

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

To / Destinataire Ottawa Public Library (OPL) Board Trustees

cc: Library Senior Management Team

From / Expéditeur Sonia Bebbington, Chief Librarian / CEO
Donna Clark, Division Manager, Branch Operations

Subject / Objet COVID-19 Recovery and Hours of Operation Update **Date:** November 1, 2022

The purpose of this memo is to update trustees regarding COVID-19 pandemic recovery plans at OPL before the end of the current term of Board, specifically plans for the return to pre-pandemic operating hours.

Context

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all OPL branches, Bookmobile, and Homebound Services closed on March 16, 2020. Due to the Provincial State of Emergency declared the following day and extended twice, OPL remained closed until June 15, 2020. During the initial stages of the emergency, OPL's CEO operated under Section 2.2 (Emergency or Special Circumstances) of the *Delegation of Authority (DOA) Policy*. When locations re-opened, they did so gradually, with modified hours and in "waves" of several branches at a time.

Over the course of the pandemic, OPL has developed a strategy for COVID response, and the Board received several reports related to this, including a report about the "COVID Current" stage in February 2021 (OPLB-2021-0101). In this report, staff indicated that resuming full hours of operation was key to recovery efforts, and to resuming full services. Limited hours (at the time, two mornings and two evenings a week, and afternoon and Saturday hours at most urban and suburban branches) were designed to meet key community needs while balancing lower levels of available staff and the safety of customers and employees. OPL's goal was to continue to adjust hours to meet community needs, with the goal of resuming pre-COVID hours of operation.

As we remain in the "COVID Current" time and have not yet reached a "post-Pandemic" period, the end of the term of the current OPL Board provides an opportunity for staff to update trustees regarding services.

Current hours of operation

In January 2022, due to the Omicron wave, hours of operation and some branch services were again suspended due to the pandemic. In February 2022, some services resumed, but branch opening hours and bookmobile stops remained modified. In September 2022,

Sunday hours were expanded from 1-5pm to 10am-5pm for the 10 branches that are normally open Sundays and InfoService. In October 2022, opening hours at the urban and suburban branches increased to include Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Metcalfe branch expanded hours to the pre-pandemic weekly complement at its Town Hall location.

At present, some locations continue to operate with modified hours; these reduced hours are largely due to continued staffing shortages. Urban and suburban branches continue to have reduced hours on Mondays and Wednesdays, closing at 6pm rather than 8:30 or 9pm, and Tuesday and Thursday evenings closing at 8pm rather than 8:30 or 9pm. Rural branches are working their total weekly complement of hours on an adjusted schedule.

Four bookmobile stops also remain served by another stop (combined) or paused. Carlsbad Springs and Navan stops have been combined with Sarsfield and Vars stops; Blossom Park stop has been paused (the nearest OPL location is Greenboro branch), as has Morgan's Grant stop (the nearest OPL location is Beaverbrook branch). The three councillors with affected stops have been notified (Ward 4 Kanata North, Ward 10 Gloucester-Southgate, and Ward 19 Cumberland), and the affected bookmobile stops generally had low performance, varying from few (under six) to no visitors on a regular basis. Since these stops have been paused in February 2022 staff have not received negative feedback from residents; in contrast, staff have received positive feedback regarding the modified schedule for the Cumberland township stops, and the number of visitors at these stops has doubled. The Alternative Services Ad hoc Committee has endorsed continuing with the current interim Bookmobile schedule pending a more fulsome review in 2023.

To summarize, in order to fully return to pre-pandemic hours of operation, locations must:

- Resume Monday and Wednesday evenings in urban and suburban branches; and,
- Resume the paused or combined Bookmobile stops (4 locations).

Next steps

- Staff will continue to keep trustees and customers informed regarding hours of operation;
- Should the pandemic situation change at any point, staff will issue notice to trustees as required, guided by the *DOA Policy*;
- Staff are prioritizing job postings, hiring competitions, and onboarding new employees. This will assist in alleviating staffing pressures and determining when branch hours can be further expanded; and
- The upcoming November 2022 Board report, "2019-2022 Term of Board Key Achievements and Legacy Report" will outline future considerations related to Alternative Services. Any possible permanent changes to bookmobile stops will be considered as part of the work of an Ad hoc Committee in the next term, following public engagement.

For any questions, please contact Donna Clark, Division Manager, Branch Operations.

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