



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION DEPARTMENT REPORT

TO: Matthew R. Schmitz, MPA - City Manager

FROM: Laura Blaker

DATE OF MEETING: March 17, 2025

ITEM TITLE: Department Report – Library

One Book Indee

The library has been busy with our annual community read, One Book Indee. This is the 10th year of this project! Our selected title this year is *Veiled in Smoke* by Jocelyn Green, and we have programs in February and March related to the themes of the book.

Program highlights thus far for One Book Indee 2025:

- MHI Tours
- Upstairs Downtown Tours
- Author Jocelyn Green
- Paint and Sip
- Fire Department Tour
- Tea Time at the Library



We are thankful for all those willing to collaborate with the library for this project! The book is available at the library and in several businesses and other locations around town. There are still some great programs left, including *Burning through Time: A History of Fires in Independence* with Fire Chief, Blake Hayward, and local historian, Leanne Harrison.

Bringing Community Together Page by Page





Promoting Literacy and a Love of Reading

The library is offering a winter reading program this year! If you see the snowflakes on our windows, those are placed there by participants in our Flurry of Winter Reading Bingo!

We also had another graduation ceremony for our 1000 Books Before Kindergarten graduates. These toddlers and preschoolers have heard 1000 or more stories in their early years. Being read to as a child is proven to correlate with later academic success. We have 26 graduates to date!

Lighting

The library has lighting panels that were installed when the building was built in 2007-2008. Replacement switches have become obsolete for our system even though it is just over 16 years old. Eric and Ryan from ILPT have looked at it and determined that they could run wires and revamp the lighting to a traditional system. This would allow us to have a system that doesn't require programming and experience with our particular lighting panel, which has been a problem for years. It also will solve the problem of not being able to get parts.

The library will be paying for the materials – wiring, switches, a photocell, etc, and ILPT will be providing the labor. It is a great solution for the library, and also helps out the City due to the low cost.

Iowa Legislation Concern

There is a bill that is being considered in the House and Senate that is very concerning for libraries and cities. It is HF 521 and SF 235 and relates to "obscenity exemptions for public libraries and educational institutions." In the bill, obscenity is dangerously defined as material the "average person" would find offensive. If passed, the bill states that minors could not access any "obscene" materials in a public library. The exemption currently protects libraries and cities to frivolous lawsuits. With such a badly written definition, almost anything could be deemed offensive and would expose the City, Library, and staff members to liability.

To manage such an order would be impossible with current staffing levels and unrealistic even with additional staff. We don't know the age of all our patrons, and it is often difficult to tell if somebody is 16 or 19. Deciding what is offensive to an average person is next to impossible. The way it is written, the library would have to police the aisles, know the content of every one of the 37,000 books in our collection and what an average person would think of them, and card patrons to determine their age, both as they are browsing and as they check out.

I would encourage you to contact our legislators and the Education Committee to advocate against this bill. I would be happy to send you more information.