

To: Toronto Public Library Board – June 14, 2004

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Service Harmonization Update**

Purpose:

To provide the Toronto Public Library Board with an update on service harmonization and to recommend strategies for moving forward in the context of future capital and operating budgets.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The costs of service harmonization are dependent on the next steps determined, and will be costed and considered as part of future operating and capital budget requests.

The capital costs of new branches range from \$3.2 million for a neighbourhood branch of approximately 7,000 square feet to \$8.9 million for a district branch of approximately 25,000 square feet, excluding the cost of land. The annual operating costs for new branches range from approximately \$400,000 to \$1.5 million, depending on the open hours and staff requirements to adequately manage the branch layout and service program.

The cost of open hours harmonization is dependent on the number of hours and locations to be changed.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board:

- (1) receive the *Service Harmonization Update* for information;
- (2) endorse the branch development strategy of maintaining existing branches by enhancing services and facilities at these locations and planning for additional branches in the Scarborough City Centre and Waterfront areas only; and
- (3) endorse the branch open hours strategy of maintaining existing “legacy” hours at local branches, and, over time, enhancing open hours in suburban and high priority neighbourhoods consistent with the Library’s strategic plan directions.

### Background:

Prior to amalgamation, the seven predecessor boards of the new Toronto Public Library operated independently, each with its own blend of services, levels and philosophies. Areas of cooperation included a daily delivery service, all branch returns of books, reciprocal borrowing privileges utilizing a common borrower card and interlibrary loan privileges as well as elements of specialized service areas such as multilingual material.

There were many challenges in amalgamating to create the largest and busiest library system in North America. An extensive analysis of branches and services revealed wide variations in access, focus and services across the new city. For example, the former City of Toronto had an extensive network of small to mid-range neighbourhood branches with the greatest level of access in terms of branch open hours. In contrast to this more homogeneous structure with dense geographic coverage, the suburban areas of Scarborough and North York had a tiered network of branches, large and small in size, providing progressive levels of service, but more dispersed geographic coverage with less access per capita in terms of branch open hours.

Since amalgamation in 1998, significant progress has been achieved in harmonizing service across the entire library system. This work was completed from 1998 to 2003 within the context of the service harmonization framework and service delivery model approved by the Board in 1998. Key initiatives have included activities such as the allocation of the library materials budget, Sunday open hours, implementation of a single integrated library system, branch planning study, review of city-wide services and various policies. More details on these initiatives are provided in Attachment 1.

### Comments:

An analysis of service harmonization initiatives to date is helpful in evaluating options and strategies to move forward in the remaining key areas of branch development and open hours.

It is recognized that in achieving successful harmonization:

- removing existing service from communities is difficult. The preference is to maintain existing or “legacy” services especially in regard to highly tangible assets such as branch facilities and hours of service;
- public consultation and support is critical;
- political engagement and support for proposed directions is critical;
- “leveling up” of services rather than a reallocation or redistribution is more acceptable; and
- “leveling down” of services is generally only possible in the context of budget reductions.

### **Branch Development**

The public response to the *Branch Planning Study* underlined the support for Library branches across the City and the strong desire to maintain these branches. With the opening of the St. James Town branch this fall, the Toronto Public Library will have 99 branches, more than any other public library system in North America. In addition, we continue to receive requests for

more branches in communities across the city, either to address under-served areas or to respond to population growth. While there are many advantages of being “branch rich”, it does challenge the Library’s ability to provide effective services. For example, the budget for collections is spread thinly over the many locations. While the holds service and amalgamated catalogue provide many advantages that customers appreciate and use, the collections available on shelf in many locations are not as in depth or current as desirable, particularly for browsing. In the case of branch open hours, the same is true. Customers would like to see more extensive open hours, but the cost of providing this service at 99 locations is prohibitive. As a result, while total open hours per capita compare favourably with other cities, branches are open fewer hours on a per branch basis than in other large cities. There are ramifications in terms of building maintenance and branch capital projects as well, particularly when more than half of the TPL branches are over 30 years old.

In responding to requests for new branches, the service delivery model is used as a guide. Characteristics identified for potential branch sites include location at a major intersection, accessibility by public transportation and proximity to community focal points. Characteristics identified as indicators of a need for service include population growth and distance traveled to a library. Neighbourhood branches serve a minimum of 25,000 residents living in a 1.6 kilometer radius. District branches serve a minimum of 100,000 residents living in a 2.5 kilometer radius.

Using this framework, few locations across the city meet the criteria for a new branch. There are isolated pockets where there are barriers to reaching a branch and bookmobile service is used to address these needs. However, two areas have been identified for further review with respect to branch growth – the Scarborough City Centre area in the vicinity of McCowan and Ellesmere and the Waterfront area (including the Railway Lands, Harbourfront, Portlands, East Bayfront, West Donlands as shown in Attachment 2.

Attachment 3 indicates projected areas of development as well as the branches across the City.

Development charges, levies and Section 37 funds can be used to offset capital costs for new branches. These are being collected by the City for future use by the Library. Section 37 funds result from individual agreements that are invoked if a developer wants an exemption to zoning, usually higher density. The City may allow the exemption in exchange for “community benefits”. Currently, the City is involved in new Section 37 discussions regarding development in the Bathurst/Strachan/Fort York vicinity. No other Section 37 money is on account at the City for the Library.

Trust accounts have been set up for the Library for development levies for Railway Lands Central and West. In addition, trust accounts have been set up for Harbourfront (226 to 230 Queen’s Quay) and Lakeshore Blvd. West between York St. and Stadium Rd. Staff are researching the details of this funding.

Staff are also currently reviewing the underserved and growth areas across the City. Recommendations will come forward in the context of the long-term capital budget to address these needs. With the exception of the Scarborough City Centre and the Waterfront, no additional branches are contemplated at this time.

Branch development is being focused on enhancing services at existing branch locations, and ensuring that branch buildings are well maintained and responsive to local communities through the capital state of good repair and branch renovation projects. Branches in leased premises are being reviewed with a view to relocating onto owned property where possible, as leases expire. Undersized or inadequate branch facilities in priority neighbourhoods such as Thorncliffe, are being considered for renovation and possible expansion in relation to other community facility enhancements planned for the neighbourhood. The focus is on containing branch growth and maximizing the use of existing branch infrastructure. This balances the public demand for branches in local neighbourhoods with the demand for longer open hours and more comprehensive collections which are also important indicators of quality public library service.

### **Branch Open Hours**

Although the development of electronic service delivery has made it possible for many people to access certain library services twenty-four hours per day/seven days per week, the open hours of one's library of choice continue to be an important measure of accessibility. As noted above, a significant step toward service harmonization was achieved through the extension of Sunday service to all areas of Toronto. Considerable variation does remain, however, in the open hours of branches in various areas of the city.

The variation in open hours is partly attributable to the way in which service delivery was developed in the suburbs and the city. The suburban model concentrates resources in district libraries which generally are open longer hours than the neighbourhood branches. In the older municipalities, there are many more neighbourhood libraries, open longer hours, but fewer libraries equivalent to the district libraries. Presently, the variation in hours is not so much at the extremes - with a few exceptions, the largest and most heavily-used libraries are open the longest hours; the smallest, least heavily-used libraries tend to be open the fewest hours. There is, however, great variation in the middle. In some instances, branches which service communities of comparable size that are equally well-used differ by as much as 20 open hours per week.

Addressing the differences in open hours, and their impact on service equity, is a further step in harmonizing services. Number of hours, consistency of hours, scheduling of hours and enhancements need to be considered.

Harmonizing hours within the existing funding envelope would involve increasing service to one community at the expense of another. Our experience since amalgamation has demonstrated the inherent difficulties in removing existing services from local communities.

In reviewing open hours, there will be a focus on increasing hours in suburban neighbourhoods where access is low in comparison to the downtown.

There will also be focus on high priority neighbourhoods with higher incidences of low income, newcomers and youth. This approach is consistent with the Library's proposed strategic plan directions. It also recognizes the "legacy" services of the predecessor Boards. Open hour changes at identified strategic locations will be requested as service enhancements through the operating budget process. It is acknowledged that fiscal constraints may impact on our ability to move ahead with these changes as quickly as desired. However, based on our experience with

service harmonization initiatives to date, this approach is preferable and will be more acceptable in local communities across the City.

Conclusion:

As we continue to plan and develop library services across the City, there will be a focus on branch development and branch open hours. It is recommended that the Board endorse the branch development strategy of maintaining existing branches by enhancing services and facilities at these locations and planning for additional branches in the Scarborough City Centre and Waterfront areas only. It is also recommended that the Board endorse the branch open hours strategy of maintaining existing “legacy” hours at local branches, and, over time, enhancing open hours in suburban and high priority neighbourhoods consistent with the Library’s strategic plan directions. This will complement and enhance services that have already been harmonized and will bring to completion the major work of service harmonization undertaken since amalgamation in 1998.

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

- Attachment 1: Toronto Public Library Service Harmonization Initiatives
- Attachment 2: Toronto Waterfront Map is unavailable electronically. Please contact Nancy Marshall at 416-393-7215 if you would like a paper copy.
- Attachment 3: Toronto Public Library Active Residential Development Applications Map