

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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File Number: OPLB-2020-0601

SUBJECT: OPL COVID-19 Recovery Priority 2-5 Plan

OBJET: Plan de relance COVID-19 de la BPO – Priorités 2 à 5

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Ottawa Public Library Board:

- 1. Receive the OPL COVID-19 Recovery Priority 2-5 Plan report;**
- 2. Approve Re-Opening Priorities 2-5, as described in the report;**
- 3. Approve the Branch Re-Opening Waves (locations);**
- 4. Delegate authority to the CEO during Priorities 2-5 to amend opening hours and adjust services as needed, and advise the Board accordingly;**
- 5. Approve the suspension of fees as described in this report, until the “New Normal” Recovery Phase; and,**
- 6. Direct staff to bring forward a report regarding the “New Normal” recovery phase at the latest in Q1 2021.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

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

1. **Prenne connaissance du rapport sur le Plan de relance COVID-19 de la BPO – Priorités 2 à 5;**
2. **Approuve les priorités de reprise 2 à 5, telles qu'elles sont décrites dans le rapport;**
3. **Approuve les phases de réouverture des succursales (emplacements);**
4. **Délègue à la directrice générale le pouvoir de modifier les heures d'ouverture et d'ajuster les services selon les besoins dans le cadre des priorités 2 à 5;**
5. **Approuve la suspension des frais comme le décrit le rapport, jusqu'à la phase de « nouvelle normalité »;**
6. **Demande au personnel de soumettre un rapport sur la phase de « nouvelle normalité » au plus tard au T1 de 2021.**

BACKGROUND

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ottawa Public Library (OPL) aligned with recommendations from Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health (MOH), and closures within the City of Ottawa (City), and closed all branches, Bookmobile, and Homebound Services on March 16. The subsequent Provincial emergency order extended the closure of library facilities until May 19, when library "curbside pick-up or delivery" was included in the Stage 1 re-openings, and June 12, when "limited on-site services, such as computer access and contactless book pickup and drop-off" for libraries was included in the Stage 2 regional re-openings."^{1 2}

¹ "Detailed List of Stage 1 Openings." <https://files.ontario.ca/mof-detailed-list-stage-1-openings-en-2020-05-14.pdf>

² "A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 2." <https://www.ontario.ca/page/framework-reopening-our-province-stage-2#section-9>

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 emergency, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) operated under section 2.2 of the OPL Board policy 002-OPLB Delegation of Authority (DOA). The DOA clearly defines the decisions that must be made by the Board and those that may be made by the CEO or designate. Section 2.2, Emergency or Special Circumstances, states that “in cases of emergency or special circumstances where it is necessary to act within or outside the normal mandate of the OPL, but such action is not strictly within the terms of a delegated authority, the CEO may take such action as necessary to rectify the situation and all such actions shall be reported immediately to the Chair and then the Board.” The CEO provided verbal updates to the Board at the April 14 and May 12 meetings regarding OPL’s COVID-19 response, and a report, the “OPL COVID-19 Recovery Priority 1 Plan,” at the May 28 meeting (OPLB-2020-0501-SP).

As indicated in the OPL COVID-19 Recovery Priority 1 Plan, the recovery plan is complex, unprecedented, and requires redesigning services to accommodate new requirements. The full Recovery Plan has five (5) priorities and includes an initial phase called “Prepare.” Priority 1 was the first component in a gradual return of services, and included contactless pick-up, accepting customer returns, and providing Homebound delivery services to private residences. Throughout Priorities 1-5, OPL’s virtual service offerings will continue, and employees not involved in the provision of contactless services will continue to work at home.

The Priority 1 Plan was developed with the assistance of a Board COVID-19 Ad hoc Committee, including Vice-Chair Fisher and Trustee Brockington, to guide staff in the development of the strategies and plans for resumption of services. Priority 1, “contactless services,” was launched on June 8, when six OPL locations began accepting customer returns and scheduling appointments for customers to pick up holds. Priority 1 was expanded on June 15, when customers began picking up their holds at these six locations. Based on the June 8 provincial announcement, curbside returns and holds pick-up was changed to “contactless returns and holds pick-up,” and a limited number of customers were allowed to enter library buildings to pick up their holds and use the checkout machines. As of July 6, customers will be able to access holds shelves in the branches, picking up and checking out their holds in the same manner that they would have done pre-COVID.

Staff made several observations based on the initial days of providing curbside services: while OPL has control over the roll-out of services to locations, provincial

announcements drive the services we can offer at any given time. Staff also observed that consistency of services is key: customers expect the same services across all open locations. This desire for consistency is supported by informal feedback received by staff on an ongoing basis about OPL services, as well as by feedback received through various customer engagement initiatives undertaken by OPL over the last five years. Lastly, staff observed that many customers were keeping returns for the time being, in order to pick up holds at their home location and return their items at that time. These observations informed the Priorities 2-5 plans.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an overview of OPL's Priorities 2-5 of its Recovery Plan, and seek approval for this plan, which incorporates the new services libraries can provide in Stage 2 of the provincial re-opening plans. This plan outlines the requirements for the provision of library services in the current situation and outlines the elements (priorities and location "waves") that will comprise library services in later stages of the provincial recovery plan.

OPL's recovery plan in response to COVID-19 was developed with a project management approach, and driven by a focus on a safe, gradual return to services, emphasizing employee and customer health.

DISCUSSION

Recommendation 2: Approve Re-Opening Priorities 2-5

Document 1 "Recovery Priorities 2-5 Services" outlines the key services offered in these Priorities. A few elements of these priorities are discussed below.

- Priority 2: "New holds," including the ability to place new requests and suggestions to purchase in the library catalogue, access to recently purchased bestsellers, additional online service options, and expanded services for vulnerable residents. Currently, there is no cap on the maximum number of holds (requested items) customers may have on their account. OPL will be instituting a temporary cap of 20 holds in order to assist in managing the volume of requests and allow materials to get out to customers in a timely and efficient manner.
- Re-Opening Priority 3: "Expanded locations for contactless services," This priority targets opening additional branch locations in "waves" of 5-6 at a time, as well as releasing new materials into the collection and resuming interlibrary loan (ILL) services, depending on availability of partner libraries. The order of expansion is

set out in “Branch Re-Opening Waves” described below and outlined in Document 2. When launching successive waves, the checkout machines will be updated to remove the need for a customer to enter their PIN, in order to facilitate a contactless environment.

- Re-Opening Priorities 4 and 5: “Expanded in-branch services,” including limited in-person browsing, borrowing special collections (musical instruments, access passes), access to creative spaces, and ability to pay fees in person. Additional provincial announcements will provide clarity about which services are offered at which point. Many of the conditions required to launch the services contained in these priorities are still unknown (for example, browsing collections will likely require distancing and limits on the number of customers).

Computer access:

Public computer and internet access in physical branches are valued customer services. Staff observations from many years of providing computer access in physical and mobile branches indicate this access is most urgent for vulnerable populations to access government support services online. Given COVID-19 related requirements for physical distancing, and the layout of many branches, providing consistent, equitable computer access across the city is complex at this time. As a result, OPL will continue to provide Chromebooks and wifi hotspots through various community partnerships at present and continue to plan towards introducing computer usage in the branches.

In the past few months, staff conducted an environmental scan and needs assessment survey to determine community needs and inform priorities for Chromebook and wifi hotspot access. Based on these results, staff delivered Chromebooks and wifi hotspots to community partners working with vulnerable groups. Devices are loaned to these partners via institutional memberships, and all partners have signed an MOU with parameters for safe use. The practice of loaning devices through community partners is consistent with similar programs in Ottawa such as the partnership between United Way East Ontario and Ruckify.

Staff will continue to expand these partnerships for computer access beyond our branch doors, while also continuing to research practices to offer computer access in-branch. There is a gap at present in providing computer access to individuals not affiliated with a community organization, for instance. However, in-branch access to OPL computers

must ensure the safety of employees and customers and meet requirements to sanitize and maintain physical distance.

In-branch programming:

OPL plans and hosts a variety of in-person programs at branches and within the community. Programs may be led by branch staff, offered with a community partner, or provided by paid performers. Programs range from smaller activities with fewer participants, such as book clubs, conversation groups and homework help, to larger group events such as storytimes, workshops, and author readings. Programs require varying sized spaces and amounts of lead time to plan, and many rely on the availability and willingness of partners and paid performers. For instance, larger group events may include signing memoranda of agreements (MOAs) with partners, formal communications plans, and contract negotiations regarding venues. Often, these larger events are planned up to six months in advance.

At this time, in-person programs are not possible as in-branch services are restricted by the provincial guidelines to “computer access and contactless book pickup and drop-off” in the Stage 2 regional re-openings.”³ Furthermore, meeting room spaces, which are used for in-branch programs, are currently being used to quarantine recently returned materials. Assuming a continued requirement to quarantine, these spaces will not be accessible for program use.

Lastly, the current requirement for 2 metres of physical distancing per person limits the capacity of an average-sized meeting room to 8-10 participants at a time. Physical distancing with young children may also prove challenging in enclosed meeting room spaces. While programs are free, there are associated costs to offering programs, ranging from staff time to plan, coordinate, host and promote programs, to negotiating terms of our partnership agreements to performance fees. Many of the agencies and organizations that partner with OPL are currently planning virtual programs only for both the summer and early fall and have not yet committed to a start date for in-person programs. At present, Hamilton Public Library and Vaughan Public Library have cancelled all in-branch programs until 2021, and other public libraries have suspended in-branch programs until further notice.

³ “A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 2.” <https://www.ontario.ca/page/framework-reopening-our-province-stage-2#section-9>

Since the pandemic, OPL has pivoted to providing virtual programs, including partnered author events such as the Tech Café, weekly storytimes and babytimes, and all programs tied to our Aging Well at the Library initiative funded by the City of Ottawa's Older Adult Plan. These programs have been well attended, and staff are currently planning virtual programs for the summer and into the fall. OPL will continue to review the need for their meeting room spaces and requirements for physical distancing, and will bring back in-branch programming when permitted under the provincial re-opening plans, when space is available, when it is safe to do so for both employees and customers, and when staff have the ability to plan and promote accordingly.

Recommendation 3: Approve the Branch Re-Opening Waves (locations)

Document 2, "Branch Re-Opening Waves," outlines the five waves of branches, spanning re-opening dates from early July to September (tentatively). These locations were prioritized based on safety, geography, equity (low-income markers and the digital divide), and accessibility, and considering customer feedback received about the Priority 1 locations. Staff recommend a minimum of two weeks in between waves in order to ensure adequate preparations can be undertaken, and to apply lessons learned in an iterative manner. As OPL continues to open additional branches for services, staffing requirements will be assessed and implemented accordingly. Locations may be adjusted based on City dependencies, customer feedback, and other reasons, pending approval of the Board COVID-19 Ad hoc Committee. The waves are subject to changes in provincial or health guidelines, and are also dependent upon the phased-in return to work of part-time employees, whose return will be aligned with each wave.

Loan periods for items borrowed pre-pandemic were extended until September to enable customers to return their items when their preferred location reopens. Loan periods for items borrowed in Priorities 1-3 will be four weeks (one week longer than the normal 3-week loan period); loan periods for Homebound clients will remain the same as per their delivery schedule. Items that are not returned 35 days after their due date will be moved to "lost" status, and the cost of the items will be charged to the customer's account, as per normal practices. Loan periods were extended to allow staff to manage the flow of returns, and to ensure that residents who were unable to return items at the branches currently open (in progressive waves) were not disadvantaged. Decisions regarding loan periods for Priorities 4 and 5 will be made closer to the launch dates for

these priorities (as yet unknown), based on a consideration of the above circumstances, and will be developed with input from the OPLB Ad hoc Committee.

Recommendation 4: Delegate authority to the CEO during Priorities 2-5 to amend opening hours and adjust services as needed, and advise the Board accordingly.

Recognizing that services may change based on provincial directives or MOH guidance, or lessons learned from earlier priorities or location waves, flexibility is key to OPL's plans. As in Priority 1, it continues to be difficult to predict elements such as the availability of staff, patterns in customer use, the reliability of the technology involved, and the pace at which changes to legislation may impact plans. OPL will continue to consult the Ad-hoc Committee regarding changes to opening hours or services prior to being implemented, and these changes will be communicated to the Board.

Recommendation 5: Approve the suspension of fees as described in the report, until the "New Normal" Recovery Phase.

In the previous report to the Board, staff recommended the continued suspension of some fees during Priority 1: specifically, late fees and fees for holds not picked up. Staff are recommending that late fees continue to be suspended until the "New Normal" Recovery Phase. Staff also recommend adjusting the account suspension limit from \$50 to \$100 to ensure more customers can use their library accounts during the branch re-opening phases.

Recommendation 5 takes into consideration the difficult financial circumstances faced by residents of Ottawa amid the COVID-19 pandemic; in addition to personal financial instability, some residents will be unable to visit their home branch in the near future, and fees can only be paid online given the current provincial restrictions on in-branch services.

Recommendation 6: Direct staff to bring forward a report regarding the "New Normal" recovery phase at the latest in Q1 2021.

The CEO and staff will keep the Board apprised of any changes to the Recovery Plans for Priorities 2-5 as per normal practice. Staff will bring forward a report that will outline plans for the "New Normal" before the end of Q1 2021. This report will outline how and when OPL will return services back to normal conditions, outline any financial or

operational requirements requiring Board support, and incorporate up-to-date information from the province, MOH, and / or the City, as required.

CONSULTATION

OPL Senior Management Team; OPL Operations Task Force; OPL Customer Service Task Force; OPL Employee and Finance Task Force; OPLB Ad hoc Committee on COVID-19 (Vice-Chair Kathy Fisher and Trustee Riley Brockington); Occupational Health & Safety; City of Ottawa Service Recovery Task Force; City Recreation, Culture, and Facilities Services (RCFS); United Way East Ontario; Ruckify; Ottawa Public Health; Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC), Hamilton Public Library, Vaughan Public Library.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Several risks were considered in the development of the approach to Priority 2-5 plans. Risks have varying degrees of likelihood and impact; in some cases where the risk was determined to be minimal, it was accepted with mitigating controls established.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on the 2020 budget in terms of both revenue and expenditures. It is also anticipated that the 2021 operating and capital budget will be impacted. Priority 2-5 expenditure impacts are estimated at \$50,000 to accommodate the new service models and ensure employee health and safety. In total, operational impacts from Priority 1-5 are expected to be approximately \$150,000. To date, actual expenditure impacts are at \$80,000.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Accessibility was considered when developing the priorities and the location waves for Priorities 2-5. As indicated above, parking and transit accessibility was considered when developing the location waves, as well as geographic distribution and equity of access for residents living in poverty or without computer access. In recognition of accessibility barriers, some fees will continue to be suspended until the “New Normal” phase of OPL’s recovery.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

The continued offering of limited library services as well as the need to quarantine returns requires significant technological modifications to OPL's integrated library system as well as minor changes to OPL's website. The move away from curbside appointments to contactless in branch holds pick-up will reduce the technology requirements. Movement to provide any PC services in branch will require technological modifications to ensure physical distancing can be maintained while providing customer PC support.

BOARD PRIORITIES

The Ottawa Public Library Board is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organization.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 Recovery Priorities 2-5 Services

Document 2 Branch Re-Opening Waves

DISPOSITION

Upon approval of Recommendations 1-6, staff will implement the COVID-19 Recovery Priority 2-5 Plan. Staff will bring forward a plan for the "New Normal" recovery phase at the latest in Q1 2021.

Recovery Priorities 2-5 Services

Priority 2

New	Continue
Customers can place new holds in the catalogue - maximum 20 new holds	Returns and holds pickup service at 6 locations
Customers can place suggestions to purchase in the catalogue	Modified service hours
New bestsellers will be released	Homebound service to private residences
Express DVDs moved into regular collection	Virtual programming and events
Hoopla limit returned to pre-pandemic level	Lending Chromebooks and wifi hotspots via community partners
InfoService hours adjusted to align with curbside hours	Customer Experience supported by reassigned staff
Chat option for "Contact Us"	Remaining staff will continue to work from home
Multi-literacy activity kits via community partners	
"Connect with community" tile on the Isolation Recreation web page	

Priority 3

New	Continue
Additional locations open for service, according to the Branch Recovery Framework (starting with wave 2)	All services listed in Priority 2
All new materials released into the collection	Customer Experience supported by staff reassigned from other locations and/or branch staff during time off hub
Interlibrary loan (ILL) services resume; return of ILL assistants from branches ⁴	Remaining staff will continue to work from home

⁴ Dependent on the ability of other libraries to participate in ILL

Recovery Priorities 2-5 Services (continued)

Priorities 4 and 5

New	Continue
Limited browsing of display areas	All services listed in Priority 2
Limited access to branch PCs and Chromebooks	Customer Experience supported by staff reassigned from other locations and/or branch staff during time off hub
Lending of musical instruments, access passes ⁵ and other special items	Remaining staff will continue to work from home
In-branch programs may resume	
Creative spaces re-open: Imagine Space, Digital Room, Music Editing Lab	
Customers can pay fees in-person	
Re-invention of Isolation Recreation web page	

⁵ Access passes offer free general admission to partnered museums, galleries and other sites of interest in the Ottawa area
<https://bibliottawalibrary.ca/en/blogs/access-passes-including-museum-passes>

Branch Re-Opening Waves

Wave	Target opening date	Locations
1	June 8 (confirmed date)	Beaverbrook, Cumberland, Greenboro, Main, Nepean CentrepoinTE, Ruth E. Dickinson, Homebound (limited services).
2	July 13	Carlingwood, Carp, Greely, North Gloucester, St. Laurent, Stittsville.
3	July 27	Alta Vista, Blackburn Hamlet, Centennial, Elmvale Acres, Emerald Plaza.
4	August 10	Sunnyside, Hazeldean, Manotick, Orleans, Richmond, Rideau, Vanier.
5	TBD	Constance Bay, Fitzroy Harbour, Metcalfe Village, Munster, North Gower, Osgoode, Rockcliffe Park, Rosemount (Depot), Vernon, Kiosk, Bookmobile.