



438 Park Avenue
Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 1W1

Email: npl@newmarketpl.ca
Website: newmarketpl.ca
Phone: 905-953-5110

Library Board Report

To: Newmarket Public Library Board

From: Linda Peppiatt, Acting C.E.O.; Ben Shaw, Manager, Library Operations

Date: March 17, 2021

RE: **OLA/FOPL 2021 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission**

Background:

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) work on behalf of the libraries of Ontario to deliver professional development, research, and advocacy on library specific issues. Each year the OLA and FOPL participate in the Ontario budget process to advocate for key issues in libraries and looks to the library community to amplify their message. As a local library board, one of the ways that Newmarket Public Library Board can raise awareness about these issues is to publicly endorse the requests in the submission.

This year's OLA and FOPL joint submission to Ontario's Pre-Budget consultation highlights the critical role that public and school libraries will continue to play as part of Ontario's COVID-19 recovery. The recommendations for public libraries are:

- A \$4.7 million annual investment to support the establishment of an Ontario Digital Public Library.
- A targeted enhancement of provincial funding through the Public Libraries Operating Grant (PLOG) to offset lost revenues from implementing fines-free policies and help public libraries make these policies permanent.

The full text of the pre-budget submission is available on the OLA website at <https://accessola.com/budget-and-funding-announcements/>

Discussion:

The OLA/FOPL pre-budget submission targets to key issues facing public libraries today: late fees and access to digital materials.

Late Fees:

Late fines have long been recognized as a barrier to access that disproportionately affects individuals already experiencing socio economic difficulty. In recent years libraries across Canada have been taking action to raise awareness of this issue and have garnered national press attention (CBC – Canadian libraries increasingly scrapping late fees to boost access to services <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/libraries-late-fees-1.5919483>). In October 2019 the Newmarket Public Library Board received a report titled “Reducing barriers to borrowing” and approved changes to the borrowing policy based on that report (Motion 19-10-66). A part of those changes was the elimination of late fees on children's materials.

With the COVID-19 emergency less than six months after this, libraries across Ontario removed all fines on late materials and continue to be fine free to promote access and safe public health measures. Many of these libraries are actively seeking ways to remain fine free in a post pandemic world. The enhancement to the PLOG would be a welcome step in ensuring continued and equitable access to libraries.

Digital Materials:

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important digital collections are for our communities. During a time when the doors to the library were closed, patrons continued to be able to access resources and connect with Library staff to discover and learn. Digital material costs are quickly growing often outpacing the availability of budgets forcing some difficult decisions.

The publishing field is also concerned about its economic stability. As such, Libraries are subjected to high prices and restrictive licences for materials that are in high demand for their communities. The difference between and lack of transparency in what consumers pay for digital material and what institutions pay often leads to confusion and disappointment about wait times and holds lists.

The establishment of an Ontario Digital Public Library would ensure that all communities across Ontario are able to access a standard quality of resources which would then provide individual libraries with the flexibility needed to provide equitable access to their communities either through supplementing their own digital materials or making fine free policies permanent.

Conclusion:

The following motion is recommended:

THAT the Library Board receive the report on the OLA/FOPL 2021 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission;

AND THAT the Library Board endorses the OLA/FOPL 2021 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission and supports the requests, specifically:

- **A targeted enhancement of provincial funding through the Public Libraries Operating Grant (PLOG) to offset lost revenues from implementing fines-free policies and help public libraries make these policies permanent. This investment would help to break down barriers to access for low-income Ontarians.**
- **Subject to the above increase, maintain provincial funding for Ontario's public libraries at current levels and work with municipalities to prevent unsustainable cuts to public library funding.**
- **Provide critical e-learning support and fair access to modern, digital resources for all Ontario public libraries through a \$4.7 million annual investment to support the establishment of an Ontario Digital Public Library, thereby leveraging the province's significant purchasing power to give all Ontarians access to a common set of high-quality e-learning & online resources and more e-books.**