

Date: February 16, 2022
To: Chair and Members of the Library Board
From: Tony Del Monaco, Director of Finance and Facilities
Subject: **Keeping HPL Safe & Welcoming – Report on Incidents**

The importance of the public library today as a vital public space that brings people of all backgrounds together is more important than ever. In 2022, our plan is to open our 23 branches for a total of 1,349 open hours per week, plus regular service with our 2 bookmobiles. Our strategic priority “Community Beacon” speaks to the importance of our spaces: *“The library system will act as a unifying force by welcoming everyone.”* Although the rate of incidents at HPL is relatively low, we know that witnessing someone acting out, such as swearing loudly, can be unsettling.

As an institution that works hard to welcome everyone without barriers, occasionally problems that exist in the communities we serve are experienced inside our spaces. To put it in context, when we are operating outside of pandemic restrictions, we normally see almost 4 million in-person visits each year. In 2021, because of pandemic restrictions and reduced hours, the Library had only 795,498 in-person visits. In 2021 there were a total of 724 incidents reported which works out to about **9.1 incidents per 10,000 visits**. (See Table 1.)

INCIDENT CATEGORIES

We have an incident report tracking system that categorizes incidents into 4 main categories:

1. **Behaviour** – Someone violated our code of conduct; this usually involves behaviour that negatively impacts on the rights of others to use the space. Common examples of this are: excessive noise, inappropriate language, vandalism, or being excessively intoxicated. If someone is trespassing because they are not adhering to their suspension of privileges, that is also captured in this category.
2. **Facility** – Incidents that involve some problem with our facility. This could involve an elevator out of order, power outage, reports on pests, finding sharps in or around the branch, or an unexpected mess that needs to be cleaned-up.
3. **Medical** – This usually involves either an ambulance being called or the administration of first aid.
4. **Pandemic Related** – In 2020 we began tracking pandemic related incidents when we resumed in-person services. This relates to incidents of members not complying with our personal protective equipment (PPE) rules.

2021 INCIDENTS

In 2021, we had a total of 724 reported incidents. With 795,498 visits that works out to a system-wide rate of 9.1 incidents per 10,000 visits.

Below is a recent history of incidents by category and per 10,000 visits.

Figure 1 – Five Year History of Reported Incidents by Incident Type

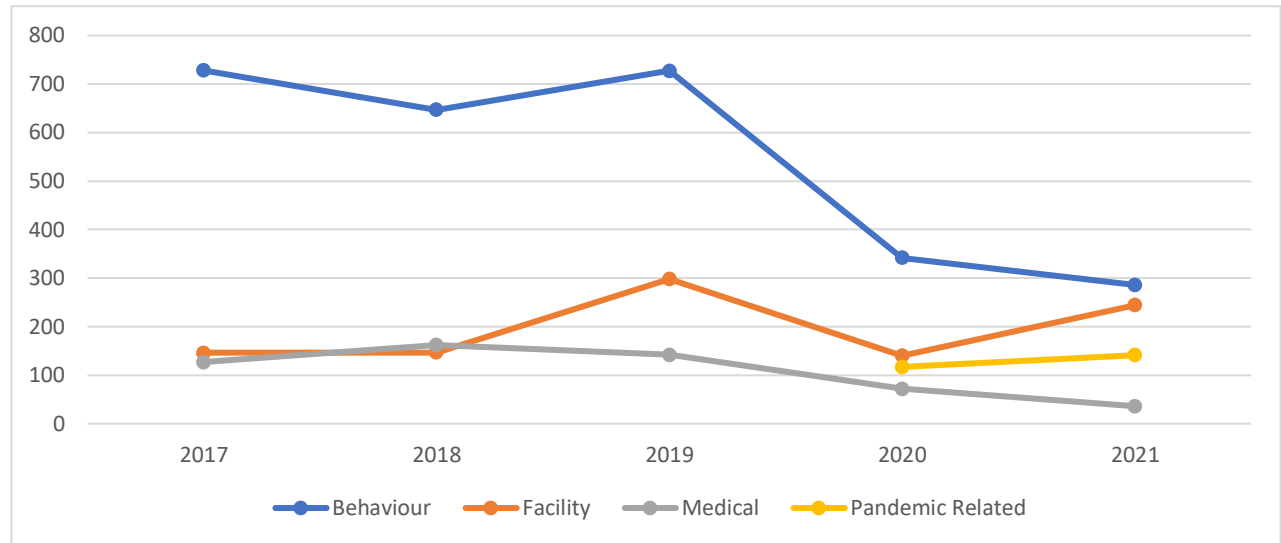
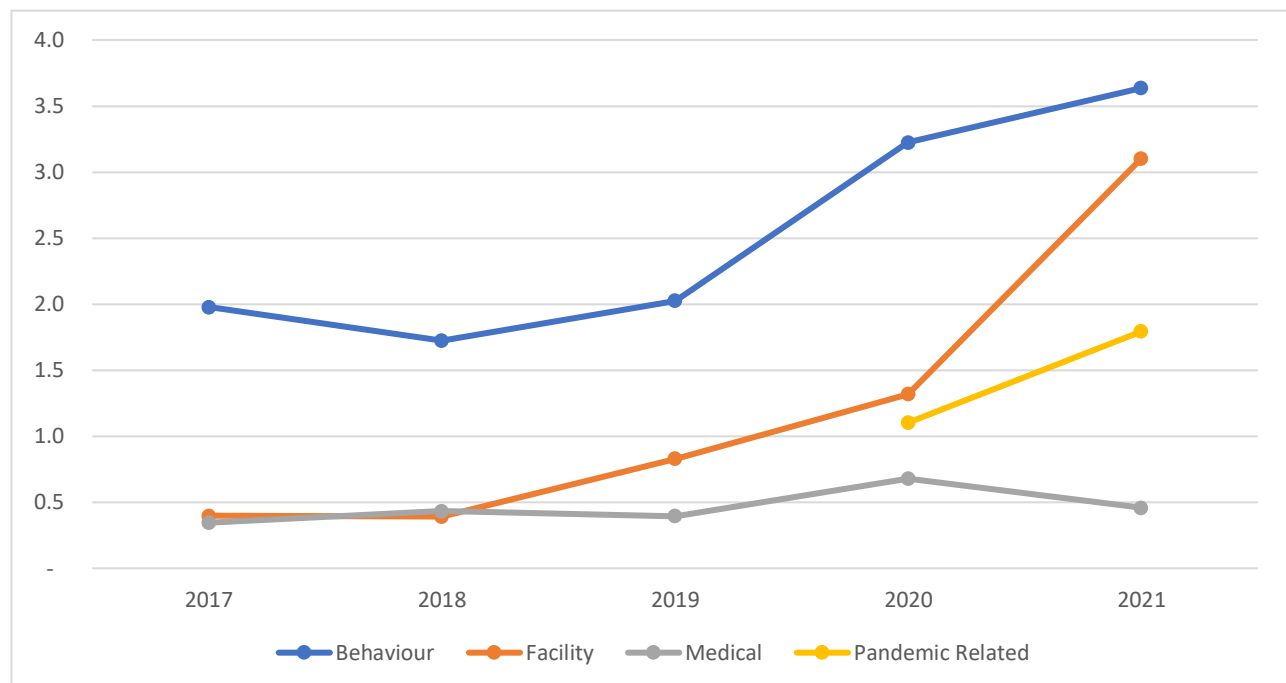


Figure 2 – Five Year History of Incidents per 10,000 visits



The rate per 10,000 visits has been higher in 2021 due to a couple factors.

First is the fact that we have introduced a new incident category related to PPE compliance by members. Members in our spaces are required to wear a face mask or shield when in the library. There were 144 pandemic related incidents involving members refusing to abide by the mask requirements in 2021. That's about 20% of all reported incidents in 2021.

When a member is not wearing a mask or not wearing it properly, they are first asked to wear one (or wear one properly) and can be provided with a free mask if needed. Staff have the discretion to issue members a warning letter if needed and for repeated violations the member can eventually be suspended from entering library branches if they are involved in repeated incidents of non-compliance.

The second factor that led to a higher incident rate is related to facility incidents which made up 33% of reported incidents in 2021 which is higher than in the past. The reason for that is due to an increase in bed bug activity that we've seen since re-opening after the pandemic. It is unclear what may be underlying the increase but reports of materials returned with bed bugs and requests for bed bug treatment service has increased. That has led to an increase in manual inspections of materials being returned. Of the facility related incidents in 2021, about 150 or 60% of them were related to pests, mainly bed bugs and mainly at Central. It should be noted that overall HPL circulation of physical materials was 2,578,886 in 2021 with Central at 296,657.

Considering our overall volume of items circulated (2,578,886), reports of bed bugs (150) remains a tiny fraction of 1% (0.0058%). To ensure the risk is kept to a minimum, we've increased the frequency of regularly scheduled bed bug treatment inspections at Central from quarterly to monthly and we supplement that with on-demand treatments in between those scheduled ones. We're also in the process of setting up a treatment area in the basement at Central to proactively heat-treat materials that are returned at Central before they are reshelfed or distributed to other branches.

Behaviour related incidents accounted for the largest category at 40% of all incidents in 2021. That's a rate of about 3.6 per 10,000 visits in 2021. This is an area that we've also seen an increase in since re-opening during the pandemic from previous levels of around 2 incidents per 10,000 visits. Branches with the highest level of behavioural incident rates per 10,000 visits in 2021 were Parkdale (21.8), Barton (19.2), Concession (7.8), and Central (6.9).

Central, our most visited branch, had 307 or about 40% of all incidents system wide. That works out to 17.8 incidents per 10,000 visits. Of the Central incidents, about 45% were facility related while another 40% were behaviour related. We expect the new measures we are taking to deal with the rise in bed bug activity to help curb the number of pest-related incidents going forward. Due to the pandemic restrictions in place, most member activity is focussed on the 1st floor and we have repositioned our guard stations and patrols to be more focussed on the 1st floor including more visibility at the customer service desk and public computer areas. We also have guards stationed at each entrance to help ensure compliance with mask guidelines. Having guards stationed at the entrances has also helped to curb unwanted activity in the foyer of York Blvd.

At Barton, there were 99 reported incidents in total for a 14% share of all incidents system wide. That works out to 43.1 incidents per 10,000 visits. At Barton, 45% of their incidents were behaviour related while another 40% were facility related. 10% of Barton's incidents were pandemic related. Since 2019, on-site guards are now stationed at Barton during all open hours to help staff deal with incidents.

At Concession, six or a quarter of the reported incidents were related to behavioural incidents involving one member who has since had their privileges suspended.

ELEMENTS OF OUR SECURITY STRATEGY

Our goal at HPL for many years is not just to provide a safe environment, but to create a welcoming environment where people feel respected and secure. To achieve this goal HPL has undertaken a multifaceted strategy to reduce the risk of serious incidents happening in our spaces and to ensure we have good systems in place to monitor and respond proactively when something happens. Important elements of this strategy are:

- 1. Staff Training** – All staff that interact with the public are required to complete [Prepare Training](#) developed by the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI). This is a non-violent crisis intervention training that helps staff learn how to respectfully diffuse situations. One of the principles of this training is the professional respect we give to members has the biggest impact on creating a safe environment for the staff and public. Customer Service Training reinforces the training. Due to the pandemic, this training has been put on hold but we will be resuming this training with modified in-person sessions or virtual sessions as allowed by public health guidelines.
- 2. Customer Service Commitment** – In 2015 the Board approved a significantly updated [Code of Conduct](#). The new policy replaced a long list of prohibited activities in the Library, with a staff customer service commitment and 4 simple rules for people using the Library to follow:
 - Be courteous and respectful
 - Follow Library policies and procedures
 - Treat Library materials, resources and spaces with care and respect
 - Be responsible for those in your care
- 3. Inspire Card** (formerly Access Card) – Prior to implementation of the Access Card program in 2014 there was a lot of activity that happened on our computers using visitor passes. The visitor pass was intended to provide temporary access to out of town visitors or infrequent library users. The reality was many residents were using the visitor pass daily. By creating the Access Card, we were able to provide better access to library resources to individuals that often had limited access to identification. The program also increased accountability on our computers.
- 4. Incident Reporting System** – On the staff Intranet is a system for tracking incidents at HPL. The system makes information available promptly, so situations can be tracked, and corrective action taken when needed. Incidents are reviewed by the departmental manager, Security Supervisor and the Health & Safety Coordinator.
- 5. Weekly Incident Review Meeting** – Every Monday the Director of Finance and Facilities meets with the Security Supervisor and the CEO/Chief Librarian's Assistant to review incidents from the previous week. Recommendations from that meeting are reviewed at the weekly Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meeting the next day.
- 6. Security Supervisor** - To place more emphasis on addressing security concerns, the Library created a full-time permanent in-house Security Supervisor.
- 7. Security Contract** – HPL made a number of changes to how we procure security services. We stipulate in the contract better pay for the guards and require more training. There is on-site orientation for new guards. With the level of incidents at Barton relatively high compared to other locations, we now have a security guard presence onsite at Barton on a full-time

basis.

- 8. Security Camera Policy** – In 2013 the Library Board made a number of changes to the Security Camera policy and approved funds to expand security camera coverage. The expansion of the coverage is less of a deterrent than a tool to help us effectively investigate incidents. The policy and processes that have been set-up ensure staff and customer privacy is protected.
- 9. Community Resource Worker** – Talks are ongoing with local agencies to find an appropriate partner to work with on member support. Many incidents that we see can be traced back to the precarious living and social conditions that some of our members experience. Having a resource worker onsite would help to put them in touch with and navigate community resources.
- 10. Partnerships & Services** – The City of Hamilton’s Experience Annex Social Navigator is located at the Central Library. This program engages youth that have not made a successful transition to higher education or meaningful employment. Clients are connected with services and advancement opportunities. City School by Mohawk provides free college level courses at the Central Library. HPL engages in over 150 partnerships that support learning, access to music and culture and social engagement. Some of these programs have been put on hold as a result of the pandemic.
- 11. Re-entry Procedures** – At HPL when someone has completed a long-term ban, they are required to meet with the Chief Librarian and the Security Supervisor. The purpose of the meeting is to review what behaviours led to the ban and encourage accountability.
- 12. Physical Design** – When designing and renovating spaces, we pay considerable attention to ensuring sight lines are good and we will be able to manage our spaces effectively. Where problems have emerged, we have made furniture and other changes to the physical environment to reduce unwanted activity.

CONCLUSION

The role of the public library at bringing people together is more important than ever. Misunderstanding, bias and prejudice are best overcome when people have a chance to get to know the “other”. HPL attracts people of all ages, economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. It is imperative that as we strive to create public spaces that welcomes everyone, we ensure safety and security in ways that remain true to our values as a public library.

Other libraries often contact HPL for information about our approaches to safety and security because they know HPL takes a comprehensive and proactive approach to these issues. Moving forward we should continue to do so.

Table 1 - 2021 Hamilton Public Library Report on Incidents

| Branch | Behaviour | | | | | Facility | | | | | Medical | | | | | Pandemic Related | | | | | Not Identified | | | | | Annual Total | In-Person Visits | Incident Rate per 10,000 visits |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|----------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total | | | |
| Ancaster | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | | | | | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 7 | | | | | 0 | 11 | 50,150 | 2.2 |
| Barton | 9 | 4 | 15 | 16 | 44 | 10 | 8 | 13 | 7 | 38 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 8 | | 1 | 2 | 11 | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 99 | 22,976 | 43.1 |
| Binbrook | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | | | 2 | | 2 | 1 | | | | 1 | 3 | | 1 | | 4 | | | | | 0 | 9 | 16,920 | 5.3 |
| Bookmobile | | | | | 0 | 1 | | | 2 | 3 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | 3 | 8,800 | 3.4 |
| Carlisle | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | 0 | 5,968 | - |
| Central | 17 | 23 | 23 | 56 | 119 | 29 | 13 | 41 | 59 | 142 | 3 | | 3 | 11 | 17 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 22 | 1 | | 2 | 4 | 7 | 307 | 172,673 | 17.8 |
| Concession | 2 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 17 | | | 2 | | 2 | | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 3 | 1 | | | | 1 | 25 | 21,633 | 11.6 |
| Dundas | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | | | 5 | 6 | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 4 | | | | | 0 | 13 | 55,176 | 2.4 |
| Freelton | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | 0 | 1 | 5,500 | 1.8 |
| Greenville | | | | | 0 | | 2 | | | 2 | | | | | 0 | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | | 0 | 3 | 5,660 | 5.3 |
| Kenilworth | 2 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 17 | | 3 | 4 | 2 | 9 | | | | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | | 8 | | | | | | 0 | 35 | 36,457 | 9.6 |
| Locke | | 2 | | 1 | 3 | | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | 11 | 20,632 | 5.3 |
| Lynden | | | | | 0 | | | 2 | 1 | 3 | | | | | 0 | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 0 | 4 | 8,242 | 4.9 |
| Mount Hope | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | 0 | 2,410 | - |
| Parkdale | | | 1 | 15 | 16 | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | 0 | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 0 | 18 | 7,314 | 24.6 |
| Red Hill | 1 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 14 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 4 | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 21 | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | 43 | 59,112 | 7.3 |
| Saltfleet | | 1 | | 2 | 3 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | | | | | 0 | 7 | 34,479 | 2.0 |
| Sherwood | 1 | | 1 | 3 | 5 | | | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | 2 | | | | | | 0 | 9 | 18,248 | 4.9 |
| Stoney Creek | | 1 | 1 | | 2 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | 2 | | 2 | | | | | 0 | 4 | 15,935 | 2.5 |
| Terryberry | 11 | 3 | 1 | 17 | 32 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 16 | | | | 1 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 10 | 13 | 36 | | | 2 | | 2 | 87 | 71,380 | 12.2 |
| Turner Park | 1 | | 1 | 6 | 8 | | | 2 | 1 | 3 | | | | | 0 | 4 | | | 4 | | | | | | 0 | 15 | 58,436 | 2.6 |
| Valley Park | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | | 0 | | | | | 0 | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 0 | 2 | 8,737 | 2.3 |
| Waterdown | | 1 | | | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | | 8 | | 1 | 1 | | 2 | 13 | 40,844 | 3.2 |
| Westdale | | 1 | | | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | 5 | 47,816 | 1.0 |
| Grand Total | 47 | 47 | 63 | 131 | 288 | 46 | 27 | 73 | 92 | 238 | 8 | 1 | 8 | 18 | 35 | 44 | 27 | 38 | 35 | 144 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 19 | 724 | 795,498 | 9.1 |