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To: Toronto Public Library Board – December 13, 2004

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Improved Internet Accessibility**

Purpose:

To place before the Toronto Public Library Board the City Council's request to consider submitting a business plan to the Budget Advisory Committee which addresses the opportunity to provide improved Internet accessibility for the citizens of Toronto.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The financial implications of the Improved Internet Accessibility Business Plan would be reflected in the annual operating and capital budget requests.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board:

- (1) agree to City Council's request to consider submitting a business plan to the Budget Advisory Committee which addresses the opportunity to provide improved Internet accessibility for the citizens of Toronto, and;
- (2) direct Library staff to prepare such a business plan, for review by the Board at its January 2005 meeting, prior to submitting the Business Plan to the Budget Advisory Committee.

Background:

The request for a business plan, which addresses the opportunity to provide improved Internet Accessibility, originated with the Toronto e-City Committee, at its October 13, 2004 meeting. The e-City Committee recommended to the Administration Committee that "the Toronto Public Library Board be requested to submit a Business Plan to the Budget Advisory Committee which addresses the opportunity to provide improved internet accessibility for the citizens of Toronto". The Administration Committee, at its November 16, 2004 meeting, recommended that City Council "request the Toronto Public Library Board to consider submitting a Business Plan to the Budget Advisory Committee which addresses the opportunity to provide improved internet accessibility for the citizens of Toronto". City Council, at its November 30, December 1 and 2, 2004 meeting, approved the Administration Committee recommendation.

Comments:

Library staff have considered the opportunities for improved Internet accessibility, in light of current public Internet accessibility, the Library's Strategic Plan goals and work plan for 2005, the Library's capital building program and its Technology Asset Management Program. The implementation of the Library's strategic goals, capital building program and TAMP will further improve Internet accessibility. Approval of the Library Board's 2005 budget requests will support plans for improved Internet accessibility. A business plan for improved Internet accessibility would present the Board's various initiatives in a coordinated manner.

Current public Internet accessibility:

The Library currently provides public Internet access at all of its 99 branches. In 2004 there are a total of 1,345 public PCs with Internet access. Based on the number of PCs and branch open hours, the Library provides more than 4.1 million hours of public Internet access. The actual number of hours varies each year, depending upon branch closures for renovations. In 2003 the citizens of Toronto logged on for more than 4.4 million Internet sessions.

A comparison to other large public libraries in Canada and the United States shows that Toronto Public Library has one of the best ratios of PCs per capita. Such a comparison can be misleading, since it does not reflect availability based upon branch open hours, nor does it reflect availability in high needs communities (e.g. low-income, newcomers).

Strategic Plan goals and work plan:

Toronto Public Library's strategic plan contains four key priority areas that include Books and Culture, Low-Income Neighbourhoods, Newcomers and Youth. The 2005 work plans for the Low-Income Neighbourhoods and Newcomers priority areas identify a number of initiatives that will improve Internet accessibility:

- increased open hours in three district branches located in the Mayor's Community Safety Initiative neighbourhoods – Albion, Malvern and York Woods – where there is a high incidence of youth, low income and newcomers. This initiative has been submitted as a "New / Enhanced Service Change" in the 2005 operating budget.
- expansion of the provision of word processing software on public PCs. This public service is increasingly important to library users who use the Internet to access government services, prepare and submit job applications and resumes, communicate with friends and relatives. This initiative is funded through existing operating budget funding and will be implemented with the upgrade and replacement of public PCs in 2005.
- improved display of non-Roman fonts and ability to input non-Roman characters (e.g. Chinese, Hindi, Tamil, Russian) using a virtual keyboard. For many newcomers the ability to read and type in their language is important. The Library will be upgrading its public Internet access PCs to not just display, but also allow users to type in non-Roman characters.

Capital Building Program

The Library Board's capital building program for 2005 will provide for improved Internet accessibility. The plans for Bloor/Gladstone and S. Walter Stewart include additional public

Internet PCs and a Le@rning Centre with Internet training facilities. Consideration of improved Internet access will continue to be built into planning for renovations in future years. The Malvern District Branch, which will re-open in January 2005 will provide a Le@rning Centre and 19 additional Internet PCs. The St. James Town Branch opened in October 2004 with 14 public Internet PCs.

Technology Asset Management Program:

The Technology Asset Management Program (TAMP) provides for the planned upgrade and replacement of Library-owned hardware and software. It is supplemented by the City's Technology End-of-Lease Strategy (TELS) which funds replacement of some of the Library PCs. The planned and regular replacement and upgrade of public Internet PCs is important to improved public Internet access. The display and input of non-Roman characters is only possible with the replacement of the 5-year old PCs and the resulting upgrade to a current operating system. Other regular upgrades to Internet browsers, plug-ins and security improve the PC users ability to access the Internet and view web sites that take advantage of current technology to deliver services.

Conclusion:

The Library, through its strategic planning and budget process, is continually improving its public Internet access. A business plan would present the various initiatives in a coordinated manner and also propose ways that the initiatives already underway or planned could be used to leverage even greater Internet accessibility. As well, such a business plan would support the Library Board's budget requests during the budget approval process.

Library staff recommend that the Board direct staff to prepare a business plan, for consideration by the Board at its January 17, 2005 meeting.

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List of Attachments:

Not applicable.