

Director's Report for September 23, 2021

Covid Updates: We have been fortunate not to have had any employees with positive covid tests in the last month despite the surge of cases in the state.

New Board Member: The LR City Board has appointed Esperanza Massana Crane to fill the board vacancy created when Susanna O'Daniel resigned after taking a job in Washington, D.C. Esperanza is the Director of Minority & Women-Owned Business Enterprise with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. She is originally from El Salvador and has Master's and Bachelor's degrees from Harding University. She has recently worked with some of CALS' staff on several programs and comes highly recommended by them.

Millage Election November 9, 2021: EveryLibrary is working closely with senior staff this month to help organize by branch groups to communicate about the election in an appropriate manner appropriate. The goal is to orient and inform neighborhood leaders and organizational stakeholders about the financial, operational, and strategic aspects of the ballot question. Their framework focuses leaders on the library's plan of service if the measure passes, as well as to inform them about what our anticipated adjustments to that plan if the measure fails on November 9th. EveryLibrary staff have provided training on proper techniques and orientation for public employee outreach and orientation that avoids advocacy for the millage. The groups will begin some outreach next week.

Some of you may be concerned that the prospects for the library proposal look dimmer in the wake of the decisive defeat of the city sales tax on September 14th. While that election indicates a high level of voter skepticism existed with the proposed sales tax, I believe that the sales tax and library property tax elections present substantially different issues and a majority of voters will be able to distinguish between the features of the sales tax plan and those of CALS' property tax referendum. The proposed property tax increase imposes a relatively smaller burden on taxpayers than the penny sales tax would have had. For a house assessed at \$250,000, our proposed increase would result in about a \$2/month increase. The 5/8 cent sales tax would have cost about \$6.20/month, assuming a \$1,000 in consumer spending per month. Property taxes are generally not viewed as being as regressive as sales taxes. We are being careful to detail how the money will be spent. For these reasons, I am optimistic that CALS will earn the support of many who were opposed to the sales tax.

I spoke to the Pulaski County League of Women Voters meeting earlier this week. I've attached graphs that I used to lay out the library's situation that compelled the request for the election. These also illustrate what the library will do with the additional \$2.4M in annual operational revenues that would flow to CALS if the voters approve the ballot proposal.

The Escalating Costs of Digital Content: One of the drivers of the need for more funds is set out nicely in this recent *New Yorker* story: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-communications/an-app-called-libby-and-the-surprisingly-big-business-of-library-e-books> I asked Leslie to take a couple of popular titles that demonstrate the costs of digital vs. print. Here are comparisons for Michelle Obama's memoir, *Becoming*, and Delia Owens *Where the Crawdads Sing*. Obama: Print, 23 copies at \$17.71, a cost per circ (CPC) of 95 cents; E-book,

20 copies at \$55 for 24 months each, a CPC of \$1.12; Audiobook, 22 copies at \$95 ea. a CPC of \$1.47. Owens: Print, 43 copies at \$14.17, a CPC of 53 cents; E-book at \$55 ea. a CPC of 55 cents; Audiobook 21 copies at \$66.50 ea. a CPC 82 cents.

Grant Funding: We have received a sizeable grant to support the Encyclopedia of Arkansas from the Arkansas Humanities Council (\$25,000) that will enable us to add something called alt text to the EOA website. It greatly benefits a visually impaired reader by describing what is seen beyond the actual text. We anticipate another, larger grant that will be announced soon and cover the EOA staff historian's salary and benefits, stipends for writers who contribute content to EOA, and funds for various other EOA web upgrades. We have received a number of smaller but very important grants, including two for the Rock It! Lab: A \$10,000 grant from the Bank of America Charitable Foundation and a second United Way grant to support RIL, this one for \$5,000. In addition, we received a \$2,000 grant from Dollar General to create and distribute early literacy kits. This idea came from Terry Library staff. We received a \$7,200 grant from the CDC and IMLS for our what we called Communities for Immunities. We will use that money to host vaccine clinics at Milam Library in Perryville and at Main, the latter targeting our unsheltered patrons. People will receive a free meal after getting vaccinated. Thanks to Eliza, Kay Kay, and Olivia for all of their hard work that is resulting in these awards to CALS for our library users.

Jonesboro Drive Project: CALS used grant funds to launch a four week “road diet” on Jonesboro drive last fall and later to pay architects at PSW to create renderings for this corridor based on our findings from that trial period. Using our architects’ drawings, the city submitted a funding request of over a \$1M to Metroplan to upgrade the Jonesboro Drive overpass on I-630 and the road along the west side of Children’s library. Metroplan awarded the city \$750,000 for this project. The city must add another \$187,000 to get the federal money from Metroplan but city officials say this amount is available and earmarked for the project. Here is google drive with images of the new renderings.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jRx8yv1-qO6o0fXpAEE8mhQzbsNDFc8-?usp=sharing>

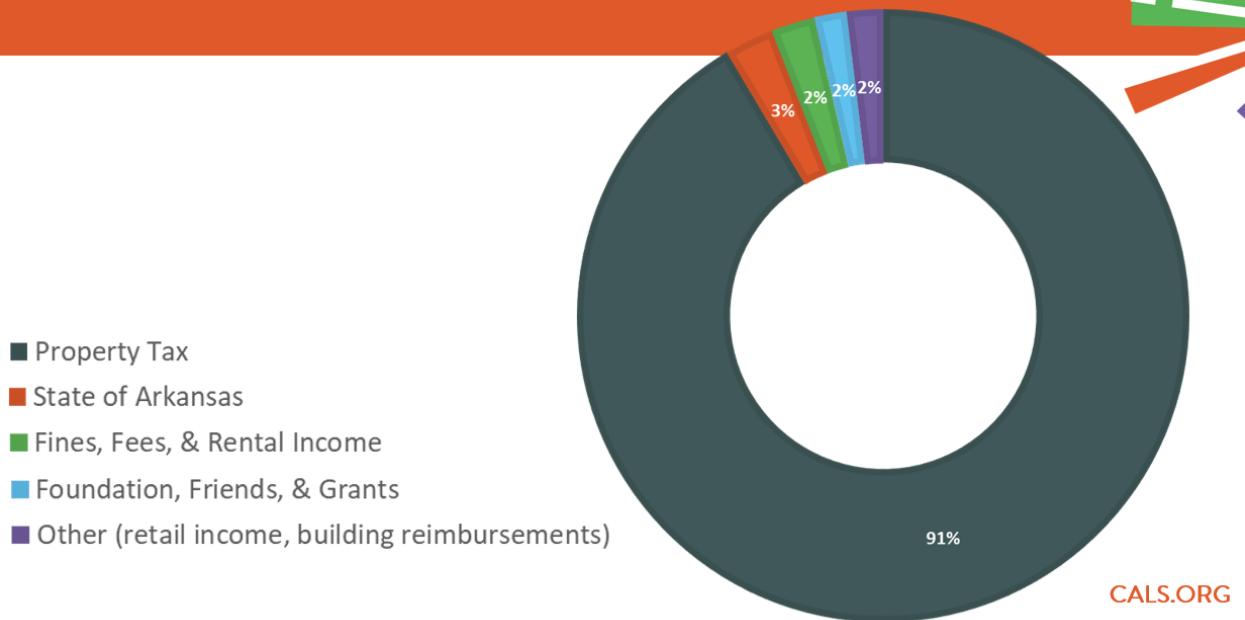
Solar Farm: Entegriy started construction on the solar farm last week at the site off Fourche Dam Pike east of the LR airport. We will pay Entegriy for the power put on the grid by our panels at this location. CALS will then receive monthly credits for the value of that power to offset our utility bills. This will result in annual utility savings of approximately \$25,000.

Six Bridges: Brad Mooy has been working hard to pull together this year’s book festival. He will appear at the board meeting to describe what is coming up October 21-31.

David Stricklin’s Retirement: Today is David’s last board meeting. He has been at CALS since 2004, most of that time as the leader of the Butler Center. No one deserves more credit than David for making the Butler Center the CALS treasure that it is. In the last two years he has used his considerable talents to build support for CALS outreach initiatives, particularly to the African American and Latino/Latina communities. He’s been successful because he’s very smart and the consummate nice guy. We will miss him. We will have a staff party on September 30 for him and later in the fall something in the community to honor David him for his long, productive tenure at CALS.

League of Women Voters Election Presentation

FUNDING SOURCES



WHY IS THE LIBRARY SEEKING THIS INCREASE IN ITS OPERATING REVENUES?



CALS has not had an increase in the operating tax rate since 2007. Since then, CALS has acquired or built six properties.



There is a gap between the expenses and projected revenues. Since 2008, the expenses have grown faster than revenues by about 3.5M adjusted for inflation.



The library has reduced staff by 8% since 2015, capped employee benefits, achieved savings by bringing some work inhouse, and invested in energy efficiencies and solar power.

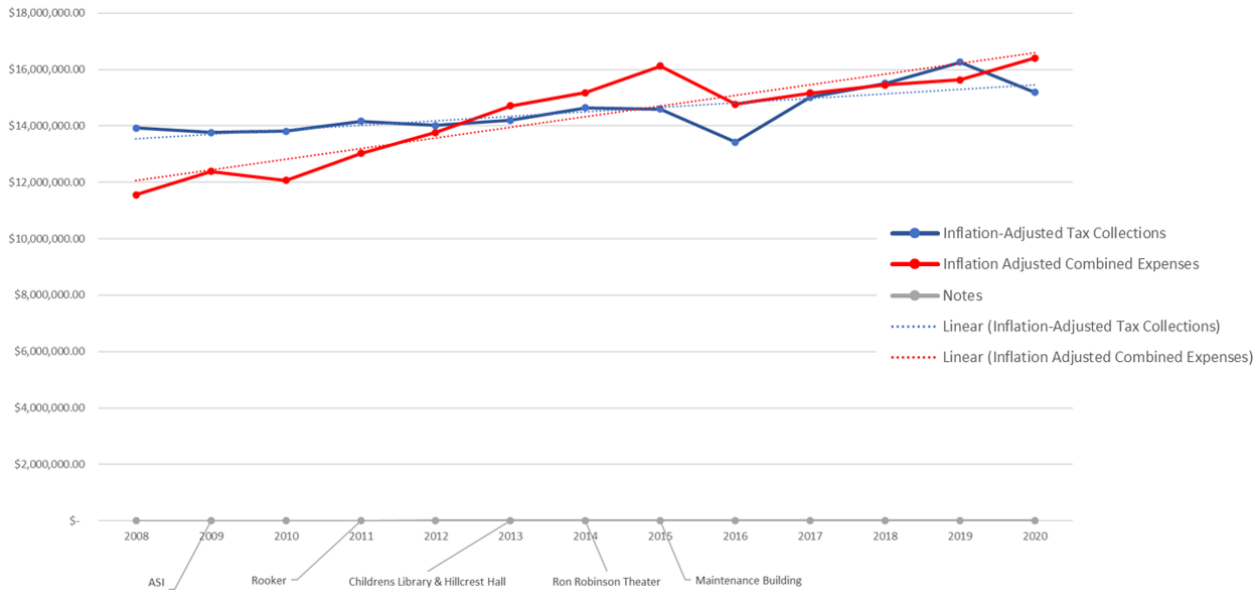


The costs of digital materials such as e-books and audiobooks is rising. In 2015, the cost of digital books was \$242,000, or 12% of the materials budget. Last year it rose to 27% of the budget (\$580,000).

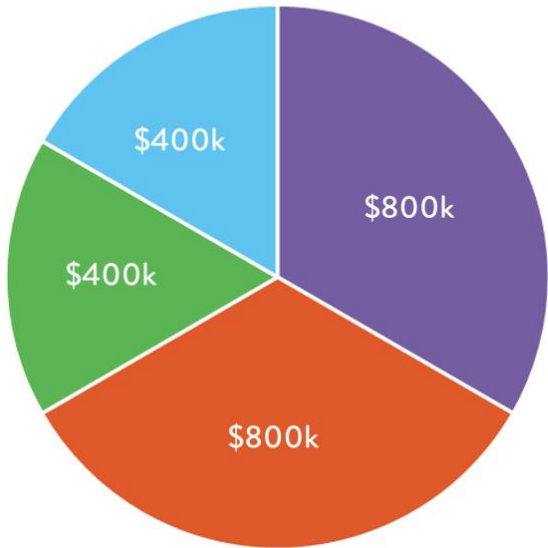
The growing library cannot continue to provide the quality of service and resources the community demands of it without more money for operating.

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CALS Inflation-Adjusted Revenues and Expenses



WHERE WILL THAT MONEY BE SPENT?



- Paying a living wage & retaining experienced staff who curate the EOA, tutor students, assist entrepreneurs, and assist children and adults in branches.
- To cover the escalating costs of e-books and audiobooks and provide plentiful copies of all print and digital materials.
- To address deferred maintenance at some aging buildings like Main.
- To upgrade technology for patrons in the branches and further expand outreach to underserved communities around Little Rock.

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Community Engagement

- Sustain student resources, like Count Up math tutoring program, and life skills training and programs for adults e.g., Legacies & Lunch, genealogy.
- Expand entrepreneurial support for aspiring business owners at the Rock It! Lab.
- Support our social worker who connects patrons to other community resources.

Increase in Materials Budget

- Offer more books on more platforms, especially access to e-books and digital audiobooks.
- Reduce wait times to check out the most popular books when they come out.

Technology Upgrades

- Upgrade technology for patrons in the branches and further expand outreach to underserved communities around Little Rock

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Facilities & Spaces

- Maintain safe, inviting spaces for productive after school programs.
- Address deferred maintenance at aging buildings to ensure they remain attractive and comfortable.

Staff Development & Programming

- Boost the minimum wage to \$13 for public service staff.
- During the pandemic, public service staff helped the community cope by providing curbside service, virtual programming, handing out 175,000 meals at branches, and offering in-person assistance (e.g., notary services, internet/computers, and copy and fax machines).



For More Information

Facebook: Coalition for Neighborhood Libraries.

Hon. Co-Chairs: Annie Abrams & Skip Rutherford.

Co-Chairs: John Adams, Don Evans, Madhav Shroff, Anna Morshedi.

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