

Public Consultation Regarding Potential Service Reductions

Date:	December 12, 2011
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide the results of public consultation on the impacts to residents and communities of potential reductions to library collections and open hours as requested by the Library Board as context for review of the 2012 operating budget submission. Public consultation included an in branch and online survey and thirteen public meetings.

There were 9,316 surveys received, and 800 residents participated in thirteen public meetings held by the Library. Responses indicated that reductions to library collections and open hours would reduce usage of library service in communities across the City. Concerns were communicated about the broader impacts of these reductions on literacy, learning and access to affordable culture and recreation potentially reducing the quality of life for many.

Survey Results

Collections:

If there were fewer new items, including books, audio books, and DVDs available for browsing, research, borrowing and filling holds:

- 45.5% would use the library less
- 27.3% would use the library much less
- 27.2% said their use of the library would not change

Hours:

At the 59 library branches where open hours would be reduced:

- 43.9% would use the library less
- 24.8% would use the library much less
- 31.3% said their use of the library would not change

Themes from the survey responses and public meetings include:

- Libraries are a vital community asset and services should not be reduced.
- Extensive open hours, including mornings, evenings and Sunday hours meet a broad range of community and residents' needs, including families, youth, newcomers, students of all ages, job-seekers, entrepreneurs and seniors
- Purchasing fewer new materials is a significant service reduction. Collections support reading, literacy and learning, and provide access to affordable culture and recreation. Collections are important to residents of all ages. Many residents would be impacted by longer wait times for new material.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The results of public consultation have no financial impact.

The Director, Finance and Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

DECISION HISTORY

At its September 13, 2011 meeting, the Board received the *Service Efficiency Update* report for information and approved a motion arising from the report *that staff undertake public consultation with affected communities if any consolidations/closures, or reductions in hours of service are being considered by the Board as part of its consideration of the Service Efficiency Review report.*

At its October 17, 2011 meeting in considering the 2012 – 2021 operating budget submission, the Board approved the following motions: *to authorize staff to conduct public consultation about the impact of potential reductions in service hours and collections, and direct staff to report on the results of consultation at the November or December Board meeting and that the public consultations on proposed service reductions include consultation meetings at the local library branches, where requested.*

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Consultation on the impacts of potential service reductions fulfills the Board's request and is an input to consideration of the Library's 2012 operating budget submission.

COMMENTS

Summary of Results

Results of public consultation show that residents place a high value on library service for themselves, families and communities. Overall library usage would decrease as a result of service reductions. However, approximately 30% of those responding indicated that their use of the library would not change. There is interest and concern about potential

service reductions with emphasis on the impacts for children, youth, seniors and newcomers, job seekers and entrepreneurs. Concerns include the service impacts as well as the short and long-term implications for the sustainability of library service, which is seen as an important City asset. Many residents indicated that a reduction in library service would reduce the quality of life in Toronto.

Survey

The survey was the primary method of consultation on potential service reductions. It was available online and in print in library branches from October 27th to November 27th, with assistance for persons with disabilities and translation available through the Answerline service.

Results of the Survey

As of November 30th, 9,316 surveys were received and analyzed. Questions included the impacts about potential reductions to collections and about open hours for residents, families and communities. Detailed results are included in Attachment 1.

Collections

Question 1:

In response to the question: *if there are fewer new items, including books, audio books, and DVDs available for research, borrowing and filling holds, tell us how you think this would affect your use of the library:*

- 45.5% would use the library less
- 27.2% would use the library much less
- 27.2% said their use of the library would not change

Question 2:

If the library had fewer new items, I would be affected by the following changes – Check all that apply.

- 89.8% would be impacted by longer wait times for holds
- the percentage of respondents impacted by reductions to specific types of materials are listed below:
 - 77.7% popular materials
 - 70.9% information, study and lifelong learning
 - 61.4% new audio books and DVDs available to borrow
 - 52.7% research materials
 - 48.5% fewer new books for children and youth

Question 3:

Please tell us any other ways you, your family or your community may be affected by the reductions in library collections. There were 5,180 responses received and are categorized by major theme. Percentages are approximate.

- reductions to collections would negatively affect learning/reading (41%)

- the library plays a vital role. Service reductions will impact the quality of service (10%)
- reductions to collections would cause financial hardship among residents (9%)

Sample survey comments about Collections:

It will affect how my family and I spend time together. We get a lot of resources from the library to have fun. If there is a reduction in materials and library hours are reduced, it will be harder to find affordable ways to have a great time with my family.

My whole family uses the library a lot. My parents read Chinese literature only, so a reduction in library collections would affect my family.

Everyone would be affected by fewer new books - new books currently have long waiting lists ... I have to wait long periods for updated school project materials.

My husband and I are avid readers and use the library on a regular basis. It would not be in our budget to purchase all of the books we borrow. As a writer, I use the library for research and rely on materials being current and up to date.

The public library is a marvellous resource. I use it professionally and personally, and count on being able to get the books I need swiftly and efficiently. In my neighbourhood, the library is often the only resource available to school children, elderly and others who do not have computer access at home. I worry about specific research materials at the Toronto Reference and North York Central libraries, particularly genealogy.

Open Hours

Potential reductions to library open hours impact 59 branches, including the weekday and Sunday schedule. At 39 branches, the number of open hours would not change, but there would be minor changes to the schedule.

Question 4 and 5:

What branch do you use the most? How would the proposed changes to your branch's schedule affect your library use? (For the 59 branches with proposed reductions in hours)

- 43.9% would use the library less
- 24.8% would use the library much less
- 31.3% said their use of the library would not change

Question 6:

If library hours were reduced I would not use the library as much to – check all that apply:

- 18.8% browse, borrow, or use library books, magazines and DVDs
- 14.8% read or work in the library
- 11.0% use computers and the Internet
- 10.9% get assistance from staff in finding information

- 10.5% attend library programs

Question 7:

Please tell us how else you, your family or your community may be affected by the reduction in library hours across the City. There were 4,818 responses received categorized below by theme. Percentages are approximate.

- Quality of library service will be impacted (37%)
- Libraries are vital community spaces which residents need (25%)
- Proposed open hours will reduce access (18%)

Sample comments about Open Hours:

If library open hours were shortened further, I would have difficulty visiting during my own non-working hours. The members of our community would have fewer safe places to do research, to gather and to find leisure materials. The children and youth who attend schools around our neighbourhoods would no longer have a place to use wifi, write papers, read and gather safely. It would be a real loss to our community to have a single hour cut from our existing service, which is already functioning on limited hours per week.

I do not have Internet access at home; my children use the library computers or wireless service to do research and homework; I use the library for research and to attend programs; evening and weekend hours are when we are able to use the library and reducing hours would restrict our ability to use these services.

My children often meet with peers for group research. Closing libraries when children are out of school, and on Friday evenings allows for one less positive activity they have to choose from.

I view the library as a safe, comfortable, well connected location for people, especially the young, in my community to study and learn. Reducing library hours would remove what I consider to be a necessary location for young people to gather and study. It would also promote greater socio-economic inequality and countless studies have identified libraries as having a crucial role in providing access to technology and information for disadvantaged youth.

I have been taking my daughter to the library on Thursday mornings for about two years as that is the best morning for us to go in terms of scheduling other activities. It would be very inconvenient for us if these hours were not available to us anymore.

I do some volunteer work as an ELS language tutor with a person with disabilities - having a library locally and accessible means we can use their facilities and resources for this learning.

Public Meetings

Thirteen public meetings in branches across the City were attended by 800 residents with Councillors attending meetings in their ward and Board members attending several meetings. Meetings extended the opportunity to participate in the consultation, to ask questions about service reductions and for residents and communities to communicate about potential impacts. Meetings began with a brief presentation providing context about the potential service reductions followed by questions and comments. Presentation materials were made available to local community groups to support additional meetings. Participants filled out the survey as the primary method of providing input. Themes of the discussions are listed below and reflect results of the survey.

Hours

The majority of participants in community meetings did not support reductions in open hours indicating that an extensive range of open hours meet the diverse needs of residents. Some suggested that library hours should increase. To mitigate the impact of reduced hours, suggestions included staggered schedules for closed mornings and evenings instead of standard closed times or reducing open hours by one or two hours instead of a whole day and building online access to resources.

Comments:

- *Youth [would be] genuinely hurt and affected by library cuts; many youth visit the library daily at lunch and after school to study; [youth] cannot progress without libraries they are a fundamental component of our lives.*
- *Speaking as a newcomer who has been in Canada 11 months from Africa, this library is the one thing that makes Canada great - that is 9 on a scale of 1-10 – libraries should be touched as a last resort.*

Collections

The majority of participants did not support reductions to library collections as outlined in the survey results indicating that a reduction to collections is a significant service reduction.

Comments:

- *The library is vital in providing access to culture – we do not live in a City to be born and die – we want to think, to explore, we want to be cultured – library collections support this.*
- *How are the cuts to collections going to be managed with respect to electronic versus print? Have you taken into consideration that poorer patrons do not have access to IT equipment? Will you be increasing workstations in the library branches to facilitate access?*

Funding

Participants in the public meetings generally acknowledged the current fiscal environment at the City. In response, some suggested that maintaining the quality of library service was more important than reducing the cost. Suggestions to mitigate the impacts of funding reductions included approaching other orders of government for additional funds, increasing City revenues, building partnerships with other service providers and charging a small, voluntary fee for library cards and charging for holds not picked up.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Detailed Survey Results