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Report to / Rapport au:

**Ottawa Public Library Board
Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa**

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Submitted by / Soumis par:

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SUBJECT: Hours of Operation Review: Changes to Rural Branch Hours

**OBJET: Examen des heures d'ouverture: Changements aux heures
d'ouverture des succursales rurales**

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Ottawa Public Library Board:

- 1. Receive this report for information; and,**
- 2. Approve disbanding the Hours of Operation Ad hoc Committee, as further described in this report.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa :

- 1. Prenne connaissance du présent rapport à titre d'information;**
- 2. Approuve la dissolution du groupe du Comité spécial sur les heures d'ouverture, tel que décrit dans le présent rapport.**

BACKGROUND

As per Ottawa Public Library (OPL) Board (“The Board” or “OPLB”) Policy 002, the Delegation of Authority Policy (“the DOA Policy”), the CEO is delegated responsibility to “set or modify administrative and operational policies,” including hours of operation. As the Board is responsible for reviewing and recommending annual budget estimates to City Council, it is important that the Board be aware of any proposed changes to the hours of operation that may have the potential to impact future budgets.

In 2001, OPL established hours for its 33 branches following amalgamation. By 2004, hours for district and local branches (as defined in the OPL Facilities Framework, OPLB-2022-1108-10.2) were mostly standardized, with the former open 55-63 hours per week depending on the time of year, and the latter open 36-52 hours per week depending on size. Hours for rural branches had and continue to have significant variations.

In 2019, the Board approved the creation of an Hours of Operation Ad hoc Committee (“the Committee”), which was carried over to the new term. The Committee met three times over the course of the last two years to advise staff regarding the strategic context for the review of hours of operation and provide guidance on potential changes to hours of operation. In the same year, the Board approved an evaluation process for consideration of adjustments to hours, which focused on three areas of consideration: a) gap analysis, b) needs assessment, and c) cost analysis (OPLB-2019-1002). In the last five years, branch hours were adjusted twice: minor adjustments were made to rural branch hours resulting in a net gain of 2.5 hours, and branches experienced reductions and adjustments to hours during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adjustments to branch hours over the last five years have not taken a holistic approach, leaving inconsistencies and gaps specific to library service delivery among rural branches.

In 2024, the Board received the Corporate Work Plan (as part of the 2024 Ottawa Public Library Board Work Plan, OPLB-2024-0409-11.1) which included a “Review of rural branch hours for potential standardization within existing budget envelope,” in alignment with the strategic priority to define the ideal client experience across service channels. Furthermore, the Councillor-led consultations in advance of the November 2024 City of Ottawa’s (City) Rural Summit provided additional information regarding the needs and interests of rural residents.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with information on changes to rural branch hours of operation to be implemented in 2025, along with staff requirements to support those changes. Changes represent a net increase of 39 hours per week for rural branches. Staffing resources required to support the increase are available within the existing budget envelope.

DISCUSSION

Staff closely monitor growth and development across the city, demographic trends, branch performance, public feedback, and other data to inform adjustments or changes to branch hours, to ensure that hours of operation remain relevant and responsive to client and community needs.

In Fall 2023, staff conducted a comprehensive review of rural hours of operation, considering usage trends and community feedback. Feedback included information from the 2022 survey about library hours of operation (OPLB-2022-1108-10.1), which validated that clients are seeking:

1. Consistency in hours;
2. Longer hours;
3. More morning and evening hours; and,
4. Additional Monday, Friday, and Saturday hours (among rural respondents specifically).

Feedback from the councillor-led consultations ahead of the Rural Summit included:

1. The need for consistent hours of operation among rural branches; and,
2. The need for more programs, particularly for children/teens and older adults.

Using a community development approach, anecdotal feedback from residents and OPL clients was also considered, derived primarily from community conversations.

The primary goals of the rural hours review were to:

1. Eliminate split hours (i.e., when a branch is closed over lunch or dinner, resulting in non-continuous open hours);
2. Improve distribution of service times across rural communities; and,
3. Maximize programming opportunities.

To achieve these goals, staff identified rural branch tiers, and adjusted branch hours to ensure consistency within and among each. They also ensured improved access six days a week by providing continuous service from mornings to evenings within a network of relatively proximate branches. Additionally, staff created a plan to address programming opportunities and determined the resource requirements needed to implement these changes. These elements of the rural hours review are discussed further in the following four sections of this report.

Rural Branch Tiers

Staff used the Board-approved evaluation process from 2019 to analyze hours specifically among rural branches, and subsequently developed a five-tier approach for allocating hours to the 10 branches, tailored to their profiles and usage data. Considering the tiers, staff examined the hours of operation of each rural branch for consistency, considered geographic proximity, and reviewed population served and usage statistics (visitors, circulation, program attendance, public feedback) to inform changes to hours.

As a result of this analysis, staff identified opportunities to improve rural hours overall, to improve access to rural branches on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays, and to provide a consistent number of open evenings across rural locations (i.e., each branch open two evenings per week). Changes represent a net increase of 39 hours for rural branches as noted below, and in Table 1: Rural Branch Tiers and Current and New Weekly Hours.

- **No changes to Tiers 1 and 5:** The hours and staffing levels for the Fitzroy Harbour and Carp branches will remain unchanged, as they are currently sufficient to meet client usage and needs.
- **Tier 2:** Changes to hours for Greely (currently 32 hours) and Richmond (currently 38.5 hours) branches will respond to increased usage and the need for more programming. Changes will further align hours for these branches with smaller local branches, including Monday morning hours at Richmond and Saturday hours at both branches. Additional staff (approximately 1 full-time equivalent (FTE) at each location) will support increased morning, evening, and weekend programming.

- **Tier 3:** To ensure that communities of similar size have comparable access, hours at Metcalfe Village branch (currently 23 hours) will be increased to match North Gower and Osgoode branches, also part of Tier 3. These changes provide hours over five days a week for Metcalfe, including new Friday hours. No changes to the hours of North Gower are being made. The hours at the Osgoode branch will be adjusted within the existing weekly total to provide consistent service.
- **Tier 4:** Constance Bay (currently 19 hours), Munster (currently 24 hours), and Vernon (currently 18.5 hours) branches will have their hours standardized at 22 hours each to ensure consistent service across branches of similar size, and hours over five days a week for Constance Bay (including new Friday hours) and four days a week for Vernon. While Munster sees a small reduction in hours, this change is offset by the more significant increase in opening hours at relatively proximate locations, and the availability of hours among these locations on six days each week.

These changes underscore the importance of the Spaces service category within the OPL Service Delivery Framework (OPLB-2022-0503). By improving the hours of rural branches, residents can access an OPL location six days a week (Monday-Saturday) from morning to evening, ensuring more clients in more communities can benefit from library services.

Table 1: Rural Branch Tiers and Current and New Weekly Hours

Tier	Branch	Current Hours	New Hours	Difference
1	Carp	51.5	51.5	0
2	Greely	32	48	+16
2	Richmond	38.5	48	+9.5
3	Metcalfe Village	23	32	+9
3	North Gower	32	32	0
3	Osgoode	32	32	0
4	Constance Bay	19	22	+3
4	Munster	24	22	-2
4	Vernon	18.5	22	+3.5
5	Fitzroy Harbour	12	12	0
Net increase to rural branch weekly hours				+39

Programming Opportunities

Following the review of changes to hours of operation, staff examined the opportunities for enhanced programming in rural communities. This involved several elements designed to align with community demographics, such as age, literacy levels, primary language, and interests. Opportunities considered:

- The number of programs;
- The frequency of programs; and,
- A variety of programs for all ages in alignment with demographics.

Rural branches currently offer one or two early literacy programs per week (e.g., babytimes or family storytimes), seasonal programming for March Break and the TD Summer Reading Club (e.g., TD SRC), and some self-guided or community-led adult or older adult programming (e.g., book clubs). At the Greely and Richmond branches, programming is particularly well-attended, with an average of 14-19 participants per program.

Capacity to offer age-based programs is limited and requires an increase in both hours and staffing. There are opportunities to engage with local youth, offering regular monthly programs at Greely, Richmond, and Vernon branches. Adult programming is offered between 1-3 times per month in some rural branches, and these offerings can be increased to 2-5 times per month with additional resources. In addition, there are some branches that currently have no capacity to offer programming.

Staff have identified specific opportunities to augment programming designed to meet the needs of each community. Overall, programming changes will include:

- Additional early literacy programming at convenient weekday morning or evening, or Saturday, timeslots.
- Additional seasonal programming;
- New programs for all ages;
- More frequent programming at four branches (Constance Bay, Greely, Metcalfe Village, Richmond);
- Outreach with schools and other groups, and the potential to build on existing community relationships and partnerships, including the City's Recreation, Culture, and Facility Services (RCFS); and,

- Regular early literacy programs and other programming with Constance Bay branch staff.

These changes will create more consistent services, expand program offerings, improve access, and increase opportunities for employees to engage with their communities directly. Most importantly, the changes will be tailored to the interests and needs of the community. These changes underline the importance of the “Programs” service category within the OPL Service Delivery Framework, by supporting greater frequency, more variety, and the ability of staff to plan, promote, coordinate and/or deliver high quality programs for all ages.

Resource Requirements

Changes to hours, and additional programming, must be supported by adequate human resources. Many rural branches operate with a single employee on duty at a given time, limiting the ability of staff to engage meaningfully with clients and community groups, and to offer programming.

A total of 3.3 FTE is required to support rural library service delivery, including 1.42 new FTE, and the addition of extra hours (augmenting existing staff schedules) representing 1.88 FTE. The financial cost is estimated at \$330K, covering salaries, wages, and benefits.

Implementing these changes to staffing models will ensure that OPL’s services remain responsive and high-quality, fostering a stronger connection between the library, its clients, and the community. These changes underscore the importance of the “Expertise” service category within the OPL Service Delivery Framework, by ensuring branches are appropriately resourced to provide client services including early literacy support, readers’ advisory, technology support, and information needs.

Conclusion

In summary, staff have developed a plan to increase rural branch hours by 39 hours per week, considering usage and feedback received from the community. Staff intend to implement the new hours effective Monday, March 3, 2025. A complete implementation plan, including human resources, operational, and communications considerations, will be developed to align with this timeline.

With this fulsome review and significant change to rural hours, bringing greater consistency and addressing feedback received over the last few years, the work of the Hours of Operation Ad hoc Committee identified as key for this term of Board is complete, and the Committee can be disbanded. Any potential future adjustments to hours this term of Board are anticipated to be minor and within the delegated authority of staff. In the subsequent term of Board, staff will consider the involvement of trustees in advising regarding proposed future changes. OPL thanks trustees for their time, expertise, and guidance on the Committee.

CONSULTATION

The report draws on public consultations completed as part of the 2022 Hours of Operation Survey and community feedback in the lead up to the 2024 Rural Summit.

The Board Hours of Operation Ad hoc Committee, as well as Library Senior Management Team, branch managers, and rural staff were also consulted.

The councillors for Wards 1 Orléans East-Cumberland, 5 West Carleton – March, 19 Orléans South-Navan, 20 Osgoode, and 21 Rideau-Jock have been advised of changes within their ward, as applicable.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Ottawa Public Library supports and considers the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (2005)* in its operations. There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

BOARD PRIORITIES

The changes to rural hours of operation and staffing models support the strategic priority to redesign the library experience, specifically to identify and address barriers to service.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS IMPLICATIONS

The changes to rural hours considered a variety of data, including active cardholder rates, usage (gate counts, circulation, and program attendance), as well as applied the Board-approved evaluation process to make evidenced-based decisions about hours of operation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The report outlines the financial requirement of \$330,000 to support the envisioned service delivery to rural communities. Through a financial efficiencies review, staff have identified the required resources that will be redirected to address the structural deficiencies in rural library service delivery.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no technology implications associated with this report.

DISPOSITION

Upon approval of this report, staff will:

1. Develop an implementation and communication plan for changes to staffing and the changes to hours in the rural branches, effective March 3, 2025; and,
2. Close out business for the Hours of Operation Ad hoc Committee, effective immediately.