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Library Board Report

To: Newmarket Public Library Board
From: Todd Kyle, C.E.O.
Date: September 16, 2020
RE: **Recovery and Re-opening Update for Library**

Background:

The library re-opened for limited services on July 28, 2020 following roughly a month of offering curbside holds service only. The gradual re-introduction of services has been consistent with the Board's general guidance from the June 17 2020 meeting, which was to re-introduce services in a cautious manner, consistent with the Town of Newmarket's re-opening stages, and following authoritative health and safety advice. This report will give an update on services and changes since that meeting, all of which fall under the C.E.O.'s authority, as well as summarize some considerations for the next stage of re-opening.

Discussion:

Actions taken so far:

On June 19, York Region entered Stage 2 of re-opening, allowing libraries to open to the public but without the ability of users to browse the shelves. On July 24, York Region entered Stage 3, allowing libraries to re-introduce services such as browsing, small group programs, and other in-person services, but mandating continued quarantine of both returned materials and those used in-house for browsing but not being borrowed. This quarantine period is mandated to be at least 3 days; however NPL has recently increased this to 5 days, in keeping with a change in practice in many libraries. This is based on a recent test of the REALM (Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums) Project of the US federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, which showed that some hard-surface library materials continue to have detectable levels of virus at 5 days.

At this point, NPL's services are mainly limited to those allowed in Stage 2. At first, this consisted mainly of a pickup service for reserved items and public computer use, to which the library has gradually added in-person membership service, printing and copying, assistance in placing holds for materials reservation, limited use of a large meeting room for wi-fi access or study, and as of August 24, staff retrieval of items to borrow while you wait. Customers are asked to place into a

designated basket any items retrieved for them but which they do not choose to borrow. Many library services continue in a virtual format, including Tech Help, children's storytime and reading clubs, adult book clubs, reader's advisory, and other programs.

As previously detailed, staff stationed at the entrance (in a role we've called "conciierge") allow a limited number of patrons in for limited times and only for approved services, with a limit of one hour per day for any one visitor. Staff also remind visitors of the mandatory mask policy, ensure that they sanitize their hands, record information for potential contact tracing (see separate report on related policy), and remind them to answer the COVID screening questions before entering. No group programming, meeting rooms, shelf browsing, or other casual activity is provided or allowed, and open hours are limited to 11:00 am to 7:00 pm Tuesday to Thursday, 11:00 am to 5:00 pm Friday and Saturday, in order to give staff time for the extensive work in the public area (such as picking books for holds) without the risk of the public being present.

Staff who were on leave have all been invited to return to work, and staff not on leave were asked to return to the workplace from working at home. With staff now in the workplace, recommendations from the Ontario government for the safety of employees in a library setting are being followed. It is recommended that staff who are not needed in the workplace continue to work from home; however it has proven more practical and equitable to extend work from home arrangements only to those who need an accommodation for COVID-related reasons, and only at the times when it is necessary and does not conflict with front-line duties. All staff are completing an online COVID screening before attending work each day, and those who indicate that either they or a household member are experiencing COVID symptoms are required to self-isolate at home until they test negative for the virus. Staff are also following strict protocols regarding personal protective equipment, physical distancing, and workstation isolation.

At this point, the major decision taken by the C.E.O under the advice of the Town of Newmarket's Health and Safety Specialist has been to delay the introduction of browsing services until there is more evidence of an ongoing reduction in COVID cases, especially as the impact of the start of regular school is seen. While a number of other libraries in the region have or will shortly introduce the ability to browse, NPL is limiting walk-in borrowing to materials retrieved by staff for the time being, reassessing the situation weekly.

Status of overdue fines

In addition, the Library has continued not to assess fines for overdue material, but will shortly re-introduce overdue reminders as well as applying against a user's account the replacement cost for long overdue items (which is reversed upon returning). It is recommended that this practice be extended until the end of 2020, as is the case with many other libraries in Ontario. It is also recommended that the Board re-visit the use of fines entirely prior to the end of 2020, as many libraries have also announced permanent fine-free services going forward.

Security Guard services in re-opening

The Library also re-instated the Security Guard Services Pilot that was begun in February 2020 and intended to run for 16 weeks during evening and weekend hours. The contractor was gracious and allowed the Library to defer completion of the contract obligations until the library re-opened, and at the current usage, the contract will be completed by mid-October.

While having a security guard was of immense support to staff in dealing with difficult and vulnerable visitors prior to the COVID shutdown, the utility of having a guard on duty with the current visitor restrictions has been mainly limited to directing visitors once they are inside to where to access the desired service in a safe manner. If the pilot is concluded, the “concierge” may have to move further within the library, where they can both control entry and keep an eye on patron traffic inside, and once browsing is allowed, staff would also have to keep an eye on patrons on each floor to ensure they do not remain longer than required to find and borrow their items.

However, the budget situation due to COVID is very tight. While it was anticipated that the cost of the pilot could be absorbed into existing operating budgets, going beyond the pilot would entail using the operating reserve. It is therefore recommended that the pilot be concluded at the end of the contract and that re-consideration of security services be postponed until the need arises as restrictions are relaxed.

Conclusion:

The following motions are recommended:

THAT the Library Board receive the report on Recovery and Re-opening Update for the Library, and ratify the operational decisions taken as described.