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Report to / Rapport au:

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

June 10, 2025 / 10 juin 2025

Submitted by / Soumis par:

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SUBJECT: Brand Strategy Phase 3 - Visual Identity

OBJET: Stratégie de marque phase 3 – identité visuelle

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Ottawa Public Library Board:

- 1. Approve the new visual identity (icon and wordmark), as presented; and,**
- 2. Direct staff to plan for an official public launch and coordinated roll-out in 2026.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

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

- 1. Approuve la nouvelle identité visuelle (icône et mot-symbole) telle quelle;
et**
- 2. Demande au personnel de planifier le lancement officiel et de coordonner
la diffusion en 2026.**

BACKGROUND

In keeping with the *Public Libraries Act, RSO 1990, c.P.44* (“the Act”), other relevant statutes, laws, and good governance practices, the Ottawa Public Library (“OPL”) Board (“OPLB” or “the Board”) holds accountability for the full range of decisions affecting the organization. The Board approaches its role using a policy or strategy model of governance that focuses on setting strategic directions and objectives, making decisions on major projects, and monitoring performance. The Board’s attention focuses primarily on the long-term needs and goals of the organization, rather than the administrative or operational details.

As per Board Policy 001 – Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Trustees, trustees are responsible for defining OPL’s purpose and direction; reviewing and approving major strategies, plans, and decisions; and advocating on behalf of OPL. In alignment with approval of significant strategic initiatives, Board Policy 002 – Delegation of Authority, Item #28, states that the Board retains authority to “Approve OPL corporate brand and visual identity” specifically the OPL logo and colour scheme.

The 2020 - 2023 Strategic Plan (OPLB-2019- 0601), approved by the Board in June 2019, included the direction to “Promote the Value of OPL” with an aligned priority to “Develop and implement a brand strategy.” In September 2022, OPL engaged the services of an external consultant, Intent, a communications and design firm that has extensive experience working with non-profits, the public sector, and charities (including several Ontario public libraries) to develop a creative and forward-thinking new brand and visual identity, completed through three distinct phases of work:

1. Research and Discovery
2. Strategy and Development
3. Design and Visual Identity

In February 2023, an Ad hoc Committee of the Board was established to provide staff with guidance regarding the development of a distinct and compelling brand identity, including advice on engagement components in Phase 1, on the strategy / approach components of Phase 2, and on design and visual identity components in Phase 3. Trustees Crawford and Smith, along with Chair Luloff as ex-officio, were appointed to the Ad hoc Committee.

When the Strategic Plan for 2023 -2028 was approved by the Board in October 2023, the strategic priority to develop and implement a brand strategy remained under the updated strategic direction: "Demonstrate the Value of OPL" (OPLB-2023-1010-10.2). To note, other priorities included in the plan are supported by a strong brand strategy, including enhancing fund development; strengthening community relationships and advocacy; and integrating an ongoing commitment to intellectual freedom into all OPL activities. In April 2024, staff presented to the Board the results of the Brand Strategy Phase 1 – Research and Discovery (OPLB-2024-0409-11.2) and were directed to proceed to Phase 2 – Strategy and Development. In February 2025, staff presented the Brand Strategy – Phase 2 (OPLB-2025-0211-10.1) and were directed to proceed to Phase 3, development of the visual identity. Staff committed to return to the Board in Q3 with the proposed visual identity.

In February 2025, the Board's new committee structure came into effect, with brand strategy falling under the purview of the Governance Standing Committee (members: Trustees Bradley, Crawford, Slack, and Chair Luloff). On April 23, 2025, staff presented to the Committee the recommended visual identity (icon and tagline), with consensus to proceed to the Board with the recommended option.

The purpose of this report is to seek Board approval of the Visual Identity - specifically the logo and colour scheme (as per the DOA). The Visual Identity will be presented to the Board at the June 10, 2025, meeting on-screen for the first time publicly. Following the Board meeting, the presentation containing details and images of the visual identity will be held on file with the Chief Executive Officer.

DISCUSSION

OPL provides valuable services to individuals, families, and communities, and there is merit in updating the brand to better reflect OPL's value, and as a means to encourage more residents to use its services. A brand is more than a logo or slogan: it is the consistent and recognizable feeling that is evoked by these elements. However, it is the visual identity, the logo and slogan, that are often most easily recognized and associated with the organization.

OPL's current brand and visual identity were established post-municipal amalgamation in 2001. The logo was designed in-house leveraging the City of Ottawa logo and colour scheme. The horizontal logo integrates the wordmark in both English and French, with a

design element. The horizontal, integrated format poses challenges in terms of sizing and legibility when used in its entirety, and no longer meets accessibility requirements. The logo has been particularly challenging to use with new technologies and social media to which staff developed a secondary, simplified visual marker, which has not been approved by the Board as part of OPL's official visual identity.

With respect to the tagline, OPL does not currently have an official tagline. The phrase "If it's out there, it's in here!" was created as part of a broad marketing campaign that launched in 2010, and the phrase has featured prominently on library cards issued since that time.

In Phase 1 – Research and Discovery, staff sought information regarding recognition of the visual identity, asking both clients and non-clients to identify OPL's logo (without the wordmark). Respondents were provided with six options, including OPL's primary and secondary icons, the City of Ottawa's icon, and three other icons (two used by common library vendors and one used by an OPL partner). More than 60 percent of clients correctly identified OPL's primary icon, with 30 percent identifying the secondary icon. Among non-clients, the responses were 51 percent and 19 percent, respectively. Furthermore, 27 percent of clients and 29 percent of non-clients selected the City of Ottawa icon. Staff learned that the OPL visual identity can be confused or conflated with the City of Ottawa visual identity. Most commonly, the confusion stems from the use of a similar stylized "O" and a similar colour scheme. A substantial gap in brand recognition was identified between clients and non-clients, overall, with non-clients being 10 percent less likely to recognize any of the presented logos as OPL's.

The rate of recognition among clients is acceptable, though the rate is approximately seven (7) percentage points lower than the benchmark brand recognition rate for aided awareness (that is, the percentage of respondents who are aware of the brand when asked) for an established brand. Recognition among non-clients is far less than the benchmark. Typical aided recognition rates for well-established brands are between 70-90 percent. The benchmark for unaided awareness / recall (that is, how many people can recall the brand without being prompted) is between 30 – 50%.

The tagline / slogan was less recognizable by clients at 45 percent. Most client respondents either did not recall seeing/hearing the slogan or were unsure. Among non-clients, recognition was approximately one quarter.

In terms of library experience, the Phase 1 research findings showed that across clients, non-clients, and employees, OPL is perceived as a place that inspires connection, a place that is integral to the community, and employees agreed that connecting people is one aspect of the organization's mission that best reflects their work. Both clients and non-clients associate indicated that the word "curiosity" is closely associated with libraries, with 40% of non-clients and 63% of clients stating that OPL should make them feel curious.

In Phase 2 – staff developed a brand strategy, featuring a brand promise and attributes including the following concepts: to promote wonder, spark imagination, provide connection, remain trusted, and protect client access. The brand strategy included consideration of a brand voice – one that is empowering and inclusive.

Visual identity

Leaning on the results from the research and the Board-approved brand strategy, staff worked with the consultant, Intent, to develop an authentic and powerful visual identity for OPL; a brand that captures attention, builds emotional connection, and communicates a clear and intentional identity that is meaningfully reflective of the organization. The visual identity aligns with OPL's mission (we inspire learning, spark curiosity, and connect people), vision (to build community and transform lives), and values (Community, Inclusion, Integrity, Intellectual Freedom, Literacy), and reflects the concepts within the brand strategy.

With the brand promise and attributes in mind, six options for the visual identity were developed, each including an associated tagline. All design options were developed to meet accessibility standards across multiple applications. These options were presented to an internal team for review, who assessed each option against such considerations as visual appeal, colour scheme, visual associations to other brands, connection with findings from the research phase, and ability to adapt the tagline into French. The six original options were narrowed down to three, which included refinements to both the tagline, icon, and colours (including consideration of both "warm" and "cool" colour options). These three options were presented to the Board Governance Standing Committee, along with a recommended visual identity.

The recommended identity, known as **Tapestry**, features a stylized icon that graphically explores the notion of the 'third space' and the library's contribution to connected

communities, and to a strengthened sense of social fabric, reflective of the ever evolving and continued significance of a library within its community. The wordmark typography featured with the icon is **PP Neue Montréal** *Designed in Canada (Montréal)* - a versatile, timeless Sans Grotesque font with attributes making it work well as a display font.

The recommended tagline / slogan leverages the key concepts of the brand strategy and reflects the desired brand voice. It is an empowering statement that calls clients to action. Both the English and French versions bring together several of the findings from Phase 1, reflecting OPL's role in fostering connection and promoting a culture of reading, the boundless options available at the library across services and service channels, and encouraging an openness of spirit aligned with OPL's position on intellectual freedom.

Connect with Curiosity

La curiosité sans limites

Next Steps

If approved by the OPL Board, staff will proceed with two additional components to support the brand:

Brand Equity: Staff have been working to develop consistent, meaningful measurements to assess the brand value and impact. The focus will be on ongoing brand perception, recognition / awareness, and overall sentiment post-launch of the visual identity. The aim, in terms of branding, is for OPL to be top-of-mind for residents, clients, media, and other stakeholders, with anticipated outcomes of increased cardholders, client usage, etc.

These measurements will be internal (administrative) measurements used to support the various tactics associated with the brand strategy. Staff expect that the measurements will be integrated into the overall Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) as part of a future review.

Brand Implementation: Staff are developing a phased, multi-audience rollout approach that features integrated and overlapping tactics to reach the most Ottawans and deliver maximum impact for the investment of resources and time. To ensure the most effective integration, the brand roll-out will be integrated into OPL's overarching communications

plan and embedded into the culture; a brand style guide is in development. The objective of the initial roll-out is to make a bold statement, re/introducing Ottawa Public Library and positioning OPL as a modern, dynamic public service. This will be followed by integration into various aspects of operations. The roll-out plans include a variety of activities in line with the following:

- Internal engagement (Q4 2025) – engaging and motivating employees to learn about, and get excited for, the new brand. This includes ensuring that all employees understand the brand, and the integration of key elements into other OPL activities.
- Public and media launch (Q1 2026) – introduction of the new brand to the community, including partners.
- Marketing campaign – integrated public-facing marketing campaign.
- Digital outreach and engagement – broadening audience reach through coordinated and intentional outreach across various digital channels.
- Public and media relations – building awareness through deliberate, coordinated relations with public, partners, and media.

Vis a vis the visual identity specifically, if approved, a phased and measured approach will be required to update assets such as signage, and other visual elements.

As part of the implementation, staff will provide updates to the Governance Standing Committee.

CONSULTATION

In addition to the extensive client research and ad-hoc consultation conducted in prior phases of this initiative, the development of this report included internal consultation with staff with expertise in communications, and graphic, website, and physical space design, as well as members of the OPL Board's Governance Standing Committee (Trustees Bradley, Crawford, Slack, and Chair Luloff (ex officio)).

Trustees received a presentation of three visual brand and tagline options, including the recommended option. Trustee feedback was received, and there was consensus regarding the recommended visual identity.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Ottawa Public Library complies with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (2005)* in its operations. (OPL) is committed to providing inclusive and barrier-free access to information, documentation, programs, and services. As noted throughout the report, approval of the new visual identity will ensure OPL's brand is visually accessible.

BOARD PRIORITIES

This report aligns with the Board-approved Strategic Plan, Direction #3 – Demonstrate the Value of OPL.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS IMPLICATIONS

Business analysis implications are included throughout the report, including commitments to refining brand equity metrics.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of this report are associated with the roll-out and implementation of the brand, including visual identity components. Brand equity and implementation elements as per the Discussion section of this report will be absorbed in OPL's existing budget. In addition, funding of \$250K for the updated signage to reflect a new visual identity was approved by the Board in the 2025 budget. Upon approval of the visual identity, staff will proceed to secure official costings for signage updates, and will seek additional funding through the budget process, if required.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications associated with this report. OPL's official name remains as per the legal name noted on the organization's charitable registration with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), in compliance with the naming convention identified in the *PLA*.

Staff will work with the City's Legal Services team to ensure that the new visual identity (icon and tagline) is registered as the official mark of the Ottawa Public Library Board.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The risk implications associated with this report pertain specifically to the potential for brand confusion as it relates to updating physical assets. Recognizing the importance of ensuring a cohesive look and feel across all OPL channels, staff will strive to balance timeliness and fiscal prudence in the implementation. A brand implementation plan, including communications and marketing, is described above in the “Discussion” section.

To mitigate the risk, the strategy is based on research and extensive public input, and staff will work to prioritize those aspects of signage and visual identity that are most easily updated such as digital assets.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

Technology implications associated with this report include the re-branding of OPL’s website: bibliooottawalibrary.ca, and imagery associated with third-party resources (such as CloudLibrary and Libby). In April 2025, the website platform was updated to a newer version that will allow for a seamless transition to the new visual identity.

DISPOSITION

If approved staff will prepare for the official launch and implementation of the new brand, as noted in the “Next Steps” section of the report.