



Ottawa Public Library Board

Minutes

Meeting #:	19
Date:	February 11, 2025
Time:	5 pm
Location:	Champlain Room, 110 Laurier Avenue West, and by electronic participation
Present:	Chair Matthew Luloff, Vice-Chair Kathy Fisher, Trustee Jessica Bradley, Trustee Alison Crawford, Trustee Rawlson King, Trustee Catherine Kitts, Trustee Harvey A. Slack, Trustee Adam Smith
Absent:	Trustee Mary-Rose Brown

1. Notices and meeting information for meeting participants and the public
 Notices and meeting information are attached to the agenda and minutes, including: availability of simultaneous interpretation and accessibility accommodations; *in camera* meeting procedures; information items not subject to discussion; personal information disclaimer for correspondents and public speakers; notices regarding minutes; and remote participation details.
 Note:
 1. The meeting began at 5:02 pm.
 2. Trustee Bradley participated electronically.
2. Recognition of the Territory of the Anishinābe Algonquin Nation
 Chair Luloff welcomed member and attendees to the Ottawa Public Library Board meeting and delivered the Indigenous land acknowledgment statement.

3. Roll Call

The Chair proceeded with roll call by voice in random order.

4. Regrets

Trustee Mary-Rose Brown sent her regrets.

5. Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were filed.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

6.1 Minutes 18 - Tuesday, 3 December 2024

Results: Carried

7. Communications

There were no communications.

8. Chair's Verbal Update

Ādisōke Update

Chair Luloff provided an update regarding Ādisōke, noting the amazing – and visible! - construction progress as some of the exterior scaffolding is removed. He added that framing and drywalling of interior walls is also now commencing. In closing, he encouraged everyone to follow the project at Ādisōke.ca or on the Central branch webpage on OPL's website.

Volunteer Recognition

Chair Luloff recognized Linda McDonald; a long-time, dedicated, and effective community volunteer for more than 15 years, who has offered her time and boundless energy to the Rockcliffe Park Book Sale of the Ottawa Public Library (OPL). The sale, organized by the Rockcliffe Park Residents' Association Library Committee, is more than a book sale: it is a social hub for the community that also raises thousands of dollars for activities at the Rockcliffe Park branch and in the broader community. Linda brought strong organizational skills and a smile to her role as the book sale team leader from 2017 until last year, and she remains a valued volunteer since her retirement from the leadership role. Trustee King added that Ms. McDonald is an extraordinary individual and a driving force behind the Book Sale, transforming it into one of the community's most successful fundraising initiatives with fellow members of her dedicated quartet (Jane, Kevin, and Caroline), raising over \$50,000 for OPL in 2019 alone. He noted that what truly sets Linda apart is her ability to lead with a perpetual smile

and to bring out the best in others. He added that although Ms. McDonald humbly deflects praise to her team, she has created a sustainable framework meticulous planning and volunteer engagement that will continue to benefit OPL for years to come. On behalf of the Ottawa Public Library Board, Trustee King extended his deepest gratitude to Linda for her 15 years of exceptional service and for making OPL and the community a better place; he provided Ms. McDonald with a token of appreciation for her service on behalf of the Board.

Chair Luloff thanked Ms. McDonald for her contribution to OPL's success and to her community.

Pot-Pourri 2024

Chair Luloff noted the publication of Pot-Pourri 2024, the anthology that collects the winning entries in the annual Awesome Authors writing contest in a published volume. Over 140 people attended the launch in December; contest winners and their families bubble tea, cake, and a journal-decorating station for youth, as well as opportunities for lots of photos. Chair Luloff thanked the Friends of the OPL Association, who support the contest and the anthology every year. In closing, he mentioned the 2025 edition of the Awesome Authors writing contest was launched on January 15, and that more information is available on the OPL website.

Freedom to Read Week

Chair Luloff reminded trustees that his favourite time of the year, Freedom to Read Week, was fast approaching. Noting that OPL and the Board are deeply committed to intellectual freedom as the foundation for an informed, democratic society, he added that he was looking forward to the upcoming staff presentation this evening on this topic. As a sneak preview of upcoming programming for Freedom to Read Week, Chair Luloff announced that OPL will be hosting a guest speaker discussing the censorship of comics and graphic novels. He commented that even Archie, one of his favourite comic books, had been censored. In closing, he noted that the Board joins him in appreciating their freedom to read this month and year-round – both as a fundamental human right and as an immense privilege.

MOTION OPL 20250211/1

That the Ottawa Public Library Board receive the Chair's verbal update for information.

Results: Received

9. Chief Librarian/Chief Executive Officer's Report

Fund Development Update

Sonia Bebbington, Chief Librarian and CEO (CL/CEO) announced another recent donation of \$300,000 to the Unlock Potential campaign for the Central branch at Ādisōke from the Crabtree Foundation in memory of Ms. Dorothy L. Davidson. She said this is the second donation in two years, which brings total contribution by the Crabtree Foundation to \$500,000. She expressed OPL's deep gratitude for this gift, a powerful testament to the vital role our library plays in the community and to individuals such as Ms. Davidson. Ms. Bebbington highlighted Ms. Davidson's story, which was shared in additional detail at the February 13, 2024, OPL Board meeting, including her service at the Crabtree Foundation and her use of OPL's Main branch. In closing, Ms. Bebbington expressed her delight in joining the Crabtree Foundation in celebrating this legacy of Dorothy Davison's library love!

Black History Month

Ms. Bebbington announced that OPL will be celebrating Black History Month by honouring the stories and lived experiences of Black Canadians past and present with educational and cultural programs and resources – both online and in person. On February 7, Mélodie Joseph, author of the *La Semeuse de Vents* series, explored Afrofuturism with an attentive audience at la Nouvelle Scène, and on February 25 at 7:00 pm, OPL will host a screening of [*Bridging the Gap: Legacy in Harmony*](#), a film about Black artistic heritage, in partnership with CBC. The screening will be followed by a musical performance and a discussion with the director, Fitch Jean. More details about this and other programs planned for Black History Month can be found on the OPL website.

Provincial Election

Noting the upcoming provincial election, Ms. Bebbington underlined that trustees and staff have been provided with information regarding the non-partisan role of OPL and the Board during this period. With respect to the Board's role in advocacy, she added that staff will review recently released material co-developed by the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and will share relevant information with the Board. Support from local stakeholders, decision-makers, and leaders is essential to ensuring the continued success of public libraries in Ontario.

Family Day Closure

Ms. Bebbington indicated OPL and its branches will be closed Monday, February 17th, to celebrate the importance of families, family life, chosen families, and her favorite family event: family game nights!

MOTION OPL 20250211/2

That the Ottawa Public Library Board receive the Chief Librarian/CEO's report for information.

Results: Received

10. Reports

10.1 Brand Strategy - Phase 2 Strategy and Development

File Number: OPLB-2025-0211-10.1

MOTION OPL 20250211/3

That the Ottawa Public Library Board:

1. **Approve the Brand Strategy (Document 1), as further described in this report; and,**
2. **Direct staff to proceed to Phase 3 - Design and Visual Identity and report back to the Board in Q3 2025.**

Results: Carried

Although this item was initially carried on consent, Chair Luloff subsequently noted dissent from Trustee Adam Smith at approximately 5:45 pm prior to the Board resolving in camera for item 11.

10.2 Increase to Contracts Requiring Board Approval: Integrated Library System

File Number: OPLB-2025-0211-10.2

MOTION OPL 20250211/4

That the Ottawa Public Library Board approve an increase to the five-year agreement with SirsiDynix for the Integrated Library System, as further described in this report.

Results: Carried

10.3 Intellectual Freedom Annual Report: 2024 Challenges

File Number: OPLB-2025-0211-10.3

Sonia Bebbington, CL/CEO, Sarah Macintyre, Division Manager, Client Services, and Alexandra Yarrow, Program Manager, Board and Strategic Services presented the Board with a high-level summary of the challenges

to intellectual freedom received by OPL in 2024 (*held on file with the Chief Librarian/Chief Executive Officer*).

Trustee Slack left the meeting at 5:23 pm and returned at 5:27 pm.

The presentation included:

- A summary of the foundations of intellectual freedom at OPL;
- A chart highlighting the numbers of formal challenges (requests for reconsideration, or R4Rs) in the last decade;
- An overview of the 11 formal R4Rs received in 2024;
- An update regarding the review of missing collection items and previous decisions about challenges;
- A summary of recent and upcoming initiatives to support intellectual freedom (staff training, upcoming programs); and,
- A reminder of relevant Canadian resources.

The Chair opened the floor to questions from trustees regarding the report.

Trustee King inquired whether OPL employs strategies to balance intellectual freedom with community concerns, particularly regarding children's materials. Sonia Bebbington, Chief Librarian and CEO commented that the OPL understands the importance of engaging in respectful conversation with clients, whose concerns about material are often founded in deeply-held personal beliefs or experience. She added that staff undertake a very thorough and thoughtful analysis of any item challenged. In closing, she added that there are a number of ways in which OPL strives to ensure its spaces are welcoming and comfortable for children and families.

With respect to specific strategies to support families with young children, Ms. Yarrow indicated that when a child gets a library card, the parent must sign for that card, providing an opportunity for a conversation with staff about the importance of a library visit as a family activity and about the importance of parental responsibility, including talking to their children about what they are reading. Ms. Yarrow said that parents wishing for greater control may, for example, request a library account type that restricts their child's access to the Internet at the library. She added that staff are, as always, key supports: when a parent or caregiver is struggling to explain challenging topics to children, employees can share reading

lists, speak from their own expertise, or recommend other tools such as Media Smarts for additional resources.

Trustee King thanked staff for the thorough report and response, which demonstrates an appropriate balance in place between upholding intellectual freedom and responding thoughtful community feedback. He said the library's commitment to ensuring that traditionally marginalized perspectives are represented while maintaining its commitment to intellectual freedom is particularly noteworthy.

Trustee King also noted his appreciation of the comprehensive tracking and reporting of challenges, which helps inform future operational and policy decisions, and provides local context for the broader social trends being observed in Canada and the United States. He inquired how OPL challenge rates compare to similarly sized public library systems in Canada, and Ms. Yarrow noted in reply that OPL's rates have been relatively consistent with others, such as Toronto Public Library, though their 2024 numbers have not yet been released. Nationally, the Centre for Free Expression Challenges Database listed 95 challenges to library services overall in 2024, but reporting by individual libraries remains very inconsistent. She also provided data from the American Library Association (ALA) which noted 414 attempts to censor over 1,000 unique titles in the United States in 2024, lower than 2023 numbers. In closing, Ms. Yarrow noted that North American public libraries continue to report incidences of what is called "soft censorship," "silent bans," or protests and other organized activity, in addition to formal challenges.

Trustee Crawford noted she had the opportunity to attend the Ontario Library Association (OLA) Super Conference in 2025 and attended a talk by James Turk, Director of the Centre for Free Expression at Toronto Metropolitan University, which was very well attended. She noted that Mr. Turk underlined the importance of supportive library boards, particularly when staff deal with difficult challenges. Mr. Turk also spoke about organized campaigns in several provinces to challenge books with LGBTQIA2S+ content, as well as the unique challenges of school libraries whose staff often do not have the resources to navigate challenges by parents. She thanked staff for the recent staff training offered at OPL, and noted in closing that she is very proud to be a trustee on a public library board that has a very strong commitment to intellectual freedom.

Ms. Bebbington thanked the trustee for her comments, and added that OPL's position on intellectual freedom is important, upholding it requires

the ongoing support of the Board, and staff appreciate the Board's support.

Vice-Chair Fisher inquired whether the employee training mentioned in the presentation was mandatory, and what kind of feedback had been received. Ms. Yarrow indicated the eLearning module (Part 1) is designed in collaboration with the Library's Senior Management Team that consists of a video that employees watch, and then engage in follow-up with their supervisor or manager; this module is mandatory for all employees. The in-person session (Part 2) is compulsory for employees in specific roles, and is delivered by a team of two facilitators as a full day session. She said over 300 employees attended the in-person sessions; an anonymous feedback form is emailed to individuals after the training is complete, and employees may also share feedback with their supervisor via a verbal debrief. Feedback forms are reviewed by the Employee Experience Team under Anna Basile, Deputy CEO and Division Manager, Corporate Services, and the feedback is actioned accordingly and shared with the facilitators.

Trustee Smith inquired regarding the number of individual titles that the 11 requests for reconsideration represent, and Ms. Macintyre replied that the 11 requests were for 11 unique titles. Trustee Smith further inquired whether staff could share the list of titles, and Ms. Macintyre and Ms. Yarrow confirmed that the list is provided as Document 1 of the report before the Board this evening.

Trustee Smith subsequently inquired regarding the practices for client suggestions to purchase, specifically whether there was ambiguity in the applicable policies that could allow for decisions that might be ideologically slanted one way or another. He also asked that a copy of the applicable policy be made available to him. Ms. Macintyre indicated that OPL's Suggestion to Purchase Form is located on the OPL website, and links to the applicable policy, the Board-approved Content Services Framework. The materials selection criteria in the Framework are consistently applied by staff when reviewing suggestions to purchase. In closing, Ms. Macintyre offered to meet with the trustee if he wished to discuss additional elements of the Framework, to which Trustee Smith agreed.

There being no further discussion, the report was RECEIVED as presented.

MOTION OPL 20250211/5

That the Ottawa Public Library Board receive this report for information.

Results: Received

10.4 2024 Fund Development Update

File Number: OPLB-2025-0211-10.4

MOTION OPL 20250211/6

That the Ottawa Public Library Board receive this report for information.

Results: Received

11. In Camera Items

That, in accordance with the *Public Libraries Act*, the Ottawa Public Library Board resolve in camera pursuant to 16.1 (4)(d), Labour Relations or Employee Negotiations, to receive a Labour Relations Update and with respect to the mandate for Collective Bargaining - Reporting out date: not reporting out / Upon Collective Agreement Ratification

Moved by Vice-Chair Kathy Fisher:

MOTION OPL 20250211/7

That, in accordance with the *Public Libraries Act*, the Ottawa Public Library Board resolve in camera to receive a Labour Relations Update and with respect to the mandate for Collective Bargaining.

Results: Carried

Upon resuming in open session at 7:00 p.m., the Chair advised the following:

Please let the record show that the Board went *In Camera/Closed Session*. The matters dealt with were twofold: the Board received a Labour Relations update, and provided direction to staff regarding the mandate for collective bargaining.

The details of this item cannot be reported out for the reasons stated previously. **No votes were taken and no decision made in camera**; the Board endorsed the proposed mandate for collective bargaining negotiations in closed session.

12. Information Previously Distributed

12.1 Memo - Service Delivery Framework Implementation

12.2 Memo - OPL Board 2024 Meeting Evaluation Questionnaire Results

13. Notices of Motions (For Consideration at Subsequent Meeting)

There were no Notices of Motion.

14. Inquiries

There were no Inquiries.

15. Other Business

Trustee Kitts shared that she is currently reading [“Health for All”](#), by Jane Philpott and [“Empire of Pain”](#), by Patrick Radden Keefe. Craig Ginther, Division Manager, Facility and Technology Services shared that he is reading [“Real Ones”](#), by Katherena Vermette. Julie Tremblay, Library Board Assistant is reading [“Le Leadership Bienveillant”](#), by Josée Fiset, and is listening to the audiobook version of [“After Life”](#), by Gayle Form. Cathy Bourgoin, Administrative Assistant to the Deputy CEO is reading [“The House of Eve”](#), by Sadequa Johnson. Trustee King shared that he is reading [“Panic”](#), by Michael Lewis. Chair Luloff is reading Angela Merkel’s autobiography, [“Freedom”](#). The Chair thanked everyone for sharing their reading recommendations and encouraged everyone to fall in love with a book on Valentines Day.

The Chair also wished everyone a Happy New Year as this is the Board’s first meeting of 2025. He noted that he was looking forward to a great year ahead.

16. Adjournment

Be It Resolved that the Ottawa Public Library Board meeting be adjourned at 7:07 pm.

17. Next Meeting

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Original signed by Matthew Luloff,
Chair

Sonia Bebbington, Recording
Secretary