



PALOS HEIGHTS
PUBLIC LIBRARY

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Palos Heights Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting
August 20, 2026

Library News

It has been one wild and crazy summer around here! We've had celebrations, storms, departures, arrivals, and meetings galore.

Budget Update

There's a lot to cover here, but the news is mostly good. There are no surprises with our cash flow. Even with the substantial construction bills coming due, we have funds on hand to make it through most of October. The County has rolled out its Bridge Fund Program to provide no interest loans to taxpayer-funded entities. While municipal libraries, as pass-through or "paper" taxing districts, aren't able to apply directly, the City of Palos Heights is able to apply for those funds on our behalf. I've been working with the City's Finance Director and Manager to make this happen. This loan would be an immediate infusion of two-months of expenses, which should more than get us through to the point when the next round of distributions is happening. As you'll see below, it turns out that we might not actually need this bridge loan, but we are moving forward out of prudence.

I was asked to join the weekly call between Suburban Cook County school superintendents and library directors and representative of the Cook County President's Office. These meetings started up a few months ago in response to the outcry from schools and libraries about the lack of communication around the property tax issues. They have been incredibly productive! Not only is it a chance for us to be updated by those who are working directly with the various offices in the county to get the next round of tax bills out, but it's been a valuable opportunity for the President's Office to learn about our concerns and the various circumstances that different types of libraries find themselves in. For example, it was through these meetings that the President's Office learned just how vital the reporting module is to all of us. I'm not sure why that wasn't obvious to them in the first place, but it just wasn't something that they understood as being important to our operations.

Of note from recent meetings is that the Assessor's Office has finished with their part of processing the next round of tax bills, and the necessary information was sent to the Treasurer's Office on August 3rd. This was an important milestone in the process. If there are no major bumps in the road in the coming weeks, we can expect those bills to be finalized and published around September 1st. Then there will be about a two-week delay between when the first payments are made to the County and when the County turns those funds around for distribution to us. So tentatively, the hope is that we will start seeing distributions come in mid-September. I've also been tasked with contacting library directors in financially

distressed communities to make sure they're aware of the bridge fund program and to put them in touch with

Building Envelope Project

The building envelope repair is almost-but-not-quite complete. The repair work is complete, and the building looks as it should. We've had a few storms and no leakage, so hopefully we are in the clear moving forward. I'm told that Kersey is still waiting on some warranties and hasn't completed the required landscaping repairs yet. So we're making another large payment to them this month, but there will still be a small amount to close out this project to be paid in September.

Staffing Changes

Our new Head of Public Services, Kara Kohn, started the last week of July. Kara was far and away our first choice to fill this position, and I am beyond delighted that she agreed to join us. She spent the past four years working remotely for ProQuest, which is a major vendor of online resources for all types of libraries. Prior to that, she was the Head of Adult Services at the Plainfield Public Library for five years where she oversaw a 10-person department at a busy and high-performing library. She has excellent leadership skills, is extremely organized, has tremendous professionalism, and is everything that we want in our Head of Public Services. She immediately hit it off with our Management Team and with her new staff, and she's going to do amazing things for us!

This summer also saw the unexpected departures of our Assistant Head of Youth and Teen Services, Carla Dinnocenzo, and one of our Youth and Teen Librarians, Claire Ewers. Both left for extremely attractive positions at other libraries. Carla in particular has made a well-deserved step forward in her career. She is now the Head of Youth Services at the Lemont Public Library. While dealing with so many high-profile departures could be demoralizing, I believe the key takeaway with Matt, Carla, and Claire is that we are doing a great job of training high-quality librarians who other library professionals see as rising stars in the profession.

The silver lining here is that we've made three great hires. In addition to Kara, our Youth and Teen Services Department has hired Yasmin Ayyad and Alison Jagielo. They are both incredibly bright and experienced young professionals who bring a lot to the table. While I won't say that we're better off than we were before, our YTS department will not miss a beat with Yasmin and Alison on the team.

Staff In-Service

While I'm talking about staff, we had our semi-annual in-service on Friday, August 14th. We had a productive day discussing topics like online safety (both for ourselves and when working with patrons) and working through some more of Ryan Dowd's Homeless Training. We also had some fun and games and got to know our new staff members a bit more. This continues to be extremely valuable time for our staff.

Trinity Christian College Update

You might have heard that Chicago Christian Schools has agreed to purchase a large chunk of the Trinity campus. However, there is still a large portion of the campus that remains unclaimed at this point,

including the library building. I told you that I was invited to tour the property with other City leaders a few months ago. I sat down with the Mayor and the City Manager last month to discuss the viability of the library taking over Trinity's library building. While it's a larger building that is in great shape, I shared my honest opinion that it probably doesn't make much sense for us to try to move in over there. The biggest issues are that I estimate that somewhere north of \$2 million of renovations would need to take place prior to us moving in, given the building's current lack of a suitable children's area and large meeting space. Also at issue are what would happen with our current building given its limited market appeal and the long-term budgetary requirements of maintaining a much larger property. It's just not a reasonable project without a few million dollars of outside funding. I don't believe they were surprised by my response. The Mayor made the comment that he wanted to make sure the opportunity was offered to the Library before going in a different direction with it. And this is me making you aware that we're being offered this opportunity. I have been asked to attend another meeting this Friday to continue the discussion about the fate of this property. I'm not sure what the City is considering at this point, but I'm happy to keep listening, lending moral support, and keeping an open mind. The Mayor is fully aware that I'm not the one who would make any decision related to such a move, and I will continue to keep you updated on this situation.

Summer Storms

As you're all well aware, we have had a few more rounds of significant storms this summer. You'll recall that we had our power knocked out for a few days in June, immediately prior to that month's meeting. Another storm in mid-July did the same. We were without power for two-and-a-half days again. When the power came back up this time, we were relieved to find that everything was fine on the IT side. But we seemed to blow the switch that controls the parking lot lights. It's not an expensive fix, but it was a small nuisance. Then there was another round of storms in early August, but we escaped with little more than some flickering lights for once. All of this and the fact that it seems that bigger storms are becoming the norm has me thinking again about the desirability of a generator, which we discussed about a decade ago. But that is an expensive project that is neither a necessity nor likely to be in the budget in the next few years. We need to be saving up for replacing the roof, which will need to happen at some point in the next couple of years.

DAR Tree Donation

I was approached by members of the DAR Swallow Cliff Chapter, which meets regularly in our building, about the possibility of planting a tree in honor of America 250. My initial reaction was, "Great! I love planting more trees!" They thought it would be a nice gesture considering the momentous anniversary and the symbolism of the tree. The catch is that they really want to plant a white oak. The white oak is the state tree of Illinois, obviously, and the oak is also our national tree. It's also a species that stands a decent chance of still being around in 250 years for the quincentennial. So there's lots of symbolism behind the white oak choice, but it's also a very large species. We just don't have many places on our property where a tree that large would make sense, aside from places currently occupied by similarly large trees. But we did end up identifying a location near the pollinator garden where I think it will be a nice addition to Francine's Forest. After reaching out to a few of you for immediate reactions, and hearing no major concerns, let them know that we could move forward with the project. The plan is to get the tree

planted in the next few weeks with a formal dedication at their first Fall meeting on September 19th. I'll have more information for you as we get closer to that date, and I hope that you'll be able to attend!

Other News

I have quick updates on a number of other small items. Our young IT consultant, Donivin, is getting married on December 13th, which is the date that we had planned for our annual holiday party. A number of staff are planning to attend his wedding, so we have landed on a new date for the party. This year's party will take place at Kefi on Sunday, December 6th at 5:30pm. We will send out formal invitations closer to the date, but please mark your calendars!

I attended the semi-annual meeting of LIRA, our corporate insurance pool. The pool continues to outperform the marketplace, and Gallagher continues to secure rates better than we're seeing for other libraries in the open market. Unfortunately, the proliferation of major storm events continues to drive major inflation in the sector. While it's well below the industry average at this point, we've been told to prepare for a premium increase of 8-10% for next year.

As we typically do, the library had a contingent march in the July 4th parade. It was a lot of fun, as usual, with bubbles streaming down the road in our collective wake. Thanks to John and Maria for marching with us!

The Friends held their semi-annual book sale the first week of August, and it was another huge success! In four short days they raised just shy of \$3,400 for the library. Also, the next Friends meeting is coming up on Wednesday, September 9th at 3pm preceded by another edition of A Novel Idea, in which some of our intrepid librarians will be on hand to discuss favorite books and authors. Please plan to join us at 2pm in the Reading Room if you're able!

This year marks the 25th anniversary of 9/11, and the City is dedicating a new memorial. There will be a ceremony at Memorial Park next to City Hall on the morning of September 11th, tentatively planned for 7:30am. I'll update you when those plans have been finalized, if you're interested in attending.

Finally, you probably remember Anna Kolkmeier, the sweet little girl who raised funds for the library with her lemonade stand last year. Well, she's done it again! She had her lemonade stand the last weekend of July and donated another \$275 to the library. I've been corresponding with her mother about how to recognize her work and her gift this year. (I mean, how many plaques does a 6-year-old really want?) I think we're going to put together a little article to go in the November/December edition of the PageTurner, which I hope will be something that she'll be excited to see.

Upcoming Events

- Thursday, August 20th – Budget & Finance Committee Meeting, 5:30 pm
- Thursday, August 20th – Regular Board Meeting, 6:30 pm
- Thursday, September 17th – Regular Board Meeting, 6:30 pm
- Saturday, September 19th – DAR Tree Dedication, 11:30 am

- Saturday, September 26th – Fan Con, all day

Agenda Items

Item 1: Kersey Construction Pay Application 2

I thought we would be making our final payments to Kersey this month, but it turns out they're still dragging on a few of the final details. So there will be one more small payment to close out this project in September.

Recommendation: I recommend that you approve payment to D. Kersey Construction in the amount of \$73,701.50.

Item 2: Officer Nominations

The Board's Nominating Committee chair has put together a slate of officers for the upcoming 2026-2027 term. All current officers have agreed to accept nominations for their positions for another year, so the proposed slate is as follows:

President – Rose Zubik

Vice President – Patrick Keough

Secretary – Hilary Rhodes

Treasurer – John Peltz

Anyone else who is interested is welcome to throw their hat in the ring as well. The formal election will take place at our September meeting.

Recommendation: No action is needed at this time.

Respectfully submitted,
Jesse Blazek
Library Director