



**SUBJECT: Climate Lens and Emission Reductions**

**OBJET: Perspective climatique et réductions des émissions**

**From:** Bebbington, Sonia <sonia.bebbington@bibliooottawalibrary.ca>

**Sent:** January 09, 2026 3:38 PM

**To:** John D Reid

**Cc:** Ottawa Public Library Board\C.A. de la bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa;  
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**Subject:** Climate lens and emission reductions

Dear John,

Thank you for raising this important point. We agree that libraries have a role to play in assisting in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We are not undertaking a full-scale study of library operations and greenhouse gas emissions at this time. However, we are committed to considering sustainability in our decision-making and exploring practical ways to reduce our environmental impact where possible.

### **Greenhouse gas emissions of public library operations**

Public libraries, including OPL, contribute to greenhouse gas emissions in the provision of core services, including:

- **Branches:**
  - **Operations:** computer usage by both visitors and staff, use of online records management tools.
  - **Facilities:** Operating buildings is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Heating, Cooling, and Ventilation (HVAC), lighting, appliances, electronics, water use, waste management, as well as maintenance and renovation projects all contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Collections:** Print materials: paper manufacturing, printing, transportation, and disposal all contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Digital content (ebooks, streaming and downloading, 24/7 access to services) also has a negative impact on the climate, via energy use in data storage and transmission.
- **Fleet:** The use of gas-powered vehicles to deliver collections (holds – our most popular service – shared collections, and new items) all over the city has an impact.

**How do public libraries balance some of those emissions?**

Although there do not appear to be formal scientific studies of the balance of public library emissions versus positive climate impact or offsets, we believe that OPL's, and other libraries' positive climate impact as a shared resource and shared service is likely higher than the impact of its operational emissions, though more action can certainly be taken. This has been described as the "carbon handprint" and discussed in a Finnish article from 2021 ([Bringing environmental awareness of public libraries to the 2020s](#)).

More specifically at OPL, we consider climate impact on an ongoing basis within different areas of our operations.

- **Facilities:** Climate considerations are increasingly incorporated into new facility design and renovations:
  - The [Facilities Framework](#) embeds sustainability as a guiding principle, ensuring all facility planning aligns with the City of Ottawa's climate goals. It incorporates green design standards such as energy-efficient fixtures and sustainable materials, and prioritizes locations for new facilities that are within walkable, transit-friendly neighborhoods to reduce carbon emissions. The framework emphasizes lifecycle asset management to minimize waste, flexible and multi-purpose spaces to avoid unnecessary renovation, and the role of libraries as community hubs for resilience during climate-related emergencies. These measures position OPL facilities as environmentally responsible, adaptive to a low-carbon future.
  - OPL receives an annual capital budget for 'Energy Management and Investments' through the City's Asset Management Service. This program aims to systematically identify, select, and prioritize energy efficiency opportunities across City facilities. Project examples include LED lighting conversion, and mechanical retrofits (e.g. HVAC) to reduce energy use.
  - OPL also follows the City's [Climate Change Master Plan](#) and will be incorporating the in-progress Climate Resiliency Strategy.
  - Ādisōke, the home of OPL's new Central branch, was designed with strong environmental sustainability commitments. The building targets LEED Gold certification, incorporating energy-efficient systems, advanced insulation, and smart lighting controls to minimize energy use. It prioritizes sustainable, locally sourced materials, water-saving fixtures, and landscaping to reduce resource consumption. Located in a transit-accessible area with bike-friendly amenities, Ādisōke promotes low-carbon transportation. Its design also addresses climate resilience through stormwater management and durable infrastructure, while offering spaces for public programming on sustainability, reinforcing its role as a community hub for climate awareness.
  - The upcoming Riverside South and Barrhaven branches are planned to also meet LEED certification.

- Multiple measures are implemented to prevent usable surplus assets—such as furniture and IT equipment—from ending up in landfills whenever possible. These actions include sale, donation to charities or community groups, and/or return of surplus materials to suppliers for resale or recycling.
- **Collections:** All libraries, including OPL, support environmental sustainability as a shared resource reducing broader consumption (the “circular economy”): many citizens accessing the same physical books, media, and equipment means that individual purchases are reduced. This, in turn, reduces production and packaging waste and e-waste, carbon emissions associated with manufacturing, shipping, and distributing, and extends the useful life of many materials found in libraries. OPL’s partnership with FOPLA helps divert discarded or donated material not suitable for the collection from landfills, further reducing emissions.
- **Tools:** Access to maker spaces such as the OPL Imagine Space promote maker and repair culture, diverting additional items from landfill or other types of disposal.
- **Fleet:** The specialized nature of the majority of OPL’s fleet (which includes cube vans, trucks, Sprinter vans with after-market alterations, and coach or school bus style bookmobiles) make it complex for OPL to significantly reduce carbon emissions: there is no currently available market option for a greener fleet that would align with OPL’s financial constraints. During each procurement process, greening options are considered (e.g., we are working with City colleagues to explore options for after-market hydrogen conversion) and efficiently planning operations (driving routes) can play a role in supporting climate goals.
- **Programming:** OPL partners with community organizations to deliver climate-related programming, particularly during awareness periods (e.g., Climate Action Week in November); a climate theme is also sometimes applied to other client services, such as a story-time, book display, reading list, or other.

### **How is the library sector working to further climate objectives?**

- Libraries in Canada and internationally are increasingly focusing on the importance of climate resiliency in both operations and services.
- The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Guidelines for Green and Sustainable Libraries provide best practices for libraries to reduce environmental impact and integrate sustainability into operations. These guidelines emphasize: Green building design and energy efficiency; Sustainable library services and social sustainability; Alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- ALA released in summer 2024 the National Climate Action Strategy for Libraries, addressing library spaces as climate hubs, emission reduction measures, and education and awareness initiatives.
- In September 2024, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) and Environment and Climate Change Canada announced that CFLA would receive \$23,000 in federal funding to support the launch of a national climate education campaign targeting public, academic, and school libraries across Canada. The funding will help CFLA support member associations (OPL is a member of the Ontario Library Association and the Canadian Urban Library Council, both CFLA members) to equip libraries to deliver public-facing climate education services and strengthen libraries' role in climate action.
- OPL looks forward to continuing to monitor, learn from, and participate, where appropriate, in sector climate-related initiatives.

Again, thank you for raising this question. We will continue to update the Board as specific initiatives come forward for their consideration, and work with our colleagues at the City to continue expanding greening options particularly in OPL facilities.

Wishing you a wonderful new year,

**Sonia Bebbington**

Chief Executive Officer / Chief Librarian

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