



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

9.

Use of Parkdale Branch Meeting Room as a Constituency Office

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| Date: | June 11, 2007 |
| To: | Toronto Public Library Board |
| From: | City Librarian |

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to:

- describe the circumstances which led to the establishment of a constituency office in the Parkdale Branch's Meeting Room B;
- review the Toronto Public Library's Auditorium, Meeting Room and Theatre Rental Policy as it applies in this case; and
- recommend a course of action to resolve this issue.

To summarize, a Councillor's use of the Parkdale meeting room as a constituency office contravenes the Toronto Public Library's room booking policy. The initial room booking was placed as a result of errors and miscommunications on the part of the Library. A recommendation for addressing the situation is proposed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. makes an exception to the Auditorium, Meeting Room and Theatre Rental Policy, in light of the circumstances, by accepting the Councillor's room booking from March 2007 to November 2010, with the provision that this arrangement will not extend beyond the term of the current incumbent or Council, whichever ends first;
2. charges the Councillor for the use of the room at the rate of \$10/hour, subject to any Board approved increase to the rates.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The room booking charges from March 3, 2007 to the end of the year would be \$1,320 at \$10/hour. The annual charge would be \$1,560.

The Director, Finance and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Early in 2007, staff in a Councillor's office approached the Parkdale Branch to ask about the Councillor using a meeting room at the library on an occasional basis to meet with constituents. Meeting Room B was identified as a possibility for booking by the local manager. Meeting Room B is the smallest of Parkdale's three meeting rooms at 220 sq. ft. It is rented for small meetings and in conjunction with use of the larger auditorium. The use of Toronto Public Library's meeting rooms by City of Toronto Councillors for public meetings is routine. The Library's Auditorium, Meeting Room and Theatre Rental Policy states that room rental fees are waived in this situation (Attachment 1).

On February 7, 2007, the Councillor's staff submitted a room booking contract to branch staff, requesting the use of Meeting Room B for three hours every Saturday morning for the next four years. The type of event was identified as "constituency office". The Councillor indicated that he would pay \$960 per year. The \$960 payment was based on information provided to him by Facilities and Real Estate concerning City policies and guidelines covering constituency office leases in City of Toronto buildings.

This more specific request was in contravention of the Library policy, which states that "use will be denied to clubs, groups and organizations intending to establish the Library as a permanent location for their activities". However, staff in the branch proceeded with the booking, assuming that senior staff were aware of its scope. The Councillor was advised the room was free of charge.

The Councillor began to use the room on March 3, 2007. He consulted with branch staff about a sign for the exterior of the library advertising his constituency office hours, and it was installed in late March.

This room booking came to the attention of senior management in early April, following the publication of an article in the April 2007 issue of *Parkdale Liberty* newspaper. "Settling in to the Basement Office" discussed the community's response to the Councillor's choice of constituency office. Further, at the April 26 meeting, the Board queried the application of the Library's room booking policy in relation to constituency offices.

Library staff then met with the Councillor to discuss the Library's concerns about the room booking. The room booking policy was reviewed. The Councillor does not view

his “occasional” use of the meeting room as a contravention of the room booking policy. He feels that it represents an opportunity to increase the Library’s community presence.

In May 2007, the Library’s Finance Department received a deposit cheque for \$960 from the Councillor for the room booking. The cheque is currently being held by the Library, pending the resolution of the issues around the booking.

COMMENTS

The Toronto Public Library’s Auditorium, Meeting Room and Theatre Rental Policy states that meeting rooms are made available to individuals and groups whose primary purpose is the promotion of cultural, educational and community activities. Community and commercial use is permitted when the facilities are not required by the Library for its services.

The policy denies use to clubs, groups and organizations intending to establish the Library as a permanent location for their activities. Rooms are released for booking in three month intervals. The room booking contract states that the Library may terminate the contracting party’s right to use the premises if it becomes aware that the premises are intended to be a permanent or long-term location for the contracting party’s activities.

While the policy states that “room rental fees are waived for meetings convened and attended by City of Toronto Councillors, excluding election meetings”, there is no provision for the rental of constituency office space to City Councillors. The Library is not in a position to be able to offer constituency office space to Councillors across the City.

The intent of the room booking policy is to provide space for community activities, not to rent space for office use. The Library’s Leases Policy covers the leasing of space in excess of the Library’s needs (Attachment 2). Lease space is not available at the Parkdale Branch.

The Library is not governed by the City’s policies regarding leasing space for constituency office use in City-owned buildings. Most library buildings including Parkdale Branch are owned by the Library, not by the City. Meeting Room B at Parkdale Branch is a meeting room, and not available for lease.

The Councillor’s ongoing use of the Parkdale meeting room as a constituency office contravenes the Library’s room booking policy. It is unfortunate that the room booking was originally taken. The Library regrets the errors made in handling this booking. The Library is currently in the process of centralizing its room booking process. Staff in the centralized room booking unit have a greater expertise in applying the policies, helping to prevent this type of mistake from occurring in the future.

After considering the situation, staff recommends making an exception to the policy given the circumstances. Further, staff recommends that the Councillor be charged \$10/hour, because his use does not fall into the category of public meetings for which fees are waived for Councillors. A leasing arrangement is not recommended because the Library wishes to retain the use of the space as a meeting room. The \$960 deposit cheque received from Councillor Perks will be refunded when payment is received.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Josephine Bryant
City Librarian

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Auditorium, Meeting Room and Theatre Rental Policy
Attachment 2: Leases Policy