a Wisconsin Book Festival event featuring Nancy Reddy for her book *The Good Mother Myth*. We were happy to see people strike up conversations around their favorite reads and mocktails. (And many thanks to the Wisconsin Book Festival for hosting seven author visits to MMSD schools this spring!)

150th Anniversary

We continue to highlight our 150th anniversary this year with a variety of outreach, in-library events, and social media promotion. We've been signing folks up for library cards, working to line up media coverage for our three Saturdays of events, and planning nine parties for May. If you haven't already, I encourage you to check it out at our [150th Anniversary web site](#).

Imagination Center at Reindahl Park Update

The Imagination Center at Reindahl Park bid opening is Thursday, April 3. Once the low bid has been verified to meet all requirements, it is scheduled for approval by Board of Public Works on April 9, then by the new Common Council during their first official meeting on April 15. We hope to announce the groundbreaking soon after and begin construction in May following the required timeline of the Flexible Facilities Program grant. While we've had some recent communication from the State regarding requirements changes, we are hopeful to begin drawing down those grant funds soon and are currently working through our second required quarterly report for the project. Private fundraising through the MPL Foundation has reached the 65% mark. Follow the project at madpl.org/reindahl.

Library Budget Update

We're presenting our Capital Budget for your approval at the April meeting, following the guidance of the Mayor, which focused on fiscal responsibility and prioritizes "investments in basic infrastructure, increased efficiency to reduce long-term costs, housing, and projects that promote economic development." [[Mayoral guidance](#)] It also limits new projects to those which are 1) funded by nongeneral obligation borrowing funding sources (e.g., grants, TIF increment), 2) meet an emergency need not anticipated in 2025, 3) are currently on the Horizon List and are ready to be advanced, or 4) are planned for the last year of the CIP (2031). We've added the allowable 5% increase for programs (collection and major repair and replacement) in the final year of the CIP, and rather than propose new projects, we will focus on completing projects already underway and wrapping up capital projects that are not yet complete, some of which will require additional capital funding to complete. We have an upcoming meeting with Engineering to assess and prioritize those projects.

In addition to the Capital Budget, we are working with finance to review our cost to continue budget in preparation for the operating budget process. The operating budget kickoff is June 16 and our budget is due to City Finance on July 18; in between, the Library Board will have to approve our budget submission. You can see the entire budget timeline at <https://www.cityofmadison.com/finance/budget>.

A New Colleague

On March 25, the Common Council approved the Mayor's recommendation of Elizabeth Pierson for the Madison Public Library Board. Elizabeth will serve out a term ending on June 30, 2027. She expects to join us for our April meeting, and I'll use existing onboarding materials to orient her to Board service as well as incorporate additional materials and onboarding suggestions from the onboarding subcommittee. Elizabeth is an attorney with Pines Bach where she has a diverse portfolio including but not limited to elections/voting and labor &

employment law. She is a lifelong library user/supporter. She has served as both a poll worker and observer and has provided legal services through the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic.

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:

- [National Library Week](#), April 6-12
- [Lunch for Libraries](#) fundraiser – Tuesday, April 29, 11:30am-1:30pm [if you'd like to attend as a board member but ticket cost is prohibitive, contact me regarding purchasing at-cost tickets especially for Board members]
- Staff Day (Board members welcome) – Thursday, May 15, 9am-3pm – invitation coming soon
- Imagination Center groundbreaking – May 7, 8, 13, or 14 TBD after bid opening
- 150th anniversary [celebrations](#):

May 10

Alicia Ashman Library [733 N High Point Rd], 9-11am

Meadowridge Library [5726 Raymond Rd], 11am - 1pm

Sequoia Library [4340 Tokay Blvd], 1-3pm

Goodman South Madison Library [2222 S Park St], 3-5pm

May 17

Central Library [201 W Mifflin St], 10am - 2pm

May 31

Monroe Street Library [1705 Monroe St], 9-11am

Pinney Library [516 Cottage Grove Rd], 11am -1pm

Lakeview Library [2845 N Sherman Ave], 1-3pm

Hawthorne Library [2707 E Washington Ave], 3-5pm