

Library Director Report

May 2025

Prepared by Tana Elias, June 2, 2025



May Celebration Updates

May was an incredibly busy month and we received amazing media coverage on multiple fronts.

Imagination Center at Reindahl Park Groundbreaking

Over a hundred invited guests and neighborhood residents joined us at Reindahl Park for the groundbreaking of the Imagination Center.

Watch [recorded remarks](#) at groundbreaking.

Staff Day

This year's Staff Day inservice was a celebration of the incredible work of library staff. Staff had the opportunity to take the day and center conversations around the themes of joy, resilience, and connection. Through a combination of keynote speakers and breakout sessions, staff enjoyed a variety of fun and uplifting activities and multiple opportunities to connect with and learn from each other.

150th Anniversary Parties

We turned 150 in style! In May we hosted parties at all nine locations. Each library celebrated in their own unique way with a marching band and other musical performances, history slideshows, story times, hands-on art, face painting, book sales and – of course – birthday cake. Watch [recorded remarks](#) at May 17 celebration.

All of these celebrations required the work of many library staff to make them successful, from delivering and setting up chairs to greeting customers to processing contracts. A big shout out to all staff who helped, as well as to MPL Foundation Fellow, Jacquie Kociubuk, who's worked on compiling MPL historical materials and helping us plan for our 150th for the past nine months. We wish her well in her new position! A special thank you to the Foundation for funding the above events (and planning the groundbreaking) and supporting us in so many other ways.

Throughout the rest of the year, we'll continue to celebrate our 150th by expanding our outreach at festivals and events throughout the summer, celebrating September Is Library Card Signup Month with a special flair, and unveiling a new art exhibit in the fall focused on the 150th theme.

Community & Professional Engagement Highlights

Spring continues to be a busy time for events and other engagement opportunities. This past month, I attended Lunch for Libraries, Madison Community Foundation's Madison Gives event, (where long time Foundation donors Lau and Bea Christensen were honored), the Book Club Café, the Wisconsin Historical Museum's member event highlighting the new museum to be built across the street from the Central Library, and the SCLS's 50th anniversary celebration. I also met with and gave a tour to Heather Dieffenbach, the director of the Lexington (KY) Public Library, while she was in town for a city visit sponsored by the Lexington Chamber of Commerce.

Our library staff have been busy planning summer engagement events during this time, as well, including a library presence at Parks Alive events, the city's Juneteenth celebration, photo sharing events in partnership with PBS Wisconsin, and dozens of other events outside of our buildings. Highlights of May engagement include library card drives at area high schools and MMSD literacy nights. We're also giving out tickets for free pontoon rides through a partnership with MSCR and working through logistics changes in order to re-introduce our Madison Bicycle free rental program in August.

And we just launched our 2025 [Naturalist in Residence](#) program with Andrea Debbink, who will host a series of programs in June and July.

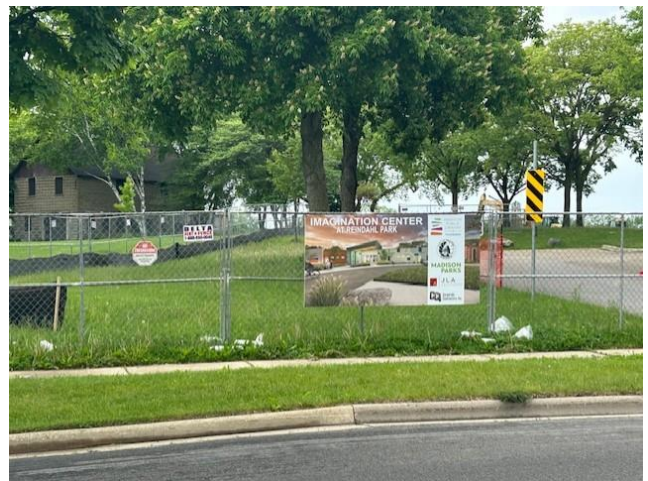


Pictured above: (left) WE READ summer map, (right) library program at Monroe Street Library. Photos by library staff.

WE READ Launched May 1

Typically our summer reading programs begin in June, but this year we launched them early in order to promote them at our 150th anniversary events. Built off the practices of the Public Library Association's Every Child Ready to Read program, Madison Public Library's early literacy philosophy incorporates five key elements: reading, talking, playing, singing, and writing. This

year, we're introducing a new WE READ map designed by former artist-in-residence Emily Balsley, a cross between the older "summer reading log" and the more open-ended approach we've taken in the last few years. We're also bringing back the summer artists-in-residence program so kids have a variety of ways to learn, share and create. A stronger partnership between MPL and MMSD this year meant that WE READ was promoted more to MMSD kids and families through MMSD's Mad about Reading initiative. Many thanks to the entire Youth Services team under the leadership of Tammy Ocampo for making WE READ a summer highlight.



Pictured above: (left) topsoil removal on future bike path, (right) on-site signage. Photos provided by CCI.

Imagination Center at Reindahl Park Update

The construction of the Imagination Center is finally underway! After the groundbreaking on May 8, the initial stages of construction have begun. To date, the tree protection fencing has been installed, a new bike path is being created, and demolition on the park shelter will begin the second week of June.

We are working on operational staffing scenarios as part of the 2026 operating budget process, have begun Owner-Architect-Contractor regular checkins to monitor construction progress, and are beginning to timeline out all the many "to dos" necessary to open a new library. At the end of June, we'll submit our first reimbursement request under the Flexible Facilities Program. We've also launched a [new email newsletter](#) with Imagination Center updates – sign up to receive monthly updates about the project.

National Library Funding Update

Funding was partially restored for this year's IMLS funding, but funding for the IMLS was not included in the 2026 federal budget. On May 21, Madison Public Library also received notice that our grant for the Observation Deck project was reinstated due to a preliminary injunction order, but that the order was being appealed. Here is a [recent update from American Library](#)

[Association](#) about the current state of IMLS funding. Also in May, the Librarian of Congress was fired by the President, who then named a new Acting Librarian of Congress, Todd Blanche, who is also serving as the Deputy Attorney General of the United States. The head of the Copyright Office, who serves under the Librarian of Congress, was also fired in early May.

Libraries throughout Wisconsin are now sharing a postcard writing campaign organized by Wisconsin library systems and maintained by Milwaukee County Federated Library System called [Speak Up for Libraries](#). Madison will introduce this campaign next week and promote through the end of July. Similar to our earlier National Library Week campaign, postcards will be tallied and delivered to legislators at the end of the campaign.

Library Budget Update

In May, we had our agency briefing regarding the 2026 Capital Budget submission. A reminder that we included a \$250,000 increase for the collection budget, raising it from \$880,000 to \$1,130,000 in 2026, with 5% CIP increases through 2031. The executive operating budget will be announced on September 2, with the final budget approved November 11-13.

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 on July 8 (backup meeting on July 15 if needed). You can see the entire budget timeline at <https://www.cityofmadison.com/finance/budget>. At the June meeting, I'll present a preliminary set of assumptions and scenarios for how we should present our budget submission to the board in July, with the goal of discussing the submission and any changes or requests for additional information in advance of the July 8 board meeting.

The City of Madison will also be hosting [public budget meetings](#) this month. The meetings will feature an update of the 2026 budget process with Finance Director Dave Schmiedicke and presentations from different departments at each meeting. The goal of these public meetings is to provide an opportunity for residents to speak directly with City staff about their ideas, concerns, and priorities for Madison's future. I will present at the June 11 meeting (6-8pm, at Warner Park), where the Library will host a table to meet with residents regarding specific questions or concerns they have about the Library's budget and services.

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:

- Library budget event on Wednesday, June 11, 6-8pm at Warner Park Community Recreation Center, 1625 Northport Drive (and other City budget sessions June 4, 16, 18, 24) [All budget sessions](#)
- [Friends of Madison Public Library BIG Book Sale](#), June 28, 9am-3pm at Library Service & Support Center, 1301 W. Badger Rd.
- All Madison Libraries are closed Juneteenth (Thursday, July 19) & Friday July 4 (there are no Sunday hours in summer)

Press Releases & News Stories

Library Press Releases

- [Madison Public Library Announces 2025 Naturalist-in-Residence; Programs Begin June 16](#) *posted June 2, 2025*
- [Madison Public Libraries Closed for Staff In-Service Day on May 15; Other Upcoming Hours Changes](#) *posted May 8, 2025*
- [WE READ Summer Reading Program Begins May 1 at Madison Public Library](#) *posted May 1, 2025*

News Coverage

- [Imagination Center at Reindahl Park set to move forward with construction](#). WMTV. April 25, 2025.
- [Madison Print & Resist Zinefest celebrates defiance through art](#). Capital Times. April 28, 2025.
- [Madison celebrates 150 years of public library service](#). Isthmus. May 2, 2025.
- [Madison breaks ground on Imagination Center](#). WKOW-TV. May 8, 2025.
- [Madison Public Library announces May schedule changes](#). Channel3000. May 8, 2025.
- [In its 150 years, Madison Public Library has been a model for the nation](#). Wisconsin State Journal. May 8, 2025.
- [Generations of stories come together as Madison libraries celebrate 150 years](#). WMTV. May 10, 2025.
- [Our view: Happy 150 – and many more – for Madison’s busy, engaging, vital libraries](#). Wisconsin State Journal. May 11, 2025.
- Looking back at 150 years of the Madison Public Library [article](#) & [podcast](#). City Cast Madison. May 14, 2025.
- [Madison Public Library celebrates 150 years — but what lies ahead?](#) Madison Magazine. May 14, 2025.
- [Trump doesn’t support libraries, so we have to](#). Capital Times. May 16, 2025.
- [Madison Public Library celebrates 150 years](#) and [photos](#). Wisconsin State Journal. May 18, 2025.
- [Madison Public Library celebrates 150 years of service](#). WORT-FM. May 19, 2025.