



Date: February 21, 2024
To: Chair and Members of the Library Board
From: Paul Takala, CEO/Chief Librarian
Subject: **Letter from the Board - 2024 Direction**

Annually, the Library Board adopts a letter to direct Staff for the coming year. With Strategic Plans normally approved every four years, this letter provides an opportunity to update the context and reflect on the year ahead. The current [Strategic Plan](#)ⁱ was approved by the Board in May 2023. This letter updates and supplements the [Multi-Year Business Plan](#)ⁱⁱ approved by the Board in December and submitted to the City.

The Year-End Metrics Report shows that 2023 was the first year since the pandemic started in early 2020, when we were able to provide more normal levels of library service. In 2023, we reached a level of active Members not seen in over a decade. Our current baseline hours of service system-wide, without closed weekdays and a more consistent schedule, is a major achievement for access. Maintaining a strong and consistent foundation of service hours is a critical element of strategy to increase our impact, especially with individuals who do not come from families who are already library users.

In 2023, we were able to expand our program schedule significantly. As our Staff capacity continues to improve, animating our spaces with more programs and events should be a major staff focus of 2024. We encourage Staff to use the new Strategic Plan to focus efforts and to work with the Library Board to strive to realize our mission - *Freedom to Belong and Discover*. The new Strategic Plan emphasizes advancing Indigenous Reconciliation, sustainability and working with others to advance inclusion.

One of the major challenges of public library work during the pandemic was that while we were able to serve individuals, restrictions on group activities prevented a lot of the positive in-person group experiences that happen at storytimes, author readings, concerts and other programs. It has been encouraging and positive to see community belonging and new connections happening in our spaces in large numbers once again. Unfortunately, the serious challenges many in our community face have also been felt. The City has declared crises around homelessness, mental health and opioid addictions, and we know some areas of the City experience those challenges to greater degrees. In winter months, especially in freezing weather, Central Library has seen a scale of challenges impacting our work, especially with our ability to attract families with young children. Thankfully, that is still happening, but usage patterns are pointing to changes.

An important priority for 2024 focuses on a full review of safety and security-related strategies at the Library. That review should include a review of programs and services appropriate to offer in our spaces, as well as steps to prevent or reduce the frequency

and severity of security incidents. The [Public Safety and Security Toolkit](#)ⁱⁱⁱ developed by the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) will be a valuable resource to ensure the full range of factors that impact safety. This process should include dialogue with different stakeholders with a focus on making sustainable positive changes.

Over the past 15 years, the Library Board has been very successful at getting major capital projects funded to update all our locations to modern accessibility standards. We encourage Staff to continue to advance the Mount Hope project - the last project left to complete on the previous [Facilities Master Plan](#)^{iv}. We look forward to Staff commencing work on a new Facilities Master Plan this year that will take us through the next decade and beyond. That Plan should help ensure HPL can continue to grow our services as the City grows and places a renewed emphasis on sustainability.

The Library Board looks forward to continuing 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 will continue to actively work with Library associations such as 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 will continue to participate in efforts to advocate for policy and legislative changes around copyright and adequate access to eBooks.

Public Libraries have a unique ability to develop relationships with a broad 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 who are different. As we face a lot of unknowns in the years ahead, we should embrace the challenge of working with others to contribute to civic renewal and strengthen social cohesion. Polarization undermines constructive dialogue, and we should embrace opportunities for meaningful conversations that bring us to deeper mutual understanding.

ⁱ https://www.hpl.ca/sites/default/files/23-05-StrategicPlan_Approved.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ <https://granicus-azmop-peak.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/9267/MultiBusinessPlanReport2024-2ndReview.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ [Home - CULC/CBUC Library Safety & Security Toolkit](#)

^{iv} <https://www.hpl.ca/sites/default/files/19-01-FMP.pdf>