

2016.11.17

Re: 2017 Interim Budget Estimates;
2017 Operating and Capital Budgets Update

While most of the attention paid to the budget has revolved around the Mayor's suicidal and intrinsically unserious demand for a 2.6% budget cut everywhere, I have to wonder, yet again, why the Toronto Public Library Board does not understand what its own staff are proposing.

Is it because there were only two Boardmembers in the last decade who were known to *even have library cards*? (One sits on the current Board.) Fundamentally, you people do not use the library system and do not understand it. I can assure you that hiring Moe hasn't changed that one iota, given his attested unwillingness to learn what in-branch experience, the area he purports to manage, is really like.

So let's go through a few seriously unwise items in the Library budget.

Nobody asked for "cash drawers" at the self-service checkouts that nobody asked for either

One of the budget documents lies about the history of self-checkout thus: "In 2009, TPL received \$6.6 million to implement self-service checkout in branches, resulting in better service and expanded hours at no cost, and also a reduction in staff to help achieve budget targets." The real purpose of self-checkout was to fire expensive employees, not to make things more efficient. And it involved clumsily sticking decals on millions of items, in many cases marring them permanently.

Again: The real purpose of self-checkout was *firing staff*. That was confirmed to me to my face by a manager in charge. It had nothing to do with library users or literally anything else. If the project had started with automated sorters as its *raison d'être* *first*, it might have made sense.

Now we're being threatened with "cash drawers." As ever, the library can't be honest about what's really happening here, verbally dressing up this fiasco as Integrated Payment Solutions, whatever those are.

With an investment of \$2.250 million over two years [!].... [c]ustomers will be able to pay fines at the self-checkout terminals at the same time as checking out materials. Currently... fine payments can only be made online... or from a face-to-face interaction with library staff at the check-out desk.

God forbid.

Combined, these initiatives will save \$0.526 million, or 0.3%, in 2017 and allow a reduction in staff of 6.8 FTEs[.]

In other words, “these initiatives” will *cost* $\$(2,250,000 \div 2 - 526,000)$ or \$599,000 in Year 1.

The only library patrons who could possibly need this service are the ones who could never get it in the first place – those whose only use of the library is via the Bookmobile, which can’t take cash payments and which don’t use RFID in the first place. (Did you know that?) *Nobody* else needs or wants this service.

Further, does the Library really mean “cash drawers,” as in tills? Do you know what you even mean? How will these tills dispense change? Won’t every one of them be burglarized every day? How long till Sue-Ann Levy writes a column about that?

The Library refuses to adjust the collections budget for known decreases in usage

Budget documents:

\$0.482 million represents a 2.5% projected cost increase for library materials based on experience and industry projections while needing to accommodate the impact of a stronger U.S. dollar on the Library’s purchasing power[.]

The Library has elsewhere admitted that third-language materials – this means non-English and non-French, though the positioning of French as equivalent to English is a joke in itself – have suffered serious decline in recent years. Some languages (by implication, Indian ones) have shown 45% decreases in demand.

That demand is never gonna come back. Yet the Library, whose collections policy is, in some respects, more whim than policy, proposes a \$482,000 increase largely to handle projected exchange rates.

Why hasn't the Library proposed reducing relevant third-language budgets by the same amount *demand* has reduced, then redirecting that money to other collections? Why does the Library propose spending tens of thousands of dollars per language in permanent decline instead of spending that money *on items people actually want*, including third-language items that really get used?

Collections policy really does contain a large dosage of whim. I should know, being the largest single submitter of blue forms and whose yellow forms are simply ignored (Boardmembers: "What are those?"); being someone who knows there is no policy at all for acquiring new magazine titles and getting rid of dud titles; and, most of all, being the person who has had to take the Toronto Public Library to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario over its banning of a single author, an outrageous, unprincipled action that is seriously popular in-house and which the Library clearly intends to defend to the death at any cost in legal fees.

Yet this is the same department you intend to authorize to waste money on third-language materials that will never be used *while also* handing it another 482 grand.

If you actually used the Library and if you actually read your own reports, would you leave these items in the proposed budget? Again, what happens if Sue-Ann Levy finds out and documents these errors in a newspaper none of you really think should be taken seriously in the first place?