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Library Board Report

To: Newmarket Public Library Board
From: Todd Kyle, C.E.O.
Date: October 16, 2019
RE: **eContent for Libraries campaign and resolution request**

Background:

Libraries across Canada, including Newmarket Public Library, are increasingly being tasked with providing to their users electronic books, including electronic audiobook files. Out of a materials budget of roughly \$375,000, NPL spends close to \$150,000 on electronic materials, including eBooks and eAudio. However, libraries are increasingly struggling to develop these digital collections due to prohibitively expensive pricing models. Moreover, some important titles, including Canadian ones, are not made available to Canadian libraries by multinational publishers.

Unlike with print books, publishers are able to restrict sales to public libraries because libraries can only access eBooks through licensed platforms featuring acceptable digital rights management. For example, most of the “big five” North American publishers sell to public libraries a time-limited license (2 years) at a price significantly higher than retail, meaning libraries have to re-purchase the item after 2 years to maintain access. In a recent development, one publisher announced that sales of all new eBook titles would be “embargoed” –that is, not offered for sale to public libraries through the platforms they subscribe to—for a certain period after publication, except for a single copy per library or consortium (NPL is part of the Ontario Download Service consortium). Audiobooks are particularly challenging, where titles published by Amazon’s imprint Audible are entirely unavailable to public libraries.

For publishers, the reasons for the restrictions are falling sales. They place the blame for this on easy access to eBooks in libraries. However, the library community’s position is that this is misguided, and that publishers need libraries as much as libraries need publishers. Evidence suggests that sales of all book formats are strengthened, not harmed, by discovery and exposure to library patrons. In addition, the sale at lower prices of self-published material through platforms like Amazon, as well as increasing eBook piracy, are all factors that may be harming the sales of traditional publishers. The overall position of the library community is that the restrictions and costs make it difficult for libraries to provide important services that contribute to thriving and engaged communities, including vulnerable groups like seniors, low income families, youth and new Canadians.

A North American effort to improve access to eBooks has coalesced around a campaign called #eContentForAll that is being led by the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) in the U.S. and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council/Conseil des bibliothèques urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) in Canada, in addition to the #eBooksForALL campaign from the American Library Association (ALA). In addition to staff and user education through social media and other efforts such as the www.econtentforlibraries.org website, Library Boards and municipal councils are being asked to lend their support.

CULC/CBUC is asking municipal leaders to recognize the important role that libraries play in our communities and to help to advocate for a solution to the barriers that Canadian libraries face in accessing ebooks and other econtent. Accordingly, it is requesting that Boards and municipalities formally indicate their support of CULC's/CBUC's campaign to improve Canadian public libraries' access to ebooks and other econtent by passing a resolution and forwarding notice of that resolution to local federal Members of Parliament. Although libraries are governed provincially, the federal government is being targeted as it is best placed to provide a comprehensive, Canada-wide solution to the digital access issue. The federal government, for example, is responsible for trade and competition policy, as well as publishing subsidies.

A draft municipal motion is included in Attachment 1, based on a similar motion passed by Toronto City Council. I ask for your assistance in obtaining Newmarket Council endorsement of the attached draft resolution.

Conclusion:

The following motion is recommended:

THAT the Library Board seek Newmarket Council's endorsement of a draft resolution outlined in Attachment 1, requesting the Town of Newmarket to:

- a. indicate their support for CULC's/CBUC's efforts to increase access to ebooks and other econtent for library users in Newmarket and across Canada**
- b. call on the federal government to investigate the barriers faced by libraries in acquiring ebooks and other econtent and the problems that poses for vulnerable demographic groups in Canada; and**
- c. ask the federal government to develop a solution that increases access to ebooks and other econtent across Canada and assists libraries in meeting the cost requirements to acquire ebooks and other econtent.**

Appendix 1: Draft Resolution for Newmarket Council

WHEREAS, the Town of Newmarket recognizes the important role that libraries play in our community. Libraries and the early literacy programs that they run are integral to developing proficient readers and ensuring that children succeed in school. More and more, digital literacy programs run by libraries also help ensure that citizens can contribute to our digital world. Additionally, vulnerable demographic groups, including seniors, low income families, youth, and new Canadians rely on access to libraries as an important tool for their participation in the community – from education to searching for jobs to consuming Canadian cultural materials, and

WHEREAS, libraries in our community recognize that our users increasingly seek to access e-books and other e-content offered by multinational publishers, and that access to those publications is too often curtailed by prohibitively high licensing fees or else entirely denied to Canadian libraries, and

WHEREAS, libraries must be in a position to offer e-books and other e-content to their users as part of their service offering to our community, particularly given the contemporary rapid pace of digitization of educational and cultural materials.

Now, therefore be it resolved that the Town of Newmarket does hereby:

1. Indicate our support for the Canadian Urban Libraries Council in its efforts to increase access to ebooks and other econtent for library users in Newmarket and across Canada;
2. Call on the federal government to investigate the barriers faced by libraries in acquiring ebooks and other econtent and the problems that poses for vulnerable demographic groups in Canada; and
3. Further ask the federal government to develop a solution that increases access to ebooks and other econtent across Canada and assists libraries in meeting the cost requirements to acquire e-books and other e-content.