



St. Catharines Public Library Board

Special Meeting

Tuesday, January 9, 2024, 6:00 pm

Microsoft Teams

AGENDA

Chair calls meeting to order and reads SCPL Land Acknowledgment.

1. **Adoption of Agenda**

1.1 Additions/Deletions to Agenda

1.2 Adoption of Agenda

Motion

2. **Chair's Remarks & Declarations of Interest**

3. **Discussion Reports (attachments)**

3.1 Governance Review Letter Submission – K. Su

Motion

4. **Motion to Adjourn**

Motion

5. **Next Meeting / Upcoming Events**

- Board Meeting – Thursday, January 18, 2024 at 6:00 pm, Rotary / Bankers Room, Central Library & Microsoft Teams

Public Consultation - Regional Governance Review - Niagara Region

January 10, 2024, St. Catharines, ON

Report Submission: January 18, 2024

***Study on regional governance as overseen by the
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing***

Organization: Representation from some of the local public library boards in Niagara

Grimsby Public Library, Kathryn Drury - CEO/Chief Librarian

Niagara Falls Public Library - Alicia Subnaik Kilgour - CEO/Chief Librarian

Niagara on the Lake Public Library - Cathy Simpson - Chief Librarian/CEO

St. Catharines Public Library - Ken Su - CEO

Wainfleet Public Library - Lorrie Atkinson - CEO

Welland Public Library - Julianne Brunet - CEO

West Lincoln Public Library - Vanessa Holm - CEO

Contact: Alicia Subnaik Kilgour, CEO/Chief Librarian, Niagara Falls Public Library

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INTRODUCTIONS:

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to present on behalf of Niagara's community volunteer Public Library Boards. We extend our gratitude and recognition to the dedicated members of staff, as well as our collaborating community and Library Board constituents, for their unwavering support in this endeavor. Moreover, we are grateful for the opportunity to provide our insights and remarks regarding decision-making and service delivery within the Niagara communities.

The public libraries in the Niagara Region will illustrate our comprehensive approach towards implementing shared services, which has consistently yielded remarkable efficiencies and cost savings throughout the years.

SUMMARY:

Public Libraries face many challenges as they strive to strike the right balance, on the one hand, resources are finite, and collaboration is helpful in maximizing value for money, and on the other, each municipality has a unique geographic distribution of residents, a unique social demographic, and therefore a unique profile of needs that its library strives to meet.

In the spirit of fostering cooperation and maximizing efficiency, our eleven municipal libraries have cultivated a longstanding tradition of collaboration. This has been achieved through various initiatives, such as leveraging consortium purchasing to maximize discounts, sharing resources and IT services through the LiNC Cooperative, and facilitating reciprocal borrowing among libraries throughout the Niagara Region. Furthermore, our local public library boards frequently join forces for grant applications, as well as federal, provincial, and local initiatives.

Recognizing the importance of deploying our limited resources prudently and with transparency, we have fostered a culture of collaboration with our professional library staff. This collaboration has been instrumental in optimizing the utilization of our scarce resources in multiple ways. Our local public

library boards actively share information, pool advertising costs, and collaborate on staff and board training and development, as illustrated by our recent regional Library Board Governance Training. The local public library boards proactively mobilize to tackle common challenges that impact both urban and rural areas, including issues of poverty, homelessness, and opioid addiction. In addition to offering Mental Health First Aid Training and Harm Reduction Training for staff and the public, we have formed dynamic partnerships aimed at providing crucial services to marginalized individuals in our communities.

The local public library boards genuinely welcome the opportunity to continue in our collaborative efforts with the Ontario government. By addressing policy in a manner that facilitates the discovery of efficiencies for our local Public Library Boards, we can ensure the continued delivery of essential resources and services that effectively address the ever-evolving needs of our communities in the most cost-effective manner feasible.

BACKGROUND:

Libraries serve as dynamic community hubs that embrace inclusivity, remaining one of the few spaces in our society that provide unfettered access and services to individuals from all walks of life, regardless of socioeconomic status or other barriers. In times of economic distress and crisis, libraries have historically played a pivotal role in offering comprehensive support, valuable services, and vital social and human capital that optimize the utilization of limited community resources. By fostering impactful partnerships, libraries facilitate the recovery process for all members of the community. Furthermore, libraries provide a sense of belonging, foster a strong communal spirit, and actively combat social isolation.

“Libraries, by their nature and because they are located at the centre of communities, serve multiple needs in a way that no other public institution in Canada can. In a single day, a public library might be

- *a place to access culture and information;*
- *a refuge from domestic violence;*
- *an election information or polling centre;*
- *a job search centre;*
- *a health clinic;*
- *a place to warm up or cool down;*
- *a language learning centre for newcomers;*
- *a place to attend free university classes or concerts; and*
- *a space for babies, children, caregivers and youth to make friends and form a community.”* ([Canadian Urban Institute](#), 2023, p. 16)

As per the provisions outlined in the Public Libraries Act, it is mandated that public libraries are governed by locally appointed, independent boards. These dedicated Library Boards play a crucial role in meticulously ensuring that libraries operate in accordance with statutory requirements while demonstrating fiscal responsibility. The role of local boards with their detailed understanding of the specific and unique needs of each municipality is important in providing efficient and essential services to each respective community. Embracing the unique diversity of each community, library boards are entrusted with the responsibility of guaranteeing that library services are readily accessible, conveniently located, and tailored to meet the distinct needs of their respective communities. Comprising volunteer members who possess exemplary leadership skills, business acumen, and professional expertise, these boards possess an astute understanding of maximizing the value derived from every allocated dollar. Working in close collaboration with their municipalities, these boards diligently strive to deliver impactful services that yield substantial benefits for the local populace.

“Auditor generals from every order of government repeatedly cite libraries as having the highest return on investment of any publicly funded program.”

“For every \$1 invested in Canada’s urban libraries, \$6 is generated in community economic impact, a return of over 600%.”

([Canadian Urban Institute](#), 2023, pp. 44, 29)

LIBRARY EXAMPLES:

Within the confines of Niagara Falls, there exists a noteworthy marginalized community, including many unhoused individuals. The Niagara Falls Library (NFPL), a registered charity, assumes the vital role of connecting indispensable social services support to these vulnerable members of the community who would otherwise not have access to such services. By employing a coordinated approach in tandem with community partners, the Region, and social agencies, the NFPL adeptly ensures the delivery of essential services and resources to those grappling with marginalization. This comprehensive approach serves to optimize the utilization of available resources while fostering cooperative interactions and capitalizing on collective expertise.

In the city of St. Catharines, the library diligently collaborates with local social services to effectively address the pressing concerns surrounding the opioid crisis. A notable aspect of the library's efforts lies in its cooperative engagement with other libraries, harnessing the power of grants and establishing strategic partnerships to facilitate the provision of indispensable services to the community. Of particular significance was the innovative practice of sharing a social services worker across the Port Colborne, Thorold, and Welland Public Library systems, enabling the targeted support and assistance needed to address the marginalized needs of numerous underserved communities.

The digital divide continues to persist within our community, creating a significant disparity among residents who lack access to internet services or reliable WiFi connectivity. Consequently, these individuals heavily rely on the indispensable assistance provided by our esteemed Library. Regrettably, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 further exacerbated this issue, leading to a notable increase in the number of community members observed resorting to utilizing the Library's WiFi services from their vehicles within the library parking lot. This reliance on the Library's essential offerings enables them to access crucial information, engage in educational pursuits, manage financial obligations, and maintain connections with their loved ones.

In Niagara's rural communities, such as Wainfleet and West Lincoln, the availability and quality of internet service can be undependable or even non-existent. Thus, the Library assumes an essential role as a haven for rural students who seek access to the Provincial curriculum and a rich array of educational digital resources. Numerous library systems have implemented hotspot lending programs, thereby expanding accessibility for individuals who encounter challenges in securing internet connectivity. For example, West Lincoln, Lincoln Pelham and Niagara on the Lake extend their valuable services to migrant workers by equipping them with dedicated hotspots, facilitating essential tasks such as form completion and translation assistance. The provision of this crucial support is well received and garners sincere appreciation from the recipients.

The majority of the local public library boards have forged valuable partnerships with local schools, effectively elevating standardized test scores by quantifiable margins. Furthermore, the St. Catharines Library has entered into a membership promotion, facilitating joint membership sign-ups with post secondary institutions like Brock University and Niagara College, fostering enhanced opportunities for the academic community.

Many of the local public library boards also offer Seed Libraries, as well as educational and awareness programming about food insecurity. The Welland Public Library recently launched a little free pantry program and supplemental after school food program for children to help address food insecurities in their area.

SHARED SERVICES:

The local public library boards have established a comprehensive framework for the sharing of services, reflecting a commitment to collaboration, cooperation, and cost mitigation. The following list bears testament to the local public library boards unwavering dedication in fostering synergy and optimizing operational efficiencies over the course of several years.

1. LiNC - The adoption of a shared Integrated Library System and a book delivery service has successfully been implemented across the Region, facilitating seamless operations and resource management.
2. InterLibrary Loan (ILL) - Recognizing the value of shared collections encompassing books, storywalks, and audio materials, the libraries in the Region have diligently collaborated to provide efficient and reliable delivery services, ensuring swift access to materials throughout the entire region.
3. Reciprocal Borrowing - The libraries within the Niagara Region have implemented a commendable practice of offering shared collections and membership opportunities to residents residing within the Niagara Region, further enhancing access to a wealth of resources.
4. Regional Governance Training for Board and Staff - The libraries have thoughtfully invested in comprehensive training programs focusing on regional governance, better equipping board members and staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the intricate operational landscape.

5. Shared Staff Training and Development - Encompassing both Region-wide initiatives and LiNC-specific endeavors, collaborative staff working groups convene regularly to disseminate valuable information and exchange best practices, providing an opportunity for growth and synergy across the library system.
6. One Book One Niagara - Through the implementation of this commendable joint regional program, the libraries ardently foster a sense of community and belonging among residents, celebrating the power of literature in unifying diverse communities.
7. Resource/Information Sharing and Support - The libraries actively engage in resource and information sharing, extending support during collective agreement negotiations and undertaking pay equity/job evaluation endeavors, ensuring fair and equitable practices are upheld.
8. Shared Marketing and Advertising Costs - By pooling resources through shared initiatives, such as radio promotions, the libraries embrace a cost-effective approach to marketing and advertising, generating enhanced visibility and impact for our collective endeavors.

FUTURE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES:

Within the local public library boards, several libraries are currently engaged in a range of carefully planned projects and initiatives aimed at effectively managing and reducing costs related to service delivery. Notably, there is considerable potential for the implementation of shared finance, payroll, and HR systems and software across select libraries. Simultaneously, numerous libraries remain steadfast in their commitment to advancing the following key initiatives:

1. Shared Purchasing/Procurement - A collaborative approach to purchasing and procurement practices is actively being explored, fostering economies of scale and optimizing resource allocation among the libraries.

2. Shared Digital and Electronic Resources - Acknowledging the transformative impact of digital resources, libraries actively cooperate to develop shared digital collections, enhancing access to an expansive array of electronic materials and resources throughout the region.
3. Shared Training and Development - Libraries recognize the importance of continuous learning and professional growth. As such, collaborative efforts are undertaken to establish shared training and development programs, enabling staff from different libraries to collectively enhance their skills and knowledge.
4. Shared Collection Development - Through collaborative initiatives, libraries pool their expertise and resources to curate comprehensive and diverse collections, ensuring that patrons have access to a wide range of materials that meet their varied interests and needs.

CONCLUSION:

The pursuit of the aforementioned shared initiatives reflects the unwavering commitment of the local public library boards to optimize operations, enhance service delivery, and foster greater efficiency and collaboration among the libraries within the region.

Source:

Canadian Urban Institute. (2023). *Overdue: The Case for Canada's Public Libraries*. CUI

Overdue Report. https://canurb.org/wp-content/uploads/CUI_Overdue_report_10.04.23.pdf