



2023 LETTER FROM THE BOARD

On behalf of the 2019-2022 Library Board we would like to extend a warm welcome to the newly appointed Board members. As part of our Strategic Planning process, the Library Board annually drafts a letter to provide updated context for staff and Board members to consider in the coming year. During transition years like 2023, where a new Board will be appointed, we use this document as a legacy document for the future Library Board's consideration.

HPL was founded in 1889 and has a long history of being an innovative public library leader actively engaged with the Ontario and Canadian library communities. We encourage the new Board to continue this tradition and to ensure that HPL's programs and services continue to adapt to changing needs while remaining true to our core values as a public library. As you face new challenges and opportunities during your tenure, we encourage you to work with staff to ensure the organization remains relevant and responsive. We also encourage you to continue to embrace meaningful partnerships with other aligned organizations and to work closely with your municipal partners.

Over the last 15 years, the Library Board has been very successful at getting major capital projects funded to update our locations to modern accessibility standards. We encourage the Library Board to continue to work closely with City Council to ensure capital and operating budgets are adequate to support the growth of our impact, while also being respectful of the many other financial challenges facing Council. We encourage the new Library Board to actively work with library associations like the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC), the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) to seek adequate funding from higher levels of government. We also encourage participation in efforts to advocate for policy and legislative changes around Copyright and adequate access to eBooks.

Much of this Library Board's term has been dominated by the challenges presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic that started in Q1 2020. HPL was prepared with a pandemic emergency plan already in place and was able to articulate a clear vision that focused on addressing the public health crisis as top priority while providing as much library service as could be safely provided. Library staff stepped up to deliver service while under a lot of restrictions and supported key public health initiatives including supporting testing and vaccinations. In response to a request from the City and Public Health, HPL provided free printing and lamination of vaccine verification for residents. The service started in October 2021 and by the time the service was no longer needed in 2022, over 78,000 vaccine verifications had been issued. HPL's effective pandemic response has been well received by the community.

Working throughout the pandemic has been stressful for many, especially when interacting with frustrated people angry about public health restrictions like wearing a mask. Like many other organizations, since 2020, HPL has experienced a larger than normal number of staff retirements and resignations. In addition, the process of hiring and onboarding new staff was a challenge, especially when public health restrictions were in place.

In 2022, as public health restrictions were being phased out, HPL began the process of reintroducing services disrupted by the pandemic. This included expanded and more consistent library service hours around the system and gradually restarting in-person events. We ended 2022 with the recruitment of vacant positions making progress. In 2023 we encouraged the leadership team to remain focused on recruitment and on staff wellness, getting new staff in place and ensuring effective procedures and training are being implemented. We encourage staff to explore new partnerships as you take a gradual approach to ramping up activities like library programs and events. We anticipate the last half of 2023 to see a return to more normal levels of activity.

We encourage the Board to take time to understand the new Strategic Plan and to embrace the challenges and opportunities presented in it. In 2022 the Library Board updated our longer-term planning assumptions. That document concluded that the context of the societal challenges we are facing seem more urgent now than at any time in recent memory. Under your stewardship, we hope HPL will work with others allied organized to work for a more inclusive and sustainable prosperity. We encourage you to embrace environmentally sustainable solutions to support operations and that you will work with others to advance efforts to educate and empower Hamiltonian's to play an active role in preserving our environment.

Polarization undermines constructive dialogue, and we should embrace opportunities for meaningful conversations that bring us to deeper mutual understandings. Public libraries have a unique ability to develop relationships with a wide spectrum of people and our natural place is one of quiet leadership, helping people feel a part of their community and being comfortable with people that are different. We encourage you to continue to build on HPL's work to advance reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours and to integrate inclusion into all of HPL's work. Embrace the opportunity of intentionally reaching out to engage diverse voices and perspectives when making decisions. As you move forward, we encourage you be open about innovation and creative change that respond to new challenges while you also remain mindful of existing core services that many in the community rely on.

Hamilton Public Library Board
January 2023