

Report to / Rapport au:

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

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File Number: OPLB-2021-0904

SUBJECT: Commercial Meeting Room Rates

OBJET: Tarifs des salles de réunion commerciales

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

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

RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa prenne connaissance du présent rapport à titre d'information.

BACKGROUND

The Ottawa Public Library Board (the "OPL Board") is constituted under the Public Libraries Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter P.44 ("the Act"). The Act outlines services which public libraries in Ontario are required to provide; meeting rooms are not a mandatory service. As per the Act, Section 23(3b), "a board may impose such fees as it considers proper for [...] the use of the parts of a building that are not being used for public library purposes." Ottawa Public Library (OPL) provides meeting rooms as a community

service to individuals and organizations, on a fee basis, and in a fair and consistent manner. Meeting rooms are spaces for community groups, businesses, and families to connect not only for meetings, but also for book clubs, seminars, workshops, home business parties, recitals, birthday parties and more.

OPL has 31 meeting rooms spread across 33 branches. Meeting room rentals at OPL fall into three categories:

1. Not For Profit (Charity): An activity that aligns with the Library's Vision, Mission and Core Values and is not intended to generate a profit. This activity must be open to everyone.
2. Private: A not for profit activity that does not align with the Library's Vision, Mission and Core Values and/or is intended for select members of the community.
3. Commercial: An activity that has the intent of generating a profit. This activity may involve the sale of goods or services or may require a registration fee prior to participation.

Commercial meeting room rates were set as follows in 2016 (approved by the Board as part of the budget process in December 2015):

- Main branch auditorium: \$57.52/hour
- Nepean CentrepoinTE branch room 1B: \$21.25/hour or less¹
- Beaverbrook branch medium meeting room: \$56.46/hour or less²
- Beaverbrook branch small meeting room: \$45.22/hour or less³
- Other branches: \$16.60/hour or less⁴

¹ This rate was based on the 2016 rate for the Ben Franklin Complex Room 1A

² This rate was based on the 2016 City of Ottawa rental rates

³ This rate was based on the 2016 City of Ottawa rental rates

⁴ Meeting rooms at Cumberland, Greenboro, and St Laurent branches fall under the City's rental process and rates reflect the City fee structure. Ruth E. Dickinson branch fell under the City's process until 2017, when it moved to OPL's portfolio and adopted OPL rates.

OPL room rental rates were originally set to align with the City Meeting Room rental fees; however, while the City's practice is to increase its rental fees to reflect cost of living, OPL practice did not reflect this.⁵ As such, in 2019, OPL's room rental rates were no longer on par with the City's. In 2020, the Board approved to increase OPL room rental rates to match the City's room rental fees. In 2021, the Board approved OPL's Financial Framework, which commits to reviewing fees on an annual basis and making incremental adjustments. OPL also strives to ensure fees do not put the Library in the position of competing with the City. Please see Appendix A for a complete listing of all commercial room rental rates at OPL.

In December 2020, the Board directed staff to review meeting room fees for commercial use at all OPL facilities and report back in Q3 2021. This report provides information about the fees and usage of OPL meeting rooms for commercial purposes and underscores the importance of continuing the current practice of aligning commercial meeting room rates with the City, in shared facilities.

DISCUSSION

As part of the approach to explore meeting room fees and usage, staff reviewed a number of aspects related to OPL meeting rooms such as: booking categories, hours of availability; meeting room amenities and other comparable commercial rates. During the COVID-19 pandemic, meeting rooms have been unavailable for community use. As a result, the data in this report is derived from meeting room rentals in 2019. This data is consistent with trends from previous years.

2019 Meeting Room Bookings

- In 2019, meeting rooms were primarily used for library programming, with a small number of outside bookings (whether non-profit, private, or commercial). The majority of the groups renting the Library's meeting rooms were not for profit or government organizations, which is not surprising given that many small

⁵ For the current City of Ottawa fees, see: <https://ottawa.ca/en/recreation-and-parks/rental-information>

companies, nonprofit organizations, and community associations do not have suitable facilities for meetings and conferences. The majority of bookings across the system occurred in the evening. Total revenues were \$ 93,671, of which approximately \$2,810 was from commercial bookings. Broken down by category, bookings were as follows:

- Private: 57%
 - Not for Profit: 40%
 - Commercial: 3%
- Main branch saw a higher-than-average number of commercial bookings compared to other branches. An estimated 25% of the commercial usage of the Main branch auditorium was by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), OPL's neighbour in the Sir Richard Scott Building.

Meeting Room Specifications and Amenities

- Hours of availability: Those wishing to rent Library meeting rooms are largely restricted to OPL's opening hours.
- Amenities: Capacity varies; all meeting rooms offer free WiFi, tables & chairs, and access to booking Chromebooks; most have white boards; some have other amenities such as projectors or SmartBoards.
 - The auditorium at the Main branch is OPL's largest meeting space: capacity of 189, access to paid underground and street parking, transit access, stage, and podium. It has limited WiFi access, and no projection screen, and was built in the 1970's with only minor renovations since then.

Comparable commercial rentals

Within the city:

- The Ottawa Carleton District School Board auditorium is available for \$147/hour, with additional fees for equipment and support;

- The Ottawa Catholic School Board provides meeting spaces in gymnasias for \$34.45/hour, with additional fees for administration and caretaker service if used on a weekend;
- The Bronson Centre's Mac Hall (capacity 200) is available for a fee of \$65/hour plus a \$65 administrative fee. Amenities include a stage and kitchen facility; a sound system and projector are available for additional fees; and,
- TCC Canada Meeting and Conference Rooms are available starting at \$60/hour for a small room. Amenities include facilities management, Internet and phone access, and additional amenities for an additional fee.

Within the broader public library community, a few comparisons of note include:

- Toronto Public Library's North York Central branch auditorium (capacity 204) is rented for \$156.86/hour for commercial purposes. This space includes a piano, whiteboard, projector, screen, microphones and power cords, and for an additional fee, access to kitchen facilities; and,
- Hamilton Public Library's Sherwood branch has a meeting space (capacity 100) available for \$85/hour with a 4-hour minimum booking.

Potential post-pandemic rental space trends

Recent articles in the *Washington Post* and *Forbes*, among others, predict that video conferencing for meetings will continue after the current COVID-19 pandemic has ended.⁶ In Ottawa, some articles speculate that post-pandemic local offices may employ a hybrid model, where employees work from home or the office at different times.⁷ It is unclear what impact these changes will have on commercial meeting room bookings at OPL; given that bookings at the Library are generally in the evening, and the majority of

⁶ "Video conferences are here to stay, even after we go back to the office. Get used to it. " <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/02/04/zoom-video-conference-post-pandemic/>; "Five Ways The Pandemic Has Already Changed Meetings"

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2020/11/10/five-ways-the-pandemic-has-already-changed-meetings/?sh=19e7bca25665>

⁷ "The post-pandemic office: Two views from Ottawa tech" <https://ottawacitizen.com/business/local-business/the-post-pandemic-office-two-views-from-ottawa-tech>

renters are not-for-profit or government organizations, video-conferencing and working from home trends will be only one factor influencing the use of OPL meeting rooms for commercial purposes; and that our largest booking space is not current or suitable in terms of meeting room amenities.

City of Ottawa COVID-19 fee

In 2021, the City implemented a COVID surcharge of 1.95% for meeting room rentals, to make up for additional costs incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. The City has informed OPL that a COVID surcharge will be implemented in 2022 as well, but that the exact percentage has not yet been confirmed. This is a new surcharge that OPL did not apply in 2021, because meeting room bookings were not permitted at the library.

Summary

OPL does not receive a large number of commercial room booking rentals, and revenue received from these rentals is low with regards to room rental rates for branches in shared facilities. The Main Auditorium is our largest room; however, it is dated and doesn't offer modern and technological amenities that are expected with meeting venues of this size. With the construction of the new Central Library, OPL will be in a better position to explore more competitive commercial rates given that we will have more meeting room offerings with better amenities. In the interim, staff support maintaining OPL meeting room rates while continuing to align with City. In addition, staff will bring forward any COVID related surcharges that may be required for meeting rooms across the City as part of the OPL 2022 budget submission.

CONSULTATION

OPL managers and the Senior Management team were consulted in the development of this report. OPL also consulted with the City of Ottawa Recreation, Cultural and Facility Services (RCFS) department, as well as other organizations with comparable meeting spaces such as the Ottawa Carleton District School Board, the Ottawa Catholic School Board, the Bronson Centre, TCC Canada, Toronto Public Library and Hamilton Public Library.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

BOARD PRIORITIES

This report is in alignment with the OPL value of integrity: “We embody the principles of public stewardship, transparency, and accountability in our operations and interactions.”

BUSINESS ANALYSIS IMPLICATIONS

Statistics mentioned in this report regarding meeting room rentals at OPL were collated from data available from the Library’s Online Meeting Room (OMeRo) Booking System. and financial reports of revenues from other short-term rentals.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As identified in the Financial Framework, OPL will review all fines and fees annually, and increase rates to reflect cost of living as necessary. In 2022, OPL will institute a COVID surcharge to the rental rates for rooms located in shared facilities, so as to ensure alignment with the City. While the exact amount of the COVID surcharge has not yet been confirmed, OPL will align with the City and report the difference in 2022.

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

Once approved, staff will implement a COVID surcharge to the rental rates for rooms located in shared facilities, so as to ensure alignment with the City.

Appendix A

At present, the room rental rates for all branches, save and except Beaverbrook, Cumberland, Greenboro, Nepean CentrepoinTE, and St-Laurent, are as follows (tax included):

Category	Rate	Session
Commercial / Private	\$30.35	1 hour or any portion thereof
Not For Profit	\$7.55	1 hour or any portion thereof
Main Library auditorium, Commercial / Private	\$66.55	1 hour or any portion thereof
Main Library auditorium, Not For Profit	\$35.00	1 hour or any portion thereof

The room rental rates for Nepean CentrepoinTE are based on the room rates for the Ben Franklin complex:

Category	Rate	Session
Commercial / Private	\$27.55	1 hour or any portion thereof
Not For Profit	\$22.40	1 hour or any portion thereof

The room rental rates for Beaverbrook are aligned with the City of Ottawa rental rates:

Category	Rate	Session
Small Meeting Room, Commercial	\$54.55	1 hour or any portion thereof
Small Meeting Room, Private	\$35.85	1 hour or any portion thereof
Small Meeting Room, Not For Profit	\$12.75	1 hour or any portion thereof
Medium Meeting Room, Commercial	\$68.15	1 hour or any portion thereof
Medium Meeting Room, Private	\$44.75	1 hour or any portion thereof
Medium Meeting Room, Not For Profit	\$15.85	1 hour or any portion thereof

The room rental rates for Cumberland, Greenboro, and St. Laurent continue to follow the City of Ottawa's Parks and Recreation rental process and their location's fee structure.