

Date: September 8, 2021
From: Paul Takala, CEO/Chief Librarian
To: Library Board
Subject: HPL COVID-19 Response Update Report

CITY OF HAMILTON MANDATORY VACCINE VERIFICATION POLICY

On August 26, Hamilton Council had a special council meeting where they adopted a [Mandatory Vaccine Verification Policy](#)ⁱ for City staff. With the absence of provincial direction the City policy would ensure all City employees provide proof of receiving full vaccination to COVID-19, if not they will need to attend a mandatory vaccination education training session and if they still do not get vaccinated they will need to work on an individual basis with Human Resources to ensure valid exemptions for valid human rights or medical reasons. Finally, unvaccinated staff will need to get tested for COVID-19 on a regular basis that is still to be determined. The City Manager has said this is the first step, they are going to be next working on contract workers and looking at other reasonable measures that can be put in place to expand vaccination uptake and protect public health.

UPDATE ON STAFF CAPACITY & SECONDMENTS

We continue to follow our strategy of building out of staff capacity to expand library services in a responsible way by doing the following:

- **Secondments** – The first large group of HPL staff returned in July and we are pleased to report that most of the remaining staff returned at the end of the summer. We are getting very positive reports from HPL staff that worked at the vaccination sites but their early return will enable a further expansion of Library service hours over the next couple months.
- **Filling Vacancies** – HPL currently has over at least 30 full-time and 30 part-time vacancies. There are also other temporary leaves. During the pandemic the need to physically distance has made the job of onboarding staff more challenging. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has started the process of filling some vacancies. We anticipate this will be a gradual process but as restrictions are lifted, we expect we will be able to accelerate the process.
- **Extra Hours for Part-time Staff** – To help the process of building out service, part-time staff were offered to work extra hours for the months of July, August and September. This was voluntary but helped staff make some extra income while also increasing our capacity. We have extended this offer to the end of December to give us time to work through posting and hiring for new positions.

KEY FACTORS IMPACTING THE RATE OF SERVICE HOURS RESTORATION

The rate at which service hours are restored will be informed by:

- **Staff Capacity** – available staff to support in branch services.
- **Restrictions we are Under at the Time** – Restrictions impact how many people we can serve in our spaces at a time, they also create extra work for staff that restricts our ability to deliver service (i.e. extra cleaning, checking-in members).
- **Demand for Service at the Time** – We will need to monitor changes in demand for service and when that service should be offered. For example, we are currently not experiencing a demand for service in the evenings or Sundays.

BEING MINDFUL OF PANDEMIC RELATED STRESS ON STAFF

The last 18 months have been challenging for most people. We know that stress related to the pandemic has increased challenges to people's sense of wellbeing and their overall mental health. Our staff are not immune to this. As we build out our services, we need to ensure that we support staff's wellness. Many of our staff have been on the frontlines throughout most of the pandemic. In addition to ensuring effective supports are in place, ensuring we create a stable work environment that does not overwhelm staff with constant changes will be important to restoring a sense of normalcy. As part of the library's research partnership with McMaster University an emotional labour survey has been distributed to staff and staff have access to Canadian Mental Health Association emotional resiliency counselling in addition to City of Hamilton Employee Wellness resources.

CURRENT PUBLIC SAFETY MEASURES

We are currently paused at Step 3 of the Ontario Reopening plan. This table summarizes the current measures we have in place.

MEASURES	CURRENT STATE
MASK & FACE COVERINGS	HPL continues to adhere to the mask mandate for both staff and members. Library Members are provided disposable medical masks upon entry (if not wearing a face covering). Face shields or eye protection are also required when staff cannot maintain physical distancing with exempt Members not wearing a face covering.
CAPACITY OF OUR SPACES & PHYSICAL DISTANCING	We continue to apply stricter restrictions on capacity of people in our spaces than the regulations permit. This enables us to both support physical distancing in our spaces and reduces the likelihood of exposure to COVID-19 through airborne transmission. In the summer we began the process of gradually increasing the capacity numbers based on the local state of the pandemic. We are also monitoring visits to ensure our capacity limits are not creating unnecessary barriers to service. Exceeding capacity has generally not been an issue during the pandemic, however, we will continue to monitor it.
HVAC ENHANCEMENTS & IMPROVED AIRFLOW	City of Hamilton Facilities Division installed new high-grade (MERV 13) filters and increased flow in all HPL HVAC systems. During the pandemic, locations are temporarily closed if a HVAC system is not functional.
ENHANCED CLEANING AND DISINFECTING	Although current evidence points to much lower risk of surface spread of COVID-19 than was originally thought, we continue to follow enhanced cleaning of high touch surface areas to adhere to City of Hamilton standards. Hand sanitizer is available throughout the system for Members and staff.
REMOTE WORK	HPL continues to support remote work as appropriate. Supporting library operations requires many staff to be present in our spaces, so working from home is not an option for many.
PROGRAMS	Limited online and partner led. No in-person group events.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ABOUT SAFETY PROTOCOLS & SERVICES

- **Alternate for Exempt Individuals** – Face coverings are required in the Library. Exempt individuals are required to wear a face shield as an alternative. All locations have face shields to loan or give to individuals who require them. Members are provided a face shield to keep and reuse when the situation warrants. If a vision issue is disclosed, staff help the person navigate the branch verbally and guide the Member, while maintaining physical distancing. HPL offers bookable appointments between 9-10 am at four locations for members who can not wear a mask or a shield.
- **Additional Accommodations** – HPL works with partners serving vulnerable individuals and Library Members in need of supports. In 2021, HPL launched a pilot project to offer a limited number of individuals alternative accommodation by providing a mobile-connected device for a 21-day loan period.

GOAL OF THE NEXT PHASES OF THE PANDEMIC

In June 2021, HPL began the process of a gradual buildout to our new full-service portfolio over the next 12-18 months. Staff will work with the Library Board to develop a clear and positive vision for HPL that will enable us to unify Staff, residents and key stakeholders around our unique role in helping Hamiltonians thrive and stay connected. The **1st priority will be to ensure that systemwide HPL has consistent and robust service hours** – *we should be open when people need us to be and we need to ensure service hours are simple and can be clearly communicated to residents.* As we focus on expanding service hours through the rest of 2021, we will continue to plan for other services and programs that will be coming in 2022 and beyond.

PROPOSED SERVICE HOURS ROLLOUT

Below are the next steps we are proposing in expanding service hours across the system. Our plan is to move to the hours indicated below in two (2) stages, first on September 20 and then on October 4. At that point we will review capacity and how operations are going and continue to build in additional hours as we are able to. We will continue to update the Library Board and work with you on establishing our new full core service hours.

Additional notes about service:

- **Parkdale** – The new branch opened on July 13.
- **Greenville** – The new branch is scheduled to open on September 9.
- **Rural Extended Access (EA)** – With a mask mandate still in place, we are planning to temporarily use Security Guards when staff are not present at EA locations. Proposing to start in October 2021.
- **Sunday Service** – Proposing return to Sunday service in January 2022. To be confirmed in November/December.
- **Evening Study Halls** – Our Study Halls program keeps select locations open from 9pm – midnight for quiet study Monday to Thursday. Proposing to restart and expand the program in early 2022. If the pandemic restrictions get reduced, we could pilot one location later this year to help assess demand.

Location	September 20	October 4 Changes	Hours of Operation Starting October 4
Large Locations			
AN, CE, DU, FD, RH, TE, TP, WA	Tues - Thurs 9 - 7, Fri 9 - 6, Sat 9 - 5	add Mon 9-7	Mon - Thurs 9 - 7, Fri 9 - 6, Sat 9 - 5
Priority Locations			
BA, CN, PA	Tues - Thurs 9 - 7, Fri 9 - 6, Sat 9 - 5	add Mon 9-7	Mon -Thurs 9 - 7, Fri 9 - 6, Sat 9 - 5
Medium Locations			
BI, KE, SA, SH, WE	Accommodate maskless 9-10am	none	Mon -Thurs 10 - 7, Fri 10 - 6, Sat 10 - 5
Small Locations			
LO, ST, VP	Tues – Fri 10 – 6, Sat 10 - 5	none	Tues – Fri 10 – 6, Sat 10 - 5
Rural and Extended Access (EA) Locations			
CA, MH	Tues – Fri 1 – 6, Sat 1 - 5	EA to be in place after construction projects	Tues – Fri 1 – 6, Sat 1 - 5
FR, GR, LY	Tues – Fri 1 – 6, Sat 1 - 5	Oct EA start	Mon - Thurs 9 - 7, Fri 9 - 6, Sat 9 – 5 * Staffed 4/5 hours daily, EA with Security staff remaining hours

INTENTIONAL RESTART TO IN-PERSON PROGRAMS IN 2022

As staff work through the implementation of the new **Working with Us Policy** (*Policy on Programs, Partnership and Space Usage*)ⁱⁱ we are proposing an intentional and gradual restart of in-person events and programs in 2022. We will be reporting back to the Library Board later in 2021 about our plans, but here are our initial thoughts about how that should work:

- We will be more focused on outcome-based programs and ensuring we better understand the impacts we are working towards
- We will be looking at our program schedule through an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Framework and applying Universal Design Principles, so we are not creating barriers to participation. One of our most important strengths is our ability to work with people of different ages, cultural and economic backgrounds – our application of an EDI Framework needs to be about enhancing mutual understanding, respect and empathy. We are in a unique position to be able to do this in such a broad and impactful way with community partners and the *Working with Us Policy*

ⁱ <https://pub-hamilton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=281846>

ⁱⁱ <https://hpl.novusagenda.com/agendapublic/CoverSheet.aspx?ItemID=1067&MeetingID=95>