

Capital Planning Process at Toronto Public Library

Date: March 23, 2026
To: Toronto Public Library Board
From: City Librarian

SUMMARY

Library service is considered a base community asset, along with community centres, fire and police services and other hard and soft services that make a community complete. TPL has an obligation to meet the base service requirements in every community by ensuring that its branch infrastructure is designed and built to meet the needs of the community it serves and provides the appropriate spaces, programs and services to achieve this goal.

The purpose of this report is to describe how capital planning is conducted at Toronto Public Library (TPL), with evidence-based decision-making that aligns to the Strategic Plan goals and balances investments in branch revitalizations, expansions, new branches and State of Good Repair (SOGR). This information provides context for future Board consideration of capital budget submissions, updates and changes to branch capital projects, and requests for approval of new branch locations.

The annual planning cycle for updating the 10-year capital plan is informed by TPL's Service Delivery Model and Facilities Prioritization Framework, as well as by emerging development opportunities. These could include anticipated growth and

density; opportunities for joint-use and co-located facilities; and philanthropic opportunities that can accelerate the enhancement of TPL spaces, and expand access to services.

Annually, TPL assesses and updates the 10-year capital plan and budget based on a range of contextual factors and opportunities. Situations may arise where opportunities for new or relocated branches are brought forward, projects are added or advanced to begin sooner or pushed to later years, in order to capitalize on opportunities in new developments which may enable TPL to more urgently address service needs.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This report has no financial impact beyond what has been approved in the current year's budgets.

The Director, Finance & Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

A robust and evidence-informed approach to branch planning supports the Strategic Plan priority of Shared Community Spaces with the goal of accelerating the enhancements of TPL's physical spaces to establish more welcoming, safe, inclusive and sustainable multi-use environments that build resilience and belonging in every neighbourhood. In addition, effective branch planning contributes to the Strategic Plan priority of Awareness and Availability with a goal of creating more library service availability across the city so that residents in every neighbourhood have equitable access to services that meet their changing needs.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

TPL's facilities capital projects focus on equity by seeking to understand and break down barriers to access and increase inclusion. The planning, design and location of library spaces is responsive to needs of the communities they serve and support users, particularly those from equity-deserving groups. The design and animation of TPL spaces allows for everyone to feel welcome and have equitable access and opportunity to use, and benefit from, library space. Specifically, adherence to

AODA standards and TPL's Indigenous Strategies to increase opportunities for Indigenous Placemaking in TPL buildings and spaces are key equity initiatives.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 23, 2026, the Library Board [adopted the 2026-2035 Capital Budget and Plan](#) of \$72.776 million gross (\$51.087 million debt) for 2026 and \$630.236 million gross (\$473.360 million debt) over 2026-2035, comprised of 19 capital projects.

At its meeting on October 30, 2023, the Library Board [approved the updated 2024 Service Delivery Model](#) which establishes TPL's service levels and outlines the types of services TPL offers (Service Pillars) and how those services are provided (Service Tiers).

At its meeting on May 24, 2022, the Library Board [approved the Facilities Master Plan 2021 report](#), which included an updated Facilities Prioritization Framework as an input to the capital budget planning process and recommended the framework be updated every three years.

At its meeting on January 21, 2019, the Library Board [approved the Toronto Public Library Facilities Master Plan \(FMP\) report](#) develop by Ernst & Young LLP (EY).

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Toronto Public Library provides customers with a seamless in-person and online experience to ensure that everyone who wants to can use the library in ways that are convenient and responsive to their needs. In addition to its digital and community-based services, TPL offers services through its soon-to-be 101 library branch-network, consisting of two Research and Reference libraries, 17 district branches and 82 neighbourhood branches.

Neighbourhood branches provide collections and services that meet the diverse needs of local communities across Toronto. District branches are larger and offer extensive informational and recreational collections and services that expand on and complement the services available in neighbourhood branches, meeting the needs of the larger community. These branches are spread out across the city to

provide geographic equity, and most provide service to Neighbourhood Improvement Area (NIA) and Emerging Neighbourhood communities.

These 101 public library branches range in size, age, design and structure. Some branches are freestanding, while others are co-located with community or recreation centres, residential towers, malls and schools. Many branches are located in buildings owned directly by TPL, some are in shared facilities owned by the City and some are in leased spaces such as shopping malls or plazas. In total the branch network contains approximately two million square feet of space and has a replacement value of approximately \$1 billion.

There are significant pressures on TPL's capital budget to maintain and enhance the branch network. The age of TPL buildings varies from 1 to 119 years, with the average being 55 years. Consequently, there is a growing SOGR backlog. Accessibility and energy efficiency requirements aligned with the City's net zero strategy also need to be addressed, and library facility standards continue to evolve, requiring capital investments in new services and technology. Toronto's population is growing, with a dramatic increase in residents in high-growth nodes across all areas of the city, particularly downtown, resulting in increased use of library branches. There are also a range of city-led development projects that include a library branch to address the anticipated growth and density associated with the new development.

TPL's new five-year Strategic Plan identifies Shared Community Spaces as a key priority, with an objective of accelerating the enhancements of TPL's physical spaces, to ensure that residents have access to up-to-date, multi-use library spaces that meet the Service Delivery Model standards and cater to diverse needs in every Toronto neighbourhood. This reflects the feedback heard from residents about the importance of libraries as a free and welcoming "third space" (outside of home and work) where residents can engage in meaningful activities. It's also important to note that library space was identified as a priority in the previous five-year Strategic Plan. Of TPL's 100 branches, 55 currently do not meet the minimum standard for branch size set out in TPL's Service Delivery Model (four District branches and 51 neighbourhood branches).

COMMENTS

TPL's capital planning process aims to provide equitable library services across the city, address evolving community needs and align with key City strategies and planning studies. This report outlines how capital planning is conducted at TPL, with evidence-based decision-making that aligns to the Strategic Plan goals and balances investments in branch revitalizations, expansions, and new branches.

Annually, TPL assesses and updates the 10-year capital plan and budget based on a range of contextual factors and opportunities. Situations may arise where opportunities for new or relocated branches are brought forward, projects are added or advanced to begin sooner or pushed to later years, in order to capitalize on opportunities in new developments which may enable TPL to more urgently address service needs.

The annual planning cycle for updating the 10-year capital plan is informed by TPL's Service Delivery Model and Facilities Prioritization Framework, the Strategic Plan, as well as by emerging development opportunities. These could include anticipated growth and density in a specific community; opportunities for joint-use and co-located facilities; and philanthropic opportunities that can accelerate the enhancement of TPL spaces, and expand access to services.

Service Delivery Model

TPL's Service Delivery Model is the framework the Library uses to envision the possibilities that result from an investment in library infrastructure and service delivery. It sets the service level for TPL which is both practical and aspirational, outlining a future-oriented, systematic approach to branch and service planning. As such, it is used in capital planning to identify, articulate and prioritize branch capital needs.

The Service Delivery Model establishes service guidelines for each of the branch network tiers. Within these guidelines are branch size and service standards, informed by population size and catchment radius.

For example, neighbourhood branches aim to serve a minimum of 25,000 people within a 1.6km radius, and should be between 10,000 to 20,000 square feet in size. District-level branches aim to serve a minimum catchment area of 100,000 people

within a 2.5km radius. They are larger than neighbourhood branches with a minimum of 25,000 sq ft in size, and include a range of specialized spaces for a variety of uses and age groups, including children, youth and adults, as well as larger sized programming/community rental spaces.

Facilities Prioritization Framework

Given the size and scale of TPL's capital portfolio and the significant pressures on TPL's available capital budget, in 2019 TPL engaged facility planning experts to assist staff in developing an evidence-based planning framework that could be employed on an on-going basis to guide decision-making about capital investment priorities over time, including SOGR. Based on the original Facilities Master Plan report, a Facilities Prioritization Framework was created that assesses ten different inputs/criteria and provides a score for each branch that informs the annual capital planning process. The Facilities Prioritization Framework was last updated in May 2022, and an updated framework with refreshed data will be shared with the Board in Q2 2026.

The Facilities Prioritization Framework is designed to assist library staff to make the best decisions in the face of mounting and competing pressures for investment in branch infrastructure, and allows for a more evidence-based decision-making process for capital investments.

The Facilities Prioritization Framework was developed to consider operational factors, investment requirements, SOGR and market alignment and ensures a balance between maintenance capital and growth capital by applying a clear set of metrics to rank capital needs. Flexibility was also considered in developing the Framework to ensure that decisions can be made to adapt to unique opportunities that present themselves in this high-growth environment.

The Facilities Prioritization Framework is informed by:

- the city's population and community growth studies;
- building footprint size and alignment with Service Delivery Model standards;
- property condition assessments;
- accessibility requirements;
- the busyness of a branch;
- effectiveness of the physical space that currently serves its users;

- availability of specialized spaces that provide opportunities for learning, collaboration and shared experiential opportunities;
- geographic equity and neighbourhood socio-economic characteristics;
- walking and transit location access; and
- energy efficiency and climate resilience, which will be added in the updated Framework in 2026.

Emerging Development Opportunities

TPL's approach to capital planning prioritizes investment in the development, maintenance and repair of existing Library facilities infrastructure, while considering opportunities for expansion and relocation using an evidence-based approach to assess opportunities that may arise. The following are some examples of how this kind of capital development is prioritized.

1. Branch expansion or relocation to meet service guidelines

As noted previously, many TPL branches do not meet the minimum standard for branch size set out in the Service Delivery Model. The Wychwood branch was an example of an under-sized branch not appropriately serving its community before its 2022 renovation – a project which expanded the branch from 6,381 square feet to 17,000 square feet, offering dedicated children's areas, senior sections, and quiet study spaces.

Where existing branches are not able to achieve the minimum standards through renovation or expansion of the existing footprint, an alternative site for relocation may be required. The previous Bayview branch, which was below the 10,000 square foot standard for neighbourhood branches, was relocated and expanded to the new site of the Ethennonnhawahstihnen' Branch, which opened in 2023. The new branch is 13,418 square feet, almost double the size of the branch that had been located in Bayview Village Mall, and is part of a joint-use facility with the City of Toronto which includes a community and aquatic centre and a daycare.

2. Service expansion driven by population growth

In other cases, population projection data may identify branches where population growth would drive capital investment – for example, expanded size, increased hours of service, or in some cases, net new branch development.

The 2019 Facilities Master Plan report recommended that, given the significant investment requirements within TPL’s current portfolio, net new branches should be considered only in cases where the population level of a current catchment area is projected to increase to a size that is double the prescribed service population. It also notes that, even in these circumstances, an expansion of an existing location may be preferred to maximize investments across the portfolio. The Downsview lands example below provides a good illustration of significant new growth and density requiring the addition of a net new branch.

3. City partnerships that create development opportunities

Also significant to the capital planning process are new and emerging development and relocation opportunities, very often identified by the City of Toronto. Through on-going collaboration with CreateTO, City of Toronto Corporate Real Estate Management, and local Councillors, TPL is able to connect to opportunities to relocate and/or develop new branches to serve community needs (always aligned with the Service Delivery Model).

For example, as part of the redevelopment of the former Downsview Airport lands, TPL has been approached by the City, through the Update Downsview Study and development of the Downsview Secondary Plan, regarding development of a new library branch to serve the anticipated additional 115,000 residents in this new community.

Opportunities can also arise for branches in shared-use facilities, for example with Parks and Recreation, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and other City divisions. TPL and partners work closely together to develop and align long-term strategies, plans and budgets for these sites.

For example, the Parkdale Hub project, located at the intersection of Queen Street West and Cowan Avenue, will include an expanded and revitalized Parkdale branch, along with other City facilities, like a Community Recreation Centre,

affordable housing and inclusive community space. By relocating the library branch to the new facility, the City will repurpose the current library site to deliver more affordable housing. The library relocation will address both SOGR backlog issues with the current branch, and will also allow TPL to bring the branch up to the service levels as stipulated in the Service Delivery Model.

Another City partnership example is the new Etobicoke Civic Centre branch (ECC), TPL's 101st branch, which will be located at 3755 Bloor Street West within the new Etobicoke Civic Centre, a mixed-use building with a community and civic centre, municipal offices and a range of community services. The new district branch will respond to the significant projected population growth in this area and ensure that Service Delivery Model standards are met.

TPL actively receives, assesses and meets to discuss potential new opportunities as they emerge, and participates in the development of Community Services & Facilities studies led by City Planning that assess the need for services in neighbourhoods across the city. Additionally, TPL receives regular requests from councillors and developers to add new library branches. These opportunities are assessed against the Service Delivery Model standards and the Facilities Prioritization Framework criteria to determine whether a new branch is justified. In the vast majority of cases, TPL's existing network of branches addresses the perceived need.

4. Accelerate the enhancement of TPL spaces, and expand access to services through philanthropic opportunities.

Philanthropic donations which align with branch needs identified through the Facilities Prioritization Framework often provide opportunities to accelerate capital projects and enhance branches to meet TPL Service Delivery Model standards.

For example, the St. Lawrence branch has been identified as in need of replacement for many years. Undersized at 4,833 square feet, the existing building has significant maintenance issues, resulting in several branch closures each year due to flooding from the residential building above. Based on population projection data, this area of the city will see a significant growth in population over the next ten to 15 years which will increase demand for library services. This is in addition to previous growth that was identified when this project was added to the capital plan back in 2008.

The new district branch planned at 339 Queen St East will allow TPL to fully meet the Service Delivery Model service guidelines and the needs of the growing community. Philanthropic donations being secured by the TPL Foundation will allow the Library to expand much-needed social services to this community, and enhance aspects of the branch renovations.

CONCLUSION

Library service is considered a base community asset, along with community centres, fire and police services and other hard and soft services that make a community complete. As the city continues to grow, and as set out in TPL's Service Delivery Model, TPL has an obligation to meet the base service requirements in every community by ensuring that its branch infrastructure is designed and built to meet the needs of the community it serves and provides the appropriate spaces, programs and services to achieve this goal.

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SIGNATURE

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