



**Date:** March 16, 2022  
**To:** Chair and Members of the Board  
**From:** Paul Takala, Chief Librarian/CEO  
**Subject:** **Meeting Community & Member Needs - 2022:  
Thoughts on the Next Decade**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth in a series of reports that provide HPL with an opportunity to step back and contemplate the broader context we will work in for the coming years. The assumptions are intended to provide context for the challenges and opportunities we will face as a public library over the next decade. The fifth version of the report updates *Meeting User Needs IV* from 2017.

For the past two years, the world has faced a once-in-a-century global pandemic. HPL has adapted well but it has been a trying time. We update this report at a time when, for the first time in two years, it is within reason to anticipate we will soon transition out of the pandemic phase of COVID-19.

The previous versions of these reports were completed in 2010 and 2017. In 2010 we faced considerable uncertainty about the future of the library due to the early stages of an eBook explosion and a challenging funding environment. The tone in 2017 was more positive as many of the challenges posed in 2010 were successfully navigated.

This report reveals a different kind of shift. The assumptions about what we as a public library need to do have not changed much. However, the context of the societal challenges we are facing seem more urgent. Scientific consensus and recent events point to climate change as an urgent threat that needs collective action on a massive scale. The horrors of Canada's residential school system are a stain on our country and were able to happen because many Canadians remained ignorant of the systemic racism underlying Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. The voices of racism, hatred of people with different beliefs, orientations and identities seem louder today and more widespread. In Hamilton, like elsewhere in Canada, the toll of increasing income inequality, mental health problems and drug addiction are more acutely felt today than at any time in recent memory.

Vartan Gregorian, President of The New York Public Library 1981-89, is among the most respected library leaders in recent decades. He helped restore NYPL from a deep fiscal and morale crisis.

Gregorian called public libraries *Acts of Civic Renewal*. Although much about what we may face in the coming decade may not be clear, the need to work with others to contribute to *Civic Renewal* is no doubt urgent and should be woven into all our work.

**ASSUMPTION #1: WITH MORE DISRUPTIVE CHANGES AHEAD, LIBRARIES WILL NEED TO CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON ENHANCING OUR ABILITY TO ADAPT. THE HEALTH OF OUR ORGANIZATION WILL BE DEPENDENT UPON US REMAINING RELEVANT AND VITAL TO THE LIVES OF RESIDENTS AND TO THE COMMUNITIES WE WORK WITH.**

More rapid change is coming. The underlying question we need to ask is: How can we as a Library be a constructive force that helps individuals and the community adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world? HPL's long-term health is dependent on both the success of the City of Hamilton and our ability to contribute to that success.

The challenge of climate change is no longer a future threat; its impacts are already visible. HPL must show leadership in doing our part to decrease the carbon footprint of our operations. We should also be part of a broader effort to help residents understand their role in creating a more sustainable path. As we transition from fossil fuels, we have an opportunity to use our experience to educate youth and others about environmental issues. For example, we should commit to transitioning our bookmobiles and delivery vans to electric as soon as we reasonably can and use those to promote sustainable solutions.

The population of Hamilton is expected to see strong growth in the coming years. This is an opportunity to effectively engage a growing senior's population. Ensuring our facilities are located where people live require ongoing focus and long-term planning. The LRT has the potential to see increased population growth in the lower City that might create new opportunities to locate libraries near densely populated areas.

In the past decade we have seen significant changes in technology that have impacted how we deliver content and services. The global COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated technology change and drawn attention to the fact many in our community do not have adequate access to information and communication technologies (ICT). HPL must focus on ensuring Hamilton is a place of digital inclusion and access. Helping residents gain the knowledge and skills to utilize existing and emerging technologies should be an ongoing focus. Well-designed partnerships will be important to ensure we are able to embrace this challenge.

Resident's expectations on how our services should be provided and what those services should be are shaped by their experiences outside the Library. We need to ensure our services are provided in ways that meet their needs and expectations, otherwise we risk losing their engagement. Investing in staff development is key. We need to hire new staff and support existing staff to become lifelong learners who embrace supporting Members' changing needs. As Member demands change, our facilities must also change along with them, offering flexible spaces, usage, layouts and service hours. To be successful we need to embrace ongoing evaluation and continual adjustments to our work. We need to continue to develop and expand our research partnerships. With practical but independent expert guidance and evaluation we can improve our impact and tell our stories. Our primary emphasis must be on making persistent incremental changes. However, when circumstances dictate, such as a pandemic, we must be ready to embrace big challenges and opportunities.

Looking forward, we should also expect other changes in technology, society and the environment that will create future disruptions (some positive, some negative). Some we will see coming and others we won't. Rather than try to predict all the major trends, we should focus on ensuring the public library is an adaptive and resilient organization. The single best way to prepare, is to practice and enhance our ability to be responsive and adaptive.

ASSUMPTION #2: PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE HEALTH, EDUCATION, PROSPERITY AND **SOCIAL COHESION** OF THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE. TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, WE WILL NEED TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS TO COORDINATE EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE CHANGE THAT ADDRESSES STRUCTURAL OBSTACLES THAT PREVENT PEOPLE FROM REALIZING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* and the discovery of multiple unmarked graves of children at residential schools shed light on the multi-generational systemic racism Indigenous people in Canada face. Advancing the *Calls to Action* in collaboration with our Indigenous friends and allies must be a major focus of the next decade and beyond. Libraries have a special role in educating people about the truth of what happened and helping Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians learn about the rich cultures and histories of the people who lived in this area for thousands of years. As libraries continue our work welcoming new Canadians, we also need to expand our efforts with Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) to end racism and discrimination. Public libraries work with people of all ages, backgrounds, orientations and economic circumstances and have a unique opportunity to help people get to know each other and be a force to advance understanding and empathy. Libraries need to show leadership and be thoughtful in our approaches to ensure we bring the whole community forward.

Public libraries play a supporting role in advancing the education, culture and health of the communities we serve. The pandemic has disrupted the education of many young people. Those with the least resources are often impacted most. Supporting student success and residents' lifelong learning is necessary for our community's long-term economic success. We need to recognize we can contribute more to good outcomes when we do not work in isolation. Moving forward we will need to continue to advance our maturity at partnering in ways that enable us to support our mission more sustainably while advancing key community initiatives. We have seen that governments are increasingly funding initiatives that can demonstrate meaningful collaboration. Collaborations are necessary when trying to address complex issues and they can play an important role in reducing the duplication of effort between agencies. As we evolve our programs and service offerings to meet new needs, we must work with governments, educational institutions and other organizations that align with our mission. Building on our successful Researcher in Residence partnership with McMaster, we should look to create additional positions to help support library operations and ensure we have the expertise, and ongoing engagement and alignment, with key partners to address critical priorities. Developing new partnerships to renew and continue our Community Resource Worker program is a high priority, as is having an Elder-in-Residence to expand our work with the Urban Indigenous Strategy.

If political discourse continues to become more polarized in the next decade, we should anticipate an increase in challenges to intellectual freedom. Libraries will need to defend against efforts to limit access to diverse points of view. Increasing civic engagement and working with others to ensure meaningful debate and discussion is important to protect democratic norms. We should engage as many people as possible in a shared, respectful dialogue and provide cultural experiences that advance mutual understanding and empathy. Making equity and inclusion a reality requires HPL to ensure we design services and programs in ways that foster this. We need to use proven approaches, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), to ensure we are thinking and talking in ways that invite people with other perspectives, instead of driving them away with divisive language and approaches.

**ASSUMPTION #3: THERE WILL BE SIGNIFICANT COMPETITION FOR FUNDING. OPERATING BUDGETS WILL CONTINUE TO BE CONSTRAINED AND ACCESSING SUFFICIENT CAPITAL FUNDING TO MAINTAIN ALL OUR FACILITIES WILL BE AN ONGOING CHALLENGE.**

Perception and support is positive for public libraries in Canada and specifically in Hamilton. . While our work has helped us nurture strong support from City Council, we should not ignore the significant budget pressures that City Council will face in the coming decade. The provincial and federal governments also face budget pressures but municipal governments which are the primary funder for public libraries in most of Canada are the most challenged in their ability to raise funds. To continue to be successful at attracting funding we will need to be effective on several fronts. Demonstrating transparency and excellence in financial management is necessary but insufficient. We need to clearly demonstrate how public libraries advance government priorities. Although long-term growth may create some opportunities for increases in core funding and staffing, we cannot assume this is easily achieved. First, we must demonstrate a commitment to meeting emerging needs by internally adjusting our resources and utilizing innovation to shift to work of higher value. Where possible, we need to complement our core municipal funding with other sources of revenue. We need to work with key associations to find greater long-term funding from higher levels of government.

Current building code standards and the high cost of construction for public buildings mean most projects will require significant resources. To help defray these costs, we will continue to see more emphasis on developing multi-use facilities. Although HPL has made significant progress toward a more sustainable facility footprint, maintaining all locations to the proper standard will be a challenge. We will need to leverage other investments to attract limited capital dollars. Future capital maintenance costs of existing facilities must be carefully considered before pursuing new library locations. As well, investing in regular repairs and low-cost renovations/updates that maintain and enhance existing facilities must be an important part of our strategy.

**ASSUMPTION #4: THE TRENDS TOWARD THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL CONTENT AND GROWING COMPETITION FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO IT WILL CONTINUE. THE CIRCULATION OF PHYSICAL BOOKS WILL REMAIN A CORE SERVICE AND UNIQUE LOCAL CONTENT HELD AND MADE ACCESSIBLE BY HPL WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT.**

Looking at the shift from physical to digital formats, we should anticipate the physical book will be a more enduring popular format than DVDs and other physical media that provide access to music or videos. Looking forward we must carefully and continually monitor trends to ensure we are purchasing materials in the formats people want. We also must ensure we understand the local picture and anticipate trends specific to other parts of the City.

The growth of digital access in recent years has been strong. During the pandemic, when physical access to our physical spaces was limited, we saw a strong and rapid uptake in usage of HPL's digital collection. Providing content in digital form is important for libraries, as some people embrace the shift to digital. Despite this success, there are several serious challenges to digital access for public libraries. The cost and terms under which publishers make eBooks available to public libraries are unfavourable and limit our ability to provide access. Another challenge is the lack of control public libraries have of the digital platforms our content providers use. Libraries, including HPL, have made some progress at making digital content accessible through the Library catalogue, however, the convenience and experience of using the platforms directly make them a preferred option for many. HPL must continue to engage nationally on this issue with other libraries — to advocate for better terms and work at improving our ability to control how that content is presented. As we advocate for

those changes, we also need to embrace alternative solutions, such as Controlled Digital Lending (CDL), which enables us to preserve our collection and expand access.

Services such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, iTunes and Audible demonstrate that the private sector can successfully provide consumer access to large libraries of digital content at low cost. We need to monitor usage patterns and market developments to ensure the public library provides free access to a broad range of content for a large and diverse group of residents. One likely outcome of this development is some residents — especially those with financial resources — may not need the public library for many of their digital content needs. In this case other library services may become important for those individuals, such as: our spaces, technology access, storytimes, learning programs and cultural events. In this environment we must assess the amount of space our collections take-up and ensure we configure our spaces in a balanced way.

In this changing content landscape, the importance of local content should not be underestimated. The role Local History & Archives plays in preserving history and telling stories resonates strongly with residents. Our relevance is enhanced by expanding access to this material through digitization and supporting the creation of new digital content. As we foster the ability for people to move from content consumers to content creators, we nurture the skills needed to succeed in the workplace, we help people find their own unique voice and build a stronger more inclusive community. Our work should align and complement the City Museum's strategy and engage other cultural organizations in Hamilton.

**ASSUMPTION #5: NETWORK SECURITY, PRIVACY AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ISSUES WILL BECOME MORE CHALLENGING AND COMPLEX. WITH CONTENT WE CONTROL, WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MODEL BEST PRACTICES THAT FACILITATE EFFECTIVE SHARING THAT CREATES THE MAXIMUM BENEFIT TO SOCIETY.**

With the increasing sophistication and proliferation of hacking, public libraries must be diligent to ensure privacy is protected and the integrity of our information systems is preserved. We should anticipate a need to dedicate more resources and attention to keeping our systems secure as new threats emerge.

Libraries facilitate access to copyrighted material. As new technologies emerge that make it easier to share, modify and edit content, content publishers will continue to face challenges to their business models and will push for legal protections, including restrictions on fair use. Libraries have a unique role to play in advocating for copyright rules that effectively balance the rights of copyright holders with the rights of users.

As HPL facilitates the creation of local content we need to ensure the licenses in which they are made available are as open as possible, given the circumstances. To facilitate access to some material where we do not own the copyright, we need to develop mutually beneficial agreements. We should continue to use and embrace standards such as the Creative Commons licenses.

## APPENDIX I – COMPARISON OF 2022, 2017 AND 2010

The table below shows the core assumptions adopted in 2010 and 2017. Although the explanatory text has changed a lot in 2022, there are only two changes to the assumptions. *Social cohesion* was added to the assumption about our unique role and the funding challenge assumption was moved to #3. It was previously listed as #2 in 2010 and 2017.

2017 Assumptions, 2022 Amendment	2010 Assumptions
<p>1. With future disruptive changes ahead, libraries will need to continue to focus on enhancing our ability to adapt. The health of our organization will be dependent upon us remaining relevant and vital to the lives of residents and to communities we serve.</p>	<p>1. Our very survival as an organization is dependent upon us remaining relevant and vital to the lives of people.</p>
	<p>5. Current services and processes will continue to change repeatedly.</p>
	<p>6. Future jobs will be less repetitive and will focus more on public service.</p>
<p>2. Public libraries are uniquely positioned to contribute to the health, education, prosperity, and <b>social cohesion</b> of the communities we serve. To accomplish this, we must continue to develop successful partnerships and actively participate in broader community initiatives.</p>	<p><i>No similar assumption stated in 2010.</i></p>
<p>3. There will be significant competition for funding. Operating budgets will continue to be constrained and accessing sufficient capital funding to maintain all our facilities will be an ongoing challenge.</p>	<p>2. All of our funding is vulnerable.</p>
	<p>3. More library buildings require renovations than our funding will allow.</p>
<p>4. The trends toward the increasing importance of digital content and growing competition from the private sector to provide access to it will continue. The circulation of physical books will remain a core service and the unique local content held and made accessible by HPL will become increasingly important.</p>	<p>4. Electronic material will soon form a significant portion of our circulation.</p>
	<p>7. Competition from the private sector for services we once considered our exclusive domain will continue to increase.</p>
<p>5. Network security, privacy and intellectual property issues will become more challenging. With content we control, we have an opportunity to model best practices that facilitate effective sharing that creates the maximum benefit to society.</p>	<p>8. Privacy/intellectual property issues will become more complex</p>