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Library Board Report

To: Newmarket Public Library Board
From: Linda Peppiatt, Acting C.E.O.
Date: April 21, 2021

RE: **Dr. Seuss books of concern**

Background:

On March 2, 2021, Dr. Seuss Enterprises announced: “Dr. Seuss Enterprises, working with a panel of experts, including educators, reviewed our catalog of titles and made the decision last year to cease publication and licensing of the following titles: *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, *If I Ran the Zoo*, *McElligot’s Pool*, *On Beyond Zebra!*, *Scrambled Eggs Super!*, and *The Cat’s Quizzer*. These books portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong.

Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr. Seuss Enterprises’s catalog represents and supports all communities and families.”

On March 26, 2021, Newmarket Today ran an article titled “Controversial Dr. Seuss books likely to remain on shelves at Newmarket library” which prompted some comments from the public indicating their opinions on whether the library should remove or keep the titles.

I had advised the reporter that the children’s library staff were considering options on how to handle the books and that our decision would be guided by the library’s collection development policy. After that, we made a temporary decision to move the books to the Parenting Collection.

Actions:

The library leadership team met with the Head of Children’s to discuss next steps and consider a review the of Collection Development Policy. The Manager, Public Services and Head of Children’s suggested some updates to the policy could include creating a diverse collection, updating the former Canadian Library Association (CLA) statement on intellectual freedom to reflect the Canadian Federation of Libraries Associations (CFLA-FCAB) Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries and Position Statement on Diversity and Inclusion, and update to the reconsideration form.

The Acting CEO researched what other libraries are doing. Some are leaving the items on the shelves, some are leaving them on the shelves with a disclaimer type note, some are pulling them, and many are still conducting a review.

The Acting CEO and the Head of Children's Services had a very productive and informative meeting with Lillian Michiko Blakey. She has considerable experience with consulting on the subject matter and has consulted with the education sector on teaching to inform students about diversity and racial issues. She shared her opinion that the wording and tone that the Aurora Public Library used is appropriate for a disclaimer type sticker on the books of concern. Our Head of Children's Services and Manager, Public Services agree.

Discussion:

Options for the titles of concern:

- Remove the titles from the collection – consider “cancel culture’, censorship, intellectual freedom, equity, diversity, historical value and teaching moments
- Move titles to another section – consider shelving space and shifting to accommodate if/when additional books are identified as concerns
- Leave on the shelf without a note – consider sensitivity to the community
- Leave on the shelf with a note – consider wording, potential exponential growth as more books are challenged, and contravention of our current Collection Development Policy which states “The Library shall not label or classify materials in order to indicate the bias or point of view of item contents, nor shall it attempt to expurgate information contained in selected items.”

Aurora Public Library wording:

“On March 2, 2021, Seuss Enterprises announced they will stop publishing six titles, including this one, because they include harmful racial stereotypes.

Aurora Public Library supports the intellectual freedom of the individual. Choice in reading material for children is the sole decision of their legal parent or guardian.

If you would like suggestions on reading material that address the issues of social justice, anti-racism, diversity and inclusion, please visit our catalog at aurora.bibliocommons.com for staff-selected reading lists, or speak with one of our information staff for more assistance.”

- Other – Library Board suggestions

Conclusion:

The following motion is recommended:

THAT the Library Board receive the report on Dr. Seuss books of concern;

AND THAT the Library Board provide direction to the Acting CEO on suggested options