

Library Director Report

September 2025

Prepared by Tana Elias, October 6, 2025



Staff Highlight

Congratulations to Rachel Davidson, Community Engagement Librarian at Sequoya Library, who was recently awarded the Elizabeth Moon Proctor Scholarship by Madison Public Library Foundation! This scholarship, established in memory of longtime librarian Betsy Proctor, supports staff pursuing careers in library and information studies. Rachel, who is currently working toward her MLIS at UW-Madison, shared:



1 left to right, Executive Director of Madison Public Library Foundation Conor Moran, Community Engagement Librarian Rachel Davidson, Library Director Tana Elias

"As a Community Engagement Librarian, I strive to align services and events with the community's needs. I coordinate events like book discussions, cooking classes, blood drives, and our sewing club. Whenever possible, I try to advocate for my coworkers and support the team here at Sequoya, however I can."

Please join me in celebrating Rachel's achievement and commitment to both her studies and our library community!

Imagination Center at Reindahl Park Update

Construction progress remains on schedule and within budget at the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park. Plumbing, duct work, and radiant floor heat tubing were laid, the concrete slab has been poured, and work progresses on the masonry areas. In October, work will begin to enclose the exterior, starting with the installation of structural steel.



2 Masonry construction at Imagination Center site.

Two major parts of the building's sustainability footprint are being completed. Geothermal boring and piping work continues, which will create a more energy efficient heating and cooling system for the building once complete. A bio-filtration pond is being installed; the pond will naturally treat stormwater runoff by removing pollutants like sediments and chemicals, which improves the water quality before it enters local waterways.

Madison Arts Commission (MAC) has also selected four applicants to move forward with proposals for a Percent for Art public art piece that will be displayed in the park adjacent to the building. Selected applicants will now move into the proposal phase to put forth their vision for Imagination Center-specific artwork. Designs are due in January, and the community will get a chance to see the proposals. MAC will review all designs in the winter and select the final piece in the spring so the artist can fabricate the piece and install it next summer/fall.

The City is also applying for a second state grant to offset borrowing costs for the Imagination Center from the Department of Administration's [Grants for Local Projects](#) program. The application is due October 31, 2025, and grants will be announced in spring of 2026.

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

Library Budget Update

I'm extremely happy to report that the Mayor included not only our requested collection increase in her 2026 Executive Capital Budget, but also a \$320,000 increase to the library budget in the 2026 Executive Operating Budget for costs related to the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park, along with an increase in the Parks budget for their share of Center operating costs. While the operating budget will not be officially released until October 7, the announcement for the Imagination Center was made in advance on September 30.

Inclusion in the executive budgets means that funding is secure *unless* an alder proposes an amendment to adjust either executive budget. There will be a briefing with the Finance Committee on October 14, and a period of time in which alders can propose amendments, all before the budget is taken up for approval November 11-13. You can see the entire budget timeline and the library's capital and operating requests at <https://www.cityofmadison.com/finance/budget>.

One September addition to the Library's capital budget since the Board approved it was adding the Central Library Renovation project back in to the 2026 Capital Budget as a Horizon List request with zero funding. This was in response to a request by Alder Verveer (District 4) with the intent to keep the need for the Central Library as a documented need. Project scope and funding will be a consideration for 2026 and future years.

Strategic Planning & AI Updates

I've had a chance to weigh in on the Southwest Area Plan, which includes the Meadowridge Library, and upcoming meetings on the Southwest Area Plan and Southeast Area Plan are scheduled for October and November. Learn more via this recent [City of Madison email](#).

The City of Madison recently extended its pause on use of AI by City employees through March 31, 2026, but I'm continuing to read about library efforts around AI.

150th Anniversary Update

Our special edition anniversary card made quite a splash in September! We had 1848 card registrations in September 2025, a 21% increase over registrations from September of 2024. We know that many folks have been eagerly awaiting October to get their existing library cards upgraded to the new design and have purchased more special edition cards as well as card stickers for those who don't want to change their barcode number.

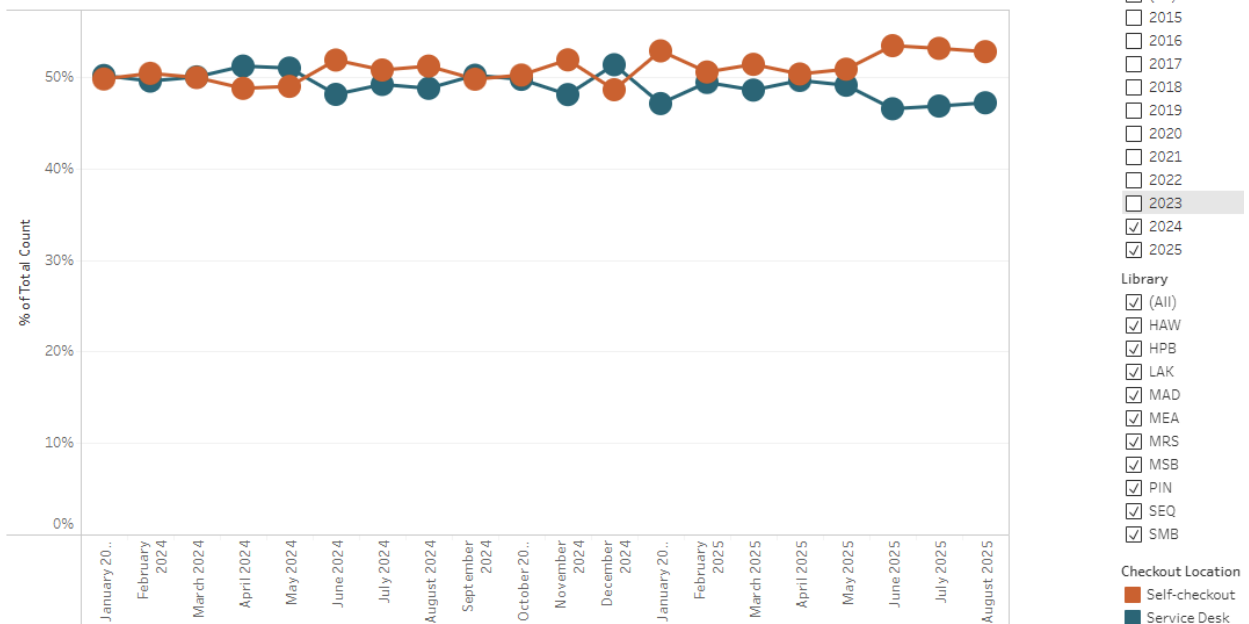


3 New library card holder at Lakeview Library

On October 14, I'll be reprising my "150 Years of Madison Public Library" presentation given to Rotary on July 16 for Wisconsin Historical Museum's History Sandwiched In series. And later this year we'll debut The Bubbler's 150 Artists for 150 Years art exhibition in seven of nine libraries, celebrating changes in our language and our 12+ year collaboration with local artists through The Bubbler's work. Shout out to Liz Boyd, Margie Navarre Saaf, Trent Miller, and Carlee Latimer for organizing the card signup and art exhibits, and finance and circulation staff for processing so many artist contracts and library card applications!

Library Metrics: Spotlight on Self-Check Use

% of Self-checkouts



Interactive data 2019-present at Madison Public Library's [Self-Checkout Ratio](#) dashboard. This shows data for 2024 and 2025.

We introduced self-check stations to all public libraries in 2021, before we reopened our libraries to full use after the pandemic. Since that time, we've seen about a 50/50 split between in-person checkouts at self-check stations and at a public service desk. This summer, we have seen a three-month trend up in self-check use.

Why do we track this? We recently learned that our self-check machines are nearing end of life and will need to be replaced, and our technology team reviewed checkout data to make recommendations on replacement (or relocation) based on checkouts at each individual machine, checkouts by library, and overall checkout totals.

And, keep in mind that roughly 25% of all checkouts happen online!

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:

- Alicia Ashman Library 25th Anniversary, Saturday, October 11, 10am-noon
- Wisconsin Book Festival, October 23-26, Central Library
- Library Board meeting – Thursday, November 6, Pinney Library
- Save the date: [Ex Libris](#), Friday, November 7, 7-10pm, Central Library

Press Releases & News Stories

Library Press Releases

- [Madison Clerk's Office Celebrates National Voter Registration Day with Weeklong Events](#) *posted September 15, 2025*
- [Celebrate the 100th Anniversary of The Great Gatsby at Meadowridge Library this Fall](#) *posted September 15, 2025*
- ["Unjust Deeds" Racial Covenants Exhibition Coming to Madison Public Library's Sequoya Library in October 2025](#) *posted September 25, 2025*
- [Alicia Ashman Library to Celebrate 25 Years of Service On October 11](#) *posted September 29, 2025*
- [Mayor Rhodes-Conway Investing in Imagination Center](#) *posted September 30, 2025*
- [Meet the Finalists Selected for Public Art at the Imagination Center at Reindahl Park](#) *posted October 2, 2025*

News Coverage

- [Madison mayor unveils executive capital budget with over \\$90M in key projects](#) (*WKOW 27, September 2, 2025*)

- [Madison mayor unveils \\$285M capital budget, calls on state for more revenue sources](#) (*Wisconsin State Journal*, September 3, 2025)
- [Madison Public Library to host first African Story Hour of the season](#) (*WMTV 15*, September 7, 2025)
- [Jane Hamilton, Mary Roach among headliners for 2025 Wisconsin Book Festival's Fall Celebration](#) (*Isthmus*, September 12, 2025)
- [Wisconsin Book Festival 2025 — what not to miss](#) (*Capital Times*, September 12, 2025)
- [Imagination Center is one for the books](#) (*In Business*, September 17, 2025)
- [Sick of AI search engines? Madison Public Library touts free databases](#) (*Capital Times*, September 18, 2025)
- [Madison's new community center library will address a 'resource desert' in the Reindahl Park neighborhood](#) (*Wisconsin Public Radio*, September 22, 2025)
- [There's a book club for that: Find your reading community in Madison](#) (*Madison Magazine*, September 26, 2025)
- ["Unjust Deeds" racial covenants exhibition coming to Madison Public Library's Sequoya Library in October](#) (*Madison365*, September 29, 2025)
- [Madison mayor supports new library by adding more funding in operating budget](#) (*WMTV 15*, September 30, 2025)
- [Imagination Center gets funding boost in mayor's 2026 operating budget proposal](#) (*WORT FM*, September 30, 2025)
- [Far East Side library with uncertain future could start fully staffed](#) (*Wisconsin State Journal*, October 1, 2025)
- ["Unjust Deeds" racial covenants exhibition coming to Madison Public Library's Sequoya Library in October](#) (*Madison365*, September 29, 2025)
- [Police cameras, library upgrades on Madison budget committee wish list](#) (*Capital Times*, October 2, 2025)
- [4 finalists chosen for public art at Madison's newest library](#) (*Wisconsin State Journal*, October 3, 2025)
- [Strong Position: The Wisconsin Book Festival's Fall Celebration is full of buzzworthy articles](#) (*Isthmus*, October 3, 2025)
- [Wisconsin authors in the spotlight at the Wisconsin Book Festival's Fall Celebration](#) (*Isthmus*, October 3, 2025)