

April 28, 2001

Toronto Public Library Board,

Re: Policy & Finance Committee Presentation and Suggestion

This letter is to inform the TPL Board of my presentation to Toronto's Policy & Finance Committee and to make a suggestion to help deal with the consequences of budget cuts. I believe the Board will better be able to carry out its tasks if it knows what took place at the Committee meeting. Also, I feel that something should be done to help mitigate the damage that could result from the Library's currently economic difficulties.

Policy & Finance Committee Presentation: On April 23, 2001, I made a presentation to Toronto's Policy & Finance Committee on the TPL budget. I also provided the Committee members with a handout (copy attached) summarizing what I said.

After the presentation Councillor Sutherland (also the vice-Chair of the Budget Advisory Committee) asked me three 'questions' and I replied as follows:

(1) Didn't I know that the Library's Budget was increased by about \$7 million this year?
I explained that this wasn't an increase as approximately \$3 million was for legally mandated employment equity payments and that much of the rest was for legally required labour settlements.

(2) He then said that he hadn't been informed that the Library was proposing to reduce branch hours?
I explained that the money to keep the branches open had been removed from the budget and the Library had no choice as it was no longer able to support the current branch hours.

(3) He then went into a tirade, as he previously had with the media, about the Library throwing away books.
I remarked that he had previously been given an answer about the books in question--that they had been turned down by possible buyers and all the Library could do was to recycle them.

Suggestion: To provide greater understanding to Library users, staff and your Toronto shareholders, I suggest that the Board have a short letter prepared and distributed in libraries. The letter would in general terms explain the Library's situation and how it came to be. It could contain:

major cuts over the last 10 years & current cuts resulting in:

- fewer books, ...
- IntelliSearch & LINK Community Info Services eliminated
- children's 'Leading To Reading' and after-school programs cut
- no funding for Teen Zone proposal
- Repairs at McGregor Park, Beaches and Long Branch deferred to 2002
- No Malvern expansion & St. James Town's new library construction slowed down

The letter would then ask for understanding and help in dealing with the situation.

Making users, staff and Torontians aware of the Library's situation and how it came about will help all of us work together more harmoniously. It will also help prepare everyone for the next round of budgeting which looks like it will be much tougher than the current one.

Thank you, for your consideration.

John F. Wilson

Cc: City Librarian

'First, Do No Harm' (Deputation to Toronto's Finance & Policy Committee-- Apr. 17, 2001)
by: John F. Wilson

I Introduction & Congratulations

II Purpose A to propose criteria that should be used to resolve budget issues

B to show that the criteria apply to the Toronto Public Library's budget

III Proposal-'First, Do No Harm'

This advice given by Hippocrates 2,500 years ago is still recited by doctors today.

You are our physicians. You are the people who are prescribing for & operating on Torontians.

First, do no harm to Torontians--especially to children, to new immigrants and to those struggling with sickness & disability. To achieve this you must restore the funding cut from the Library's budget.

criteria to determine funding

1. services that are affordable for in most communities--not just a world class city like Toronto
2. services where the benefits heavily outweigh the costs
3. services that avoid long term irreparable harm-- Hippocrates' advice

IV Library's Situation: Cuts & Challenges

A cuts--over the last 10 years

- 25% of the budget has been cut--for this year, more cuts proposed
- 23% of the staff had been cut--for this year, a proposal to cut 77 more workers
- no increases to the materials (book) budget--for this year, a proposed cut equivalent to 45,000 books

The library's assets are being destroyed--esp its mat'l collection, --books prices have soared

According to the Annual Performance Measures & Branch Cost Comparisons the TPL is one of the busiest library systems in North America. Its collections have one of the highest activity levels. This means that its books wear out very fast. Unfortunately, we are not replacing them as we need to.

B challenges--handling the technological & economic hurdles while still serving Torontians.

The library provides:

- services for shut-ins
- mobile libraries for kids in neighbourhoods far from libraries
- services and materials for people with disabilities
 - talking books for the blind and seeing impaired
 - large print books for people with poor eyesight
 - toy libraries for disabled kids
 - tty service for the deaf and hard of hearing
 - services for people in long-term care hospitals
- dial-a-story for kids who lack friends and parents to talk to
- literacy services for the people who come to Toronto from all over the world
- computers for kids whose families can't afford them. There are lineups at the library doors to sign up for 15 minutes of computer time. Forty percent of Toronto's kids don't have access to home computers

V Consequences: Cutting the libraries budget damages its assets but the real damage is to children, new immigrants and those struggling with sickness & disability.

The criteria I suggested you use is certainly met. I ask you to restore

1. services that are affordable for in most communities--not just a world class city like Toronto
2. services where the benefits heavily outweigh the costs
3. services that avoid long term irreparable harm--harm to children, to new immigrants and to those struggling with sickness & disability

VI You need to act now

1. This harm is not acceptable, especially not in combination with a tax increase.
2. Please restore the 293 hours of service cut from 26 library branches & the 45,000 books effectively cut from the library's materials budget.
3. Don't harm the Torontians who need your help the most.

Don't slam the door on kids who need to use the library!