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Report to: TPL Board

From: Meyer Brownstone
Toronto Public Library Board

Date: September 12, 2004

Subject: **September 11, 2004 Meeting of the Ontario Library Boards' Association (OLBA)**

HIGHLIGHTS:

Despite my continued uncertain status on both the TPL Board and the OLBA Council, I did attend the Council indicating my personal situation. At least one other member of Council was in a similar position.

1. Our Strategic Report

There was great interest in the summary report on our strategic plan which has recently been distributed, and I undertook to ask Nancy Marshall to distribute copies to OLBA Council members. The main point did not involve the specific content which is relevant to Toronto and our Board, but the process we used and the way in which the plan was presented in the report.

2. Membership

The membership question continues to plague the OLBA and I proposed that a much more systematic approach be made to expanding membership, membership relations, member participation and other aspects. The result was the constitution of an ad hoc committee on membership with a mandate to prepare recommendations for a permanent membership committee structure within OLBA, its composition and functions. For my pains, but given my uncertain status, I was asked to act as adviser to the ad hoc group.

3. The James Bain Medallion

You will recall that last year I chaired the OLBA Committee which administered the nomination and selection process for this prestigious award (which Rick Goldsmith won jointly with Sharon Stroud). I was asked to chair the Committee again and agreed, but again this will depend on my future status on the TPL and the OLBA.

4. Elections to the OLBA Council

There will be elections to fill some vacancies on the Council but these will not apply to the TPL unless there is more than one nominee from our Board.

5. Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL)

This was the most difficult issue on the agenda. Before summarizing it, the Board should be aware of the overall current structure of the library system and its organizations. The basic point here is that the corporate entity in the system is the OLA. The library organizations which are part of the system are defined as “divisions” of the OLA. For example, OLBA does not have an independent corporate status - and some of its key powers are defined in the OLA By-law 1. There are additional By-laws under this corporate “umbrella” which provide further definition of the divisions. The OLA then, “covers” a wide variety of library organizations including the public libraries, but the FOPL refers only to public libraries; i.e. not to school libraries, university libraries, librarian professional associations, etc.

Therefore, although the OLBA sits on the Strategic Directions Committee, as does the TPL, it is the OLA which will shortly circulate to all public libraries the final materials on the FOPL proposal containing motions for membership, commitments for fees and various other formal forms for consideration by individual public library boards or their response. The OLBA, in short is really not involved as an organization in the ongoing process except as it may continue to have delegates to the SDC.

As to the discussion of the FOPL, it was one in which questions were raised and in which no consensus of support for the proposal as it now stands could be found. I reviewed my own questions, at least a few of them given time constraints, and found agreement with a number of these questions from other Council members. Some members indicated that the fee schedule would be rejected virtually out of hand by many Boards facing severe financial stringency - others expressed reservations about CEO votes on the proposed FOPL Board as potential for dominance of volunteer control. One position taken was that the basic goal of “one voice” was compelling and that the FOPL should be moved ahead as an “act of faith” with the new FOPL Board developing as it saw fit; i.e. presumably not necessarily in the direction indicated in the details of the SDC Business Plan.

But all of this questioning and raising of doubts ended rather dramatically and strikingly when Peter Rogers, speaking presumably for the SDC stated that there would be no further response from the SDC to questions being raised, and that the proposal as contained in the material to be distributed by the OLA would stand as now drafted. For the OLBA, no motion of endorsement was made or passed - instead it was agreed to note that the OLBA had been and was being represented on the SDC. This means in practice that the OLBA as a Council has no mandate to proceed further with this issue - although individual Council members will undoubtedly be part of a dialogue within their Board(s).

The Board is well aware of my views and questions(in writing) regarding the current FOPL proposal and I will not repeat them here. It, along with all other public library boards, will now be faced with the decision to make commitments to the FOPL as contained in the OLA circulated FOPL package. It is difficult to predict the outcome of this “poll” but it seemed clear to me that questions and reservations raised by members of the Council who represent many small, medium and larger libraries indicate a problematical outcome - one which may or may not have improved with a correction of many flaws noted and a much better process of communication/consultation.

6. Strategic Plan

After a very lengthy and awkward history the OLBA strategic plan is not yet ready for final consideration and approval by the Council. I did submit a lengthy set of comments and suggestions to the Council Chair some months ago and it was agreed that these would be taken into account in preparation of a more effective draft for the November meeting of Council. It should be said that the process of preparing the OLBA plan has been made complicated by the debate and uncertainty about the FOPL since there are clearly areas of potential overlap between the two organizations and, indeed the OLA and the FOPL. Hopefully, however the OLBA will now set out what it sees as its own future without speculating about what the FOPL might or might not be or do.

7. Ontario Digital Library

It was reported that useful discussions have been held with the Ministry of Culture - but that at this stage there was no budgetary allocation available. It is planned to engage other relevant Ministries in the discussions.