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To: Toronto Public Library Board – May 12, 2003
From: City Librarian
Subject: **Northern Elms Branch Library**

Purpose:

To advise the Toronto Public Library Board of the termination of the tenancy agreement for the Northern Elms Branch, and to update the Board on the efforts and activities of staff to seek out an alternative location.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

Funding implications are not known at this time. If an alternative location is found, there will be costs for leasehold improvements. Any costs incurred to provide an interim service will be covered by the operating budget for the branch.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive the *Northern Elms Branch Library* report for information.

Background:

The Northern Elms Branch has been located in the Rexdale Mall since it opened in 1991. It was originally opened in response to community demand, and remains well supported by the local neighbourhoods in the branch catchment area.

For several years, there have been rumours regarding the possible redevelopment of the Rexdale Mall. In the fall of 2002, the Library, in conjunction with City of Toronto Real Estate Division and as part of the lease renewal process, began an investigation of possible sites for re-location.

Early in March 2003, the Library was advised that the Rexdale Mall had been sold to FirstPro Shopping Centres, a developer of “big box” malls, for the construction of a Walmart store and some related retail space. On March 14, 2003, the Library was notified that its tenancy in the mall would be terminated at the end of its three-year tenancy agreement, effective May 1, 2003. Subsequent to that notification, staff have negotiated a one month extension to the agreement, and the Branch will close effective May 31, 2003.

On March 19, 2003, the developer held a well-attended open house to unveil the plans to the community. Following that meeting, a number of local citizens contacted the Library to express their concern for the future of the branch and their desire for continued library service in the immediate area.

Comments:

In response to these developments, staff have been working on several options to continue to provide library service to the Northern Elms community.

Leasing alternative space:

In conjunction with the City of Toronto's Real Estate Division, staff are currently involved in discussions for a re-located space in a former Zellers store at 2267 Islington Avenue, which is located at the north end of the current Rexdale Mall. This option proposes the re-location of several of the tenants, including the Library, displaced from the Mall. Its feasibility rests on the negotiation of suitable space within the store and viable terms for rental costs, length of the lease, and leasehold improvements. A new leasing agreement, once negotiated, as well as any related costs for leasehold improvements, would be brought back to the Board for consideration and approval.

Permanent or leased space in cooperation with Shelter, Housing and Support's Bergamot Proposal:

The City's Shelter, Housing and Support Division, as part of its "Let's Build" housing initiatives, has developed a proposal to provide low cost housing for families and a child care centre on Bergamot Avenue. Bergamot is located on the west side of Islington Avenue, across the street from the Rexdale Mall and the current site of the Branch. Council approved the project in January, and the YWCA was the successful proponent to construct the housing and the day care centre. An architect has been hired and a site plan has been developed; planning for a community consultation process is underway. The project is scheduled for completion in two and a half years.

Library staff initiated discussions with Shelter, Housing and Support and the YWCA about the viability of including a library as part of the project. As it stands, additional space for the library could not be accommodated on the site within the current footprint or budget. Inclusion of the library would involve pursuing the possibility of acquiring additional land from the City and re-negotiating locations for the day care. The only available land adjacent to the site is parkland which, according to the new official plan is not to be used for another purpose.

At this point, given the complications and time frame for the project, this does not appear to be a viable solution.

Interim Service:

As an interim measure, planning is underway to provide a regular, weekly bookmobile service on the site of the Rexdale Mall and to extend hours of service at our Rexdale Branch until a new location for Northern Elms is confirmed. This service is scheduled to take effect the week of June 2, 2003.

Conclusion:

Staff will continue to review these options, and, although there is limited opportunity in this neighbourhood, to investigate the availability of other sites. A further report, with recommendations, will be brought forward to the Board at the June 9, 2003 meeting.

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Not applicable.