



**Subject: Port Colborne Public Library Board 2024 Budget Presentation**

**To: Council**

**From: Library Services**

Report Number: 2023-178

Meeting Date: September 12, 2023

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### **Recommendation:**

That Library Services Report 2023-178 be received; and

That the recommendations in Library Services Report 2023-178 be approved.

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### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to present the Port Colborne Public Library Board's 2024 budget estimates to Council, and to request the addition of a part-time assistant management position through a shared-services agreement with the Thorold Public Library to reduce costs.

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### **Background:**

The Port Colborne Public Library Board (the Board) acknowledges that needs, opportunities, and challenges change as the Library strives to meet the needs of its user communities year by year. The Board prepares budgets that support the library services required for a growing and vibrant community, and prioritizes maintaining an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming space where residents, visitors, and tourists can access informational, recreational, technological, and cultural resources and experiences that support the well-being of a vibrant and growing city. The public, community agencies, local business, and other community groups rely on the library for relevant and reliable services and support.

The Board prioritizes its fiscal responsibility to ensure that the budget is kept as low as possible to reduce the impact on tax payers, not only during the pandemic, but with each budget it presents to Council for approval. Upon careful assessment, and

acknowledging its duty to adequately staff the library to support and ensure the continuity of operations, the Board has identified the need for a part-time management position.

The Board recommends that this position be filled through a shared-services agreement with the Thorold Public Library. The shared-services solution is an efficient, creative, and collaborative strategy to benefit tax payers and creates cost-savings for enhanced library services and streamlined workflows.

## Legislative Requirements

The *Public Libraries Act*, RSO 1990, c. P.44 (the Act) governs the operation of public libraries in Ontario. The Act states that a public library is under the management and control of a board (R.S.O. 1990, c. P.44, s. 3 (3)). The Act requires that the board shall submit to the appointing council, annually or on the date and in the form specified by the council, estimates of all sums required during the year for the purposes of the board (R.S.O. 1990, c. P.44, s. 24 (1)).

Under the provisions of the Act:

- a. It is the board's duty is to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service that reflects its community's unique needs.
- b. The board oversees the library's finances and has financial oversight which involves understanding the implications of a budget and a financial report; recognizes the allocation of monies with board priorities; and, ensures that financial policies are in place.
- c. The *Act* and *Regulation 976* specify that most library services must be offered to residents free of charge. This requirement makes the library different from other community services which are often expected to generate revenue from user fees. Access to library service must remain free because universal access to information is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of democracy.
- d. The Board is the employer of all library staff and has employer obligations.

## Funding Sources

- a. **Municipal Funding** accounts for over 95% of the Library's operating budget. The Board acknowledges the continued support of Council in providing library services to support the needs of the community.
- b. **Provincial funding** has remained unchanged since the mid-1990s. The Library does not anticipate any increase to the provincial Public Library Operating Grant (PLOG) of \$38,300 (which includes a pay equity component) in 2024.
- c. **Other grants**, including federal grants, are generally dependent on applications based on programming and other needs identified during the operating budget

year. For example, the Library received a \$121,200.00 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to invest in and revitalize the library's interior spaces.

## **Strategic Partnerships and Shared Services**

The 2024 budget focuses on leveraging strategic partnership opportunities. Partnerships are key to the Library's continued success and to keep operating costs as low as possible.

Library staff have identified areas for increased efficiencies and cost-savings, opportunities that target modernization and streamlining of services, and the need to deepen strategic partnerships with Regional libraries and with the City of Port Colborne. Staff currently use the expertise and services of City departments to reduce costs.

### **a. City of Port Colborne Collaboration and Support**

- **Financial services** (e.g., implementing City financial software to avoid duplication of services and repetitive input of data between organizations)
- **Information technology** (e.g., partnering with City IT to modernize technology and improve efficiencies for both staff-facing and public-facing equipment, interfaces, and other technology solutions)
- **Human resources** (e.g, assistance with reviewing the library's staffing model)
- **Communications and website** (e.g., creating an internal communications and marketing library team to enhance services)
- **Facilities maintenance and improvements** (e.g., working with the City to identify and implement capital projects to ensure sustainability and optimal building condition; procuring a Building Condition Assessment Report to plan future improvements)

### **b. The Cultural Block (Library and Museum Collaboration)**

The Cultural Block was formally introduced in March 2010 with resolutions passed by both the Library and Museum boards to improve programming, enhance efficiencies, support resource-sharing, and increase cross-promotion of events. The resolution also recommends the need for capital funding by Council to support infrastructure on the Cultural Block.

### **c. Libraries in Niagara Cooperative (LiNC) and Niagara Regional Libraries**

The LiNC partnership is a shared service among nine Niagara Region library

systems. It is a highly successful collaboration initiated and maintained by local libraries in an effort to simplify, collaborate, reduce costs for technology and resources, and to establish a reciprocal borrowing and delivery system that benefits local tax payers. The Library joined LiNC in 2019 and has realized cost-savings and benefited from the expansion of shared services and collaborations. These include:

- Resource-sharing (books and other materials formats)
- Region-wide courier delivery to LiNC library partners
- Shared open-source Integrated Library System and online catalogue
- Cooperative working groups
- Collaborative programming, marketing, and promotion
- Training and other staff development opportunities as a shared cost
- A strategic plan that focuses on improved and expanded services for LiNC partners, opportunities to benefit residents locally and within the Niagara Region, preparing for future opportunities, and to reduce the impact on tax payers and decrease barriers to library service

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## Discussion:

Building on the Library's successes with LiNC, the Board prioritizes expanding shared services and collaboration with the City and with Niagara Region libraries as integral to its duty to ensure a budget that is fiscally responsible.

Due to the continuing impact of inflation and the need for an increase in personnel costs, the proposed operating budget will reduce municipal funding for **non-personnel expenses**. The reduction in **non-personnel** expenses is to help offset an anticipated increase in personnel costs due to annual wage increases and the request for an additional management position through a shared-services agreement with the Thorold Public Library.

The 2024 operating budget is also informed by the Board's 2023-2027 strategic plan and looks forward to the implementation of services and strategies which started in 2023 and will move forward incrementally throughout the life of the Board's strategic plan.

With the return to normal operations, the proposed budget supports the goals of the strategic plan by:

- Ensuring cost-effective and operational efficiencies

- Focusing on expanding quality library service and enhancing the user experience
- Optimizing customer-focused service levels to ensure accessible, diverse, and affordable programs
- Modernizing and investing in leading-edge technology
- Planning for and meeting the needs of an energized City, a rising population, and changing demographics
- Ensuring that library staff are well-trained, equipped, supported, and ready for the future
- Focusing on recruiting and retaining staff, strengthening organizational structure for stability, reducing risk, and ensuring continuity of service with appropriate staffing in place to provide services to the community and with an assistant library manager on staff who can step in to run the library on an emergency basis in the absence of the library CEO
- Ensuring operational efficiency and accountability, community responsiveness, and barrier-free, fair and equitable service

## **Non-Personnel Operating Expenses**

Staff propose a decrease to the overall **non-personnel** budget, and have made adjustments to reallocate spending to areas where there is greater need.

### **Areas of Focus and Budget Pressures**

#### **a. Self-Generated Revenue**

With the return-to-normal in 2022/2023, self-generated revenue has increased. Grant revenue from the province is not guaranteed year to year. Although programming and fundraising revenue is increasing, staff recommend a cautious approach to projecting revenue for 2024.

**Fines** – The Board eliminated fines for overdue materials in 2021, joining hundreds of other libraries across North America that have chosen to go fine-free to ensure equity of access. The library continues to charge for damaged and lost books, and for the replacement of lost library cards.

**Fees and Sales** – The Library charges fees for some services including print services, room rental, and sign rental.

**Fundraising** – The Library's ongoing book sale generates revenue year-round. In 2023, the Library is expanding its fundraising efforts.

**Donations and Other Grants** – Donations and grants are cyclical in nature and depend on certain programs and events planned during the operating budget year. Staff will continue to explore new funding opportunities in 2024, in tandem with enhanced donor engagement strategies.

## **b. Technology**

The budget allows for an increased investment in digital and community-based services that support vulnerable populations. Spending in 2024 supports the strategic plan in the area of technology through:

- Continued investment in modernization and innovation to enhance the user experience and to give ease of access to library collections and services
- Updating staff-facing software and equipment to streamline workflows and reduce repetitive tasks
- Updating customer-facing technology to meet the public's need to connect, work, and learn in an accessible, welcoming space
- Responding to the increased demand for staff with technical and digital technology expertise (for both staff-use and patron-use) and rising expectations from library users for staff to solve their technology needs in an increasingly digital environment
- Building and maintaining a leading-edge information infrastructure that understands library users' requirements, supports technological innovation, integrates multiple information systems, connects to global information sources, and provides self-service access to core library services remotely

## **c. Library Collections**

The collections budget includes print materials, digital materials, audiovisual and electronic materials (which are expensed in the operating budget and then capitalized as assets and amortized). The collections budget has been divided into traditional and non-traditional collections (physical materials), and digital resources.

Spending in 2024 will support the strategic plan in the development of the library collections by responding to the demand for:

- Digital resources such as downloadable audiobooks, eBooks, and digital

magazines

- Online learning resources for the public
- Free lendable technology (e.g., hotspots) to help break down the digital divide for vulnerable populations
- Free lendable non-traditional items to help patrons explore items that they may not otherwise be able to afford including musical instruments, board games, gaming systems, and more

#### **d. Resource Delivery**

Expenses for resource delivery are primarily associated with the integrated library software system (ILS), Libraries in Niagara Cooperative (LiNC) consortium fees, resource-sharing, training, and delivery service.

#### **e. Staff Development**

Spending in 2024 will support the strategic plan to ensure the continued empowerment, enrichment, and education of library staff at all levels through training, and to support mastery of technology that supports their ability to best perform their jobs.

#### **f. Modernization and Innovation**

Spending in 2024 will support the strategic plan to continue modernization and innovation efforts in telecommunications, computer and software upgrades, and further digital innovations in media spaces.

Connectivity, telephone, and networking expenses fall under this category. The Board's capital project to upgrade fibre and voice services will be completed in 2023 with the final stage of the installation of phones and equipment. The connectivity upgrade has significantly improved the delivery of reliable internet service for staff and the library's ability to meet increasing user demands. Connectivity expenses also support the Museum and Archives.

#### **g. Facilities Maintenance, Utilities, Cleaning and Associated Contract Services**

Spending in 2024 will support the strategic plan to focus on preventative maintenance to prolong the life of the building, the prudent management of a sustainable facility, and energy conservation strategies to reduce utilities costs.

Facility cleaning and security monitoring contracts are in place, with both contractors offering excellent value for cost. The facilities budget estimates are set in collaboration with the City of Port Colborne.

#### **h. Supplies and Services**

Spending in 2024 will support the strategic plan through the continued prudent procurement of supplies and equipment.

#### **i. Personnel**

Salaries and benefits are the key cost driver for the Port Colborne Public Library. The Board identifies staff as its most important resource in the delivery of library services. The Board identified staffing as a goal in its strategic plan. The Board is committed to ensuring that the operating budget focuses on retaining, recruiting, and innovating in human resources . Increases in **personnel costs** in 2024 will be based on:

- Wage rates negotiated through union-management relations
- Shared services contract due to the addition of an assistant manager

Currently, there is only one manager on staff (the CEO). The library's organizational structure was changed in 2001 with the removal of the Assistant to the CEO non-Union position. The library's staffing and organizational structure has not been revisited since then. Library operations and services have changed significantly over the course of 20 years. The library is busier, faces new and challenging demands (e.g., legislative requirements and risk management) all of which require heightened oversight of service delivery, efficiencies, and staff activities. The Library proposes a management structure with the CEO and a part-time assistant manager to enhance efficiencies, streamline workflows, and to satisfy a succession plan that optimizes efforts to attract, recruit, and retain the highest quality staff on its team.

The Board recommends the addition of part-time manager through a shared-services agreement. The shared-services solution will provide coverage in the absence of the CEO, and assist in the management, administration and supervision of day-to-day operations.

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**Internal Consultations:**

None.

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**Financial Implications:**

The cost to add an assistant management position through a shared services agreement is \$63,201.00.

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**Public Engagement:**

None.

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**Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The budget supports the City's pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
- Economic Prosperity
- Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure.

The budget supports the Library's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, priority goals, mission, vision, and values:

- To maintain and develop high-quality, inclusive programming and services for our user communities
  - Retaining, recruiting, and innovating in human capital
  - Strengthening accessibility and sustainability of library spaces / Developing the Cultural Block
  - To exercise financial stewardship by leveraging all funding sources and partnership opportunities
  - Trailblazing library trends while maintaining core library services / Developing methods to deliver and strengthen innovative user experiences
  - Engaging our external stakeholders and user communities to ensure good decision-making for the benefit of all
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**Conclusion:**

The 2024 operating budget ensures sufficient funding to meet the needs of the Library's user communities while being mindful of inflation, fiscal restraints, and operational

costs. The budget will allow the Library to move forward, build toward the future, and support the Board's goals in the second year of its strategic plan during a time of increased inflation.

The budget allows reasonable flexibility to adapt and optimize activities with restraint, responsible planning, and accountability. While finalizing the budget submission, staff have been cognizant that the City provides over 95% of the Library's operating revenue, and of the Board's role as a supportive partner of the City.

The Library requests a part-time assistant management position through a shared-services agreement with the Thorold Public Library to reduce costs.

With Council's support, the Port Colborne Public Library can maintain its operations and continue to fulfil its evolving and vital role in the community. The Library will be well-positioned to respond to expected residential and economic growth within the City of Port Colborne.

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Respectfully submitted,



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### **Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.