



To: Toronto Public Library Board – January 21, 2002

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Ontario Public Library Strategic Plan – *Building Value Together: A Vision for Change for Ontario Public Libraries***

Purpose:

To report to the Toronto Public Library Board on progress to date in developing a new strategic plan for public libraries in Ontario.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The discussion paper *Building Value Together: A Vision for Change for Ontario Public Libraries* has no immediate funding implications for or impacts on the Toronto Public Library. However, any future creation of a coordinating body for public libraries in Ontario could have a negative impact on those “provincial” services currently provided by TPL and the significant provincial grant funds supporting them. Staff will continue to be involved in the planning process and will keep the Board informed.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive for information the *Ontario Public Library Strategic Plan – Building Value Together: A Vision for Change for Ontario Public Libraries* report.

Background:

Public libraries in Ontario are provincially legislated under the Public Libraries Act RRS, 1990, but are established at the community level by municipal by-law and operate under the authority of a local library board. In the mid 1960s, the Ministry of Culture and Communication assumed responsibility for public libraries and various iterations of that Ministry have maintained the role to the present Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation. Unlike many other provinces, Ontario did not create a Provincial Library, nor was a central governing body ever developed to provide an integrated approach to all aspects of public library service. Various organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, provide leadership and/or a coordinating role in different contexts. These organizations include:

- Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation:
 - responsible for the administration of the Public Libraries Act;

- advances the public library system in order to maximize its contribution to the provincial economic and social vitality.
- Heritage and Libraries Branch:
 - develops provincial policies for the public library system;
 - administers operating and special grants and special province wide grants such as the Urban and Rural CAP programs, Gates Foundation funding etc.;
 - compiles and publishes annual provincial library statistics;
- Ontario Library Service:
 - Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS) and Ontario Library Service North (OLS-N) are non-scheduled agencies funded by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation;
 - governed by boards nominated by public library boards and the Minister;
 - on behalf of the Ministry, provide a wide range of support service and programs to public libraries across the province (excluding Toronto), eg. consulting, staff training, delivery service, Help Desk, etc.);
 - mandated to increase cooperation and coordination among the library boards in their areas.
- Strategic Directions Council:
 - provides coordinated, province-wide leadership and direction for public libraries;
 - encourages participation in province-wide initiatives as identified in strategic planning;
 - coordinates the public library community's response to issues of concern;
 - membership from all public library organizations in Ontario.
- Consortium of Ontario Libraries (COOL):
 - created in 1998 as a cross library sector consortium to maximize leverage and purchasing power for negotiating licenses for the joint acquisition of electronic products.
- Ontario Library Association:
 - professional associations for all library types in Ontario;
 - includes seven types of professional organizations, eg. Ontario Library Trustees Association (OLTA), Ontario Public Library Association (OPLA);
 - provides education and professional information, lobbying and political action, services and products to support library programs.
- The PLO's:
 - Association of Medium Public Libraries in Ontario (AMPLO);
 - Administrators of Rural/Urban Public Libraries in Ontario (ARUPLO);
 - Association of Small Public Libraries (ASPLO);
 - Chief Executives of Large Public Libraries in Ontario (CELPLO);
 - all provide a mechanism for discussion and resolution of issues and problems common to the specific group of libraries represented;
 - all represent the interests of the specific group to the provincial government.

There are many other coordinating bodies, with various mandates that serve as vehicles for discussion of common issues or resource sharing, but none has comprehensive responsibility or authority.

Ontario's lack of a provincial library or a central coordinating body for library service makes it atypical among political jurisdictions today. Certainly in North America, most states and provinces have well established mechanisms for collective action. The range of models is considerable and runs the gamut from the bricks and mortar provincial/state library to the virtual. Two Canadian examples of these extremes can be seen in Nova Scotia and Alberta.

The Nova Scotia Provincial Library is a division of the Higher Education and Adult Learning Branch of the Department of Education and operates under a provincial libraries act and regulations. Under the direction of a Provincial Librarian, it provides leadership in coordinating library services throughout Nova Scotia and engages in a broad range of activities that include:

- providing leadership at both provincial and national levels on matters affecting libraries;
- promoting resource sharing and enhanced document delivery across the province;
- providing funding support to regional public libraries through various grant programs;
- providing centralized technical services to support regional libraries;
- maintaining a provincial database of library materials;
- providing consultation, training and specialized services to libraries.

At the virtual library end of the spectrum is The Alberta Library (TAL), a multi-type, province-wide library consortium that works collectively with its members to promote universal, barrier-free access to the materials and resources in Alberta's diverse libraries. Members include public, university, college, technical institute and special libraries. Each member library has a seat on the Board of Directors, which in turn elects an Executive Committee of 5 to 7. An Executive Director administers TAL and advises the Board. Although only created in 1994, TAL has quickly made progress toward a number of its goals:

- implementation of a province-wide library card whereby members in good standing of a participating library can borrow up to five books at a time from any participating library and return them to any participating library;
- provincial database licensing has resulted in smaller and medium-sized libraries having more affordable access to a wider selection of databases;
- partner in the Alberta Heritage Digitization Project – a major ongoing project to digitize and make accessible Alberta's history;
- TAL Online, a collaborative project among Alberta's 232 libraries to provide Internet-based access to their catalogues simultaneously, using one search engine;
- staff conferences and training;
- advocacy on behalf of its members;
- VisuNet partnership with the CNIB to provide TAL member users with access to CNIB resources.

TAL is funded jointly by the provincial government and member libraries and has a very ambitious three-year plan to further advance library service throughout the province.

In Ontario's fragmented context, the public library community, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Ontario Library Association undertook a strategic planning process for all libraries in the province and in 1990, published *One Place to Look; The Ontario Public Library Strategic Plan*. The Plan was forward looking and visionary for its time and was based on four goals for every Ontarian:

- access to information resources within the province through an integrated system of partnerships among all types of information providers;
- accurate and timely public library service that is responsive to individual and community needs;
- public library service that meets recognized standards of excellence from trained and service-oriented staff, governed by responsible policy makers;
- access to the services and resources of all public libraries without barriers or charges.

Specific objectives included recommendations to establish an office to “co-ordinate and develop an integrated province-wide public library network” and a “Strategic Planning Council with representation from all library organizations in Ontario, to provide community-based input” to the proposed coordinating office. While the Strategic Directions Council (SDC) was established in response to the latter recommendation, the central coordinating body was never achieved. As a result, many of the Plan's other goals and objectives have not been realized.

The need to establish a coordinating body for public libraries in Ontario that was identified in *One Place to Look* has continued unabated and in fact, has been exacerbated by radical changes over the last decade in the environment in which public libraries operate. The advent of the Internet and the digital age has made resource-sharing and service provision on a provincial level an even more attainable goal. Today's technology offers great potential for collaborative and cost effective opportunities to provide equitable and accessible library service to all Ontarians.

In recognition of this, the SDC, early in 2000, inaugurated a second strategic planning process that would chart the course of public library development in Ontario for the next several years. Since its inception, the strategic planning process has broadly engaged the public library community through a participatory structure that has included a Core Management Team, Issue Teams and Review Groups. More than 220 trustees, staff and administrators have been actively involved in the work to date. The Toronto Public Library has had staff represented at all three structural levels. While a member of the TPL Board, Sandy Douglas was a member of the Review Group that received and responded to all work of the planning team. The process has been funded through grants from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation and both financial and in-kind contributions from individual public libraries and associations.

With consulting support, significant research was undertaken as part of the planning process. PriceWaterhouseCoopers conducted both environmental and socio-demographic scans and analyzed the results for future impact on public libraries. A province-wide telephone survey conducted by Market Probe Canada also contributed valuable information to the process. For approximately 18 months, work progressed on what was emerging as a fairly standard strategic planning document. However, in the summer of 2001, an external expert review of the draft plan at a plenary session of the planning groups resulted in a significant restructuring of the strategic plan. What emerged was a move to a single focus – the “Ontario Public Library” as the one key

issue believed to be the “bold stroke” needed to enable Ontario public libraries to successfully address the threats and opportunities identified. The strategic plan for Ontario Public Libraries became a strategy for change which is described in the attached report *Building Value Together: a Vision for Change for Ontario Public Libraries*. The Executive Summary (on pages 3 to 5) provides a brief overview of the report.

The report was released to the library community in December 2001 as a discussion paper. It is available, along with other supporting documentation, on the website developed by SDC as one of its communication tools (www.strategicplan2000.com). A user feedback form is also available on the site. The report was presented to a plenary meeting of Ontario library Chief Executive Officers on December 7, 2001 and to the Strategic Directions Council on December 12, 2001. SDC approved in principle the concept of an Ontario Public Library and agreed that the SDC Executive undertake further refinement of the concept. This includes the current round of stakeholder consultation and the development of a business plan to secure funding for a Task Force to be struck in the spring of 2002 to address issues of function, financing, governance, services and processes to establish the Ontario Public Library.

The report is a work in progress; revision will be ongoing through the current consultation process. A final version of the discussion paper will be presented at the Ontario Library Association Superconference at the end of January.

Comments:

Building Value Together identifies a significant number of challenges facing all public libraries today, but also recognizes that each challenge represents an opportunity if libraries can position themselves to effectively respond to the challenges. The report identifies the creation of a single coordinating agency called the Ontario Public Library (OPL) as the most effective mechanism to provide libraries with the collective capacity to create a future in which public libraries continue to play a central role in Ontario communities. With effective provincial leadership, strong local public libraries and a collective capacity, the total public investment in public library service can be maximized to improve library service for all users across the province.

Conclusion:

It is clearly recognized that the details around governance, structure, financing, and services must be fully developed and articulated before local library boards will be able to assess the impacts on local services and weigh the cost/benefit of supporting the implementation of an Ontario Public Library.

The services that would be provided by an Ontario Public Library will be identified in the next phase of the work. However, the report sets out a list of possible services that could be provided or coordinated at a provincial level by the OPL:

- province-wide licensing of electronic information resources;
- digital content creation and preservation;
- consortia purchasing of some print and audio visual material;
- on going market research and strategic planning;

- 24/7 virtual reference service;
- fundraising and partnership development;
- establishing standards of service;
- marketing programs;
- staff training.

Some of these services are currently provided by existing organizations. For example, the Southern Ontario Library Service coordinates some consortia purchasing of print and electronic resources. The Toronto Public Library provides the Virtual Reference Library, has the most sophisticated digitization capabilities and expertise among public libraries in the province and negotiates private sponsorship of and creates a summer reading club program for Ontario libraries.

The Toronto Public Library Board is currently the only public library board in Ontario with a legislated mandate and funding to provide library service across the province. When the Metropolitan Toronto Library Board was established in 1966 by amendment to the Municipality of Toronto Act it was mandated to provide reference services to the metropolitan Toronto area and received a provincial grant for this express purpose. The Public Libraries Act 1990 sets out “the Minister may establish special library service boards to provide resources and services that the Minister specifies and may make grants to special library service boards out of legislative appropriations for library purposes”. And further, “the Metropolitan Toronto Library Board shall be deemed to be a special library service board and may provide library resources and services to the Ontario library community”. The 1997 City of Toronto Act sustained this special role and conferred it on the newly amalgamated Toronto Public Library. Negotiations with the Province just prior to amalgamation secured ongoing special funding, but linked the special provincial grant (currently \$1.4 million annually) to the Virtual Reference Library and provincial resource sharing.

Any identification of services that could be allocated to the Ontario Public Library is likely to have an impact on those “provincial” services currently provided by TPL and the significant provincial grant funds supporting them. It is important therefore, that TPL staff continue to be involved in the ongoing planning process.

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List of Attachments:

Building Value Together: A Vision for Change for Ontario Public Libraries report can be accessed electronically at www.strategicplan2000.com