



PALOS HEIGHTS  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

# DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Palos Heights Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting  
May 15, 2025

## Library News

With the pending dissolution of the Institute for Museum and Library Services federally, libraries have been in the news more than normal lately. A lot of people are sounding the alarms about what this federal change could mean for libraries at the state and local level. There was a [front page article](#) in the Chicago Tribune on the negative impact that reduced federal funding could have on inter-library delivery services. Currently, this service is funded almost entirely by a grant from IMLS. To be sure, the collapse of RAILS deliveries would be devastating to us and to every library in northern Illinois. It is a cornerstone of modern library services. I believe that now is an important moment for library advocacy on the state and federal levels.

That said, I don't believe the situation is quite as dire as is being made out. While it is true that RAILS delivery service is currently funded mostly by the IMLS grant on paper, it is not true that delivery service would likely cease to exist without this grant. The IMLS grant represents something like 10% of the RAILS annual budget. While significant, this would probably not be an insurmountable loss for the system. This would be like if we lost our Per Capita Grant. Right now, our Per Capita Grant is earmarked for funding our IT services, which is a fundamental aspect of just about everything we do. On paper, if we lost the Per Capita Grant, we would lose funding for about 30% of our IT costs. But in reality, if we lost this funding, we probably wouldn't cut back our IT spending. We would compensate by diverting funds from other parts of the budget to keep IT spending at the necessary level. Certainly, it would hurt, but it wouldn't be a catastrophe.

RAILS recognizes the importance of its delivery service and would rearrange its budget to ensure this core service continues. Also, we have a Secretary of State, whose responsibilities include serving at the State Librarian, who has been very proactive and attentive to the needs of public libraries. I believe that there is good support and momentum at the state level to find funding to compensate for any federal shortfalls, should they occur. So while the news isn't good right now, I believe that support for public libraries is as strong as ever and that the real risk to our funding and our services is relatively low.

This support is reflected in a recent PBS broadcast, [Free for All: The Public Library](#), which aired last month and is viewable online and on the PBS app through July. It does a great job of discussing the origins of modern American libraries, the role that they have played in shaping our nation, and many of the pioneers who laid the foundation for what libraries do today. I encourage all of you to watch it, if you haven't

already. I think it's a great illustration of just how beloved and vital this public institution is and why so many people are so eager to defend what we do.

In unrelated news, I reached out to our attorneys at Klein, Thorpe, and Jenkins on the two topics of recent discussion, under what conditions we could provide library cards to residents at Bethshan and what issues we need to be aware of in celebrating religiously-based holidays as a public institution. As of this writing, they are still working on their briefs. I will share them with you as soon as they are available.

Finally, our YTS staff has created a new Tonies Listening Station upstairs. This creates a prominent display for the Tonies, which is a very popular collection with those who know about it. Hopefully, this will significantly increase this awareness. It also provides an opportunity for patrons to use the Tonies while in the building, which is a fun addition to our space. In order to create this space, we removed the desk that was holding the upstairs self-checkout station and moved the self-checkout machine over to the staff desk. I think this is a small but exciting change that enhances our space, looks nice, and adds just a little bit more excitement to kids' visits to the library.



### Building & Grounds News

- Stanley Steemer deep-cleaned our carpets on 4/19. This was our first time doing this in a few years. Our carpets weren't in terrible shape, but this cleaning was long overdue.
- Tree trimming was completed on 4/21. All trees along the south property line were trimmed. One dead tree on the south side of the parking lot was removed, and one dead tree along the west fence line was removed. The Friends have agreed to purchase a new tree to be planted along the fence line.
- BTC will be here on Monday and Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, to conduct their testing on the building envelope. Dan has done a great job of lining up everything that BTC will need, including

the lift and contractor to open up and re-close the wall. I don't expect to have any news to share at this month's meeting. It's possible the issue will be something obvious with a straightforward fix, but I expect that we won't have clarity on this until June.

- All hardware for the new phone system has been received. Our IT consultants are working on programming the new system behind the scenes. It's a completely different type of system from what we've had before. Rather than a physical switchbox that routes calls around the building on traditional phone lines, the new system is internet-based. Calls will be routed through our server to IP-based handsets at each desk. It's a completely computerized system, which should bring some really nice enhancements to what we can do in terms of the ease of routing calls, changing automated messages, and more efficient communication all around. There is a significant amount of programming with this new system, and testing has to be conducted outside of library hours so that the new system can be tested on live phone lines without disrupting normal business. So it's going to take a few weeks to get everything programmed and tested before we're ready to implement. But I'm excited for the new system. I think staff are going to love it!
- A new computer has been purchased and installed in the patron computer lab, and another has been purchased for the Public Services department. These are part of the rolling maintenance/replacement schedule for these computers and are replacing computers that are well beyond their anticipated end-of-life.

## Budget News

Things are in good shape in terms of the overall budget. We have received a few more small disbursements, bringing our tax distributions up to 96.4% of the total expected for the first half of the year. I expect the remainder to continue to trickle in over the coming months. Interest rates have dropped a bit, but we are still bringing in some meaningful interest income for a change. I'm doing my best to be patient with our Special Reserves spending. There are a lot of items on our list, including some moderately large purchases for meeting room chairs and study room furniture, but I want to know where we stand with the building envelope repair in order to avoid over-extending ourselves with other purchases. We did purchase a new staff computer and a new computer for the computer lab, as there was an urgent need for these. Computer prices have jumped significantly in the past few months. I'm going to attempt to be more opportunistic with future purchases, taking advantage of sales when they occur rather than attempting to get every possible day of use out of an old unit before replacing it.

## Upcoming Events

- Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup> – Committee Meeting, 6:00pm
- Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup> – Regular Board Meeting, 7:00pm
- Saturday, May 31<sup>st</sup> – Summer Reading Kickoff Party!, 10am – 2pm
- **Wednesday**, June 19<sup>th</sup> – Personnel Committee Meeting, 6:00pm
- **Wednesday**, June 18<sup>th</sup> – Regular Board Meeting, 7:00pm

## Agenda Items

### Item 1: Non-Resident Card Fee

As you know, people who don't reside within the Palos Heights city limits aren't entitled to a library card as they don't pay into the tax base that funds the library. We are a bit unusual in that we have two sizeable areas on unincorporated Palos Heights who don't pay taxes to any library. Statute allows us to offer library cards to people who live in unincorporated areas if they pay a non-resident card fee each year. There are two allowable methods for calculating what this fee will be.

The first is the "general mathematical formula." This entails calculating that average cost that each household in Palos Heights pays to the library and charging that amount to any non-resident household that wants to have a card. The advantages of this method are that it's simple and non-intrusive. We do a simple calculation to establish the average cost per household of library services, and we apply that cost identically to every non-resident.

The second method that we can use is the "tax bill formula." This method entails looking at the tax bill of each non-resident who is interested in getting a card and doing a quick calculation to determine how much they would pay to the library if their home were in the city limits. The advantage of this system is that it's fairer to non-residents, charging them exactly what they would actually pay rather than what the average household pays. The disadvantages are that it requires patrons to bring in a current property tax bill each year, which can feel intrusive, and that it's a little bit more work for library staff to do this calculation on a case-by-case basis.

In the past, we always used the general mathematical formula. It was simple and straightforward. This year was the first year that we implemented the tax bill method. Frankly, it's probably too soon to say whether this has been a success or not. Most of our non-resident cards are purchased in May and June, which makes sense because they typically expire at the end of June each year. So far, we have only had one non-resident card purchased with the new system. I expect there to be 3-5 more in the next few weeks. My recommendation is that we stay the course for now and give both staff and non-resident patrons an opportunity to work within the new system before evaluating its efficacy.

**Recommendation:** I recommend that you approve the "tax bill method" in calculating non-resident card fees for the year beginning July 1, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jesse Blazek  
Library Director