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To: Toronto Public Library Board – January 16, 2006  
From: City Librarian  
Subject: **“The Best Thing a Library Can Be is Open”: Update on Branch Open Hours**

Purpose:

To update the Board on the status of branch open hours, recent developments and directions for future consideration.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The 2006 operating budget submission includes a request for new/enhanced services to increase branch open hours in at-risk neighbourhoods in the amount of \$0.202 million, with a full-year cost in 2007 of \$0.607 million.

The total annual cost of the open hour enhancements discussed in this report is approximately \$16.2 million, based on 2006 costs. After review, these enhancements would be prioritized and phased in over a number of years. Associated costs for the various phases would then be included in future operating budget requests for new/enhanced services, as required.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the *“The Best Thing a Library Can Be is Open: Update on Branch Open Hours* report be received for information.

Background:

Borrowing the title from a recently published article in *Library Journal*, “The Best Thing a Library Can Be is Open”, this report addresses the status of branch open hours at branches across the City in response to a request by the Library Board at its meeting of June 6, 2005.<sup>1</sup>

Toronto Public Library’s (TPL) mission states that the library “provides free and equitable access to public library services, which meet the changing needs of citizens of Toronto”. Public opinion research and consultation conducted by the Library shows that the public considers the quality of the collections and the range of open hours offered by the Library to be critical

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<sup>1</sup> Albanese, Andrew Richard. “The Best Thing a Library can be is Open,” *Library Journal*, September 15, 2005, pp. 42-44.

determinants of the quality of library service. Extensive open hours both during the weekdays and on the weekends provide access to library service to a broad range of individual users and those attending programs. Morning hours are important to seniors, preschool children and their caregivers; lunch hours to students and workers; afternoon and after-school times to elementary and high school students and evening hours to support workers, mature students and recreational users. Saturday and Sundays attract the broadest range of users.

Since amalgamation a number of initiatives have improved library hours including:

- extending Sunday service to district libraries to Scarborough and York;
- expanding the schedule of Sunday hours from September-June;
- introducing Sunday service at eight neighbourhood libraries serving children's priority areas in 2000;
- making minor adjustments using guidelines developed in accordance with the Service Delivery Model for district and neighbourhood libraries, as opportunities arise with the re-opening of branches after capital renovations.

Two changes have been made due to budget reductions. In 2003, Friday evening service during July and August was eliminated. In 2004, the latest close time was standardized to 8:30 p.m. with a reduction resulting at four branches in the West region.

Despite these initiatives, there continues to be an unequal distribution of open hours throughout the City. In the older municipalities there are more neighbourhood libraries open longer hours. In comparison, the suburban library systems were developed with larger district libraries open longer hours and fewer neighbourhood libraries open for shorter hours. The result is that residents of the suburbs do not have the same access to library service as residents living downtown.

In June 14, 2004 the Board approved the report *Service Harmonization Update* recommending the 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." The approach of maintaining existing services, while at the same time targeting resources in priority neighbourhoods, was also identified by the City's Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force as important in maintaining strong neighbourhoods and economic performance as well as avoiding neighbourhood decline.

In keeping with this overall principle, this report outlines a vision for increasing branch open hours across the City to provide improved access to library service, discusses how these changes could be phased in and what the overall impact on the operating budget would be. Strategies for moving the discussion forward are considered.

#### Comments:

Toronto Public Library faces many challenges in maintaining and upgrading facilities and developing and delivering services to meet the needs of our diverse city. In the current fiscal environment, it may seem inappropriate or misguided to present a vision for expanded branch open hours. Nevertheless, if our branches are to remain relevant, vibrant and responsive, issues

of branch open hours need to be addressed and a long-range plan for doing this needs to be developed.

**Environmental Scan:**

Looking at the needs of our City and the Board's response, *Urban Stories*, many of the key priorities identified underscore the need to improve branch open hours and address inequities of access. Our branches provide valued community spaces in neighbourhoods across the City and people want and need to be able to access them as much as possible. They are local centers of books and culture where people from all ages and walks of life can gather to access collections, connect to the City's civic and cultural life and improve their reading and literary skills. For low-income neighbourhoods, they are an essential resource, providing much needed access to computers, the Internet, information and knowledge, quiet study space, reading and literacy programs, homework clubs and more. For newcomers, library branches are a lynch pin, a critical element of integration into Canadian life, a link to home through e-mail, Internet, newspapers and other language collections, a resource for accreditation information. For youth, branches are a place to be, to work, to study, to volunteer, to connect, to learn and to relax. TPL branches are everybody's place, community places that are important, valued and treasured.

Many large urban cities and countries around the world are discovering that public libraries support and foster strong neighbourhoods and communities as well as economic development. These places need to be open more to maximize the return on the investment in buildings and resources for the benefit of the entire community.

Increasingly, this is what users are expecting from libraries. It is what other libraries and institutions are discovering. College and university libraries are finding that even in the Internet age, the importance of the library as space cannot be underestimated. The recent article in *Library Journal* referenced above discusses this issue and describes how some colleges and universities are expanding library open hours, noting that more and more, students are demanding 24/7 service from library buildings, not just library electronic resources. The new Grande Bibliotheque, which opened last June in Montreal, has responded to this phenomenon by being open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. In addition, the popular materials section is open 14 hours a day from 10 a.m. to midnight, seven days a week. In the Greater Toronto Area, Oshawa Public Library has plans to extend branch open hours and Richmond Hill recently introduced extended study hall hours at its Central Library to 11 p.m., seven days a week during exam periods. In comparison, in Toronto, branch open hours are not as extensive as those in many other cities, in part due to the fact that Toronto has more branches to keep open.

Stores such as Chapters and Indigo also have extensive open hours that are popular and well used.

In the Toronto context, all public consultation done in recent years by TPL supports expanded open hours, particularly longer evening hours. A recent customer survey undertaken at Toronto Reference Library supported extended evening hours. Similar preferences have been found in recent customer surveys conducted in several neighbourhood branches. Questions about open hours will also be included in the Library's 2006 customer survey. Expanded branch open hours will support strong neighbourhoods and respond to community need. For youth and students in

particular, extended evening hours will be helpful. In low-income neighbourhoods where traveling to distant locations is a problem, expanded branch open hours will mean that much needed resources would become more accessible.

**Guidelines:**

In developing a vision for branch open hours across the City, the following guidelines were used.

The tier structure of research and reference, district and neighbourhood branches outlined in the Service Delivery Model is used in developing bands of branch open hours. The current Model outlines three bands of branch open hours: 40, 50 and 60 hours per week, Monday to Saturday. These bands are adjusted and redefined in response to the criteria outlined below. In addition, Sunday service hours are integrated to provide a complete picture of weekly access hours. Other considerations include improved customer service through standardization of hours and increases to hours and efficient use of staff resources.

Various criteria are used to allocate hours including the City's and Library's priority areas; geographic distribution; branch size and service potential; and busyness. Larger centrally located facilities with relative high usage are open for a longer band of hours than smaller facilities. The recommended number of open hours per week balance community needs and the efficiency of staff schedules. As previously stated, legacy hours at existing branches are maintained so that areas of the City will not lose hours to support the expansion of hours in other areas. Improving library hours in all neighbourhoods of the City is a long-term strategy. Short-term priorities reflect the pillars of the strategic plan - improving library services in at risk neighbourhoods, for newcomers and youth and improving geographic access across the City.

**Vision:**

These guidelines and criteria noted above have been applied to Toronto Public Library's branches to address the need for improved access to branches across the City and build on the legacy of public library service developed in local communities over the past century. A vision that includes seven days a week service year round in selected branches across the City, late hours to midnight five nights per week and extended Sunday hours, is proposed as a road map for future branch open hour development.

The application of this vision to the Library's existing branches is shown in the following table:

RESEARCH & REFERENCE 2 locations	Open 7 days a week all year Late hours with limited service 5 nights a week all year Sunday service all year					91 hrs/wk
DISTRICT 17 locations	Open 7 days a week all year Late hours with limited service 5 nights a week all year Sunday service all year					91 hrs/wk
NEIGHBOURHOOD 16 locations + Urban Affairs	Open 6 days a week all year, Mon-Sat 5 evenings a week		65.5 hrs/wk	Sunday service Sep-Jun at identified branches		
NEIGHBOURHOOD 28 locations	Open 6 days a week all year, Mon-Sat 4 evenings a week		62 hrs/wk	Sunday service Sep-Jun at identified branches		
NEIGHBOURHOOD 23 locations	Open 6 days a week all year, Mon-Sat 3 evenings a week	50.5 hrs/wk		Sunday service Sep-Jun at identified branches		
NEIGHBOURHOOD 10 locations	Open 5 days a week all year, Tues-Sat 2 evenings a week	40 hrs/wk				

Sample schedules are provided in the Toronto Public Library Branch Open Hours Vision (Attachment 1). A detailed table outlining the application and cost of the vision to individual branches across the City is presented in the Summary TPL Branch Open Hours Proposal (Attachment 2). Two locations, Swansea Memorial and Todmorden Room, retain their current hours. Branches in identified City and TPL priority neighbourhood areas are shown in the summary chart and map (Attachments 3 and 4). The impact of the proposed changes reduces the inequity in access across the City while improving access in all areas at the same time (Attachment 5). Two maps identify branches across the City in relation to the open hours vision (Attachments 6 and 7).

### **Implementation:**

The implementation of this vision could be phased in various ways over a number of years. Improving branch open hours in all neighbourhoods of the City is a long-term strategy. As noted above, short-term priorities should:

- reflect the key priorities and initiatives in the Strategic Plan, particularly improving library services in priority and at-risk neighbourhoods (including newcomers and youth);
- improve geographic distribution of open hours access across the City with priority for open hour expansion in suburban areas of the City where access (hours per capita) is not as great;
- implement Monday as the standard close day in neighbourhood branches open five days a week in accordance with Letter of Understanding 23 of the *Collective Agreement*;
- phase in new hours as opportunities arise, for example, through efficiencies in scheduling, or when branches re-open after closure for a capital project;

- respect legacy hours so that areas of the City do not lose hours to support expansion in other areas.

Possible phases could include:

- increasing hours at branches in City priority areas;
- increasing hours at TPL identified at-risk branches;
- Sunday service expansion;
- increasing hours at research and reference and district branches;
- increasing hours at neighbourhood branches;
- introducing late hours at identified branches.

Conclusion:

The proposed vision for branch open hours is intended to initiate a process of discussion, consultation and review that will result in a long-range plan for change. Over the coming months leading up to the preparation of the 2007 operating budget, further work and consultation, including meeting with the Union, will occur to further refine and develop this plan. At the same time, changes in hours related to capital projects, scheduling efficiencies, and the Monday standard close day will be introduced as opportunities arise.

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

- Attachment 1: Toronto Public Library Branch Open Hours Vision
- Attachment 2: Summary TPL Branch Open Hours Proposal
- Attachment 3: Priority Neighbourhood Areas and Library Branches
- Attachment 4: Priority Neighbourhood Areas: City of Toronto and Toronto Public Library
- Attachment 5: Regional Open Hours Comparison
- Attachment 6: Toronto Public Library Branch Locations, Proposed Hours
- Attachment 7: Toronto Public Library Branch Locations, Proposed Sunday Branches