



“A library outranks any one thing a community can do to benefit its people.

It is a never failing spring in the desert.”

- Andrew Carnegie

These wise words from philanthropist and library supporter Andrew Carnegie reflect the level of passion and commitment that my fellow trustees have for the Waterloo Public Library.

We don't see the library as a building, or a collection of books.

Instead, our passion for libraries means that we see this library – my library, your library, our library – as the heartbeat of this community.

It's been a challenging year for this library board. We have identified challenges, made tough choices, stood together, and spoken up loudly – all to ensure that the citizens of Waterloo have the public library services that they require.

It has also been enormously fulfilling, as we heard loudly and clearly from our community.

The children who run through the library doors in anticipation of a new book. The families who participate in our diverse programming. The New Canadians who rely on our services for so much, on a daily basis. The seniors who make weekly visits to fill their book bags. The students who find silent study space. The entrepreneurs who dig deeply into our resources as they shape their next step. The volunteers who contribute almost 5000 hours of service to their community.

We heard from all of them. They love this library.

For them, we will continue to do our job. We will ensure that the library continues to evolve. We will continue to advocate for all aspects of our library community. We will continue to support our exceptional library leaders and staff as they deliver a quality service to the citizens of the City of Waterloo.

Strategic Plan Update

In 2013, when embarking on a new Strategic Planning process, the library board was presented with three challenges:

- Address the shifting demographics – an aging population and increased diversity - of Waterloo;
- Ensure our continued relevance as a public institution in our community;
- Align with the strategic priorities of our key partner, the City of Waterloo.

The results were impressive, as the library embraced those challenges and embarked on the most inclusive and thorough strategic planning process in its history, consulting with staff, board members, volunteers and, of course, our library patrons. I am happy to report – as illustrated in the annual report – that the ongoing successful implementation 2013-17 Strategic Plan continues to strengthen library services in Waterloo.

Fundraising

The Province of Ontario states: “A strong library system is a cornerstone of a strong community. It contributes to education, literacy and lifelong learning for Ontario residents.”

The Province supports this belief with strong legislation: The Public Libraries Act is designed to protect public libraries and to ensure free and equitable access to public library services in our municipalities. It also outlines the funding relationship that libraries have with their host municipalities.

Under the Act, public libraries have a limited number of revenue tools at their disposal. For instance, public libraries are unable to charge for:

- admission to a public library
- for the in-library use of materials
- reserving and borrowing circulating materials and the use of reference and information services the board considers practicable.
- the use of interlibrary loan services.

Recognizing the continued stresses on our Library budget, the library board operates with a Fundraising Committee, tasked with expanding this necessary part of our budget. This year’s After Hours @ The Library built upon the success of 2014’s inaugural event, as we doubled our earnings. Funds from After Hours @ The Library will continue to fund key strategic elements of our Strategic Plan. We will continue to seek ways to expand fundraising efforts at the Waterloo Public Library.

Finance

As noted in annual reports issued to the City of Waterloo, the budget pressure presented by operations at the John M. Harper Branch has been an enormous challenge.

In October 2015, we appeared in front of Waterloo City Council to express our concerns, specifically related to unfunded operating hours at the John M Harper Branch:

According to the original funding agreement, the John M Harper Branch was to be open 48 hours per week. Due to a call from the community for increased library service at that location, the branch is now open on Fridays and on 27 Sundays, adding \$120K of unfunded costs to our operating budget.

Over the past few years, as the pressures have compounded, our staff has been working hard to do more with less.

- We have taken steps to reorganize our library team in a strategic manner;
- We are actively looking for and acting on ways to cut costs in our compensation envelope;

- We have a number of costs that are unpredictable and out of our control.
 - Maintenance and utility costs at the John M Harper Branch are considerably higher than were estimated, now budgeted at over 160K per year.
 - Collection budgets have been heavily impacted by the currency market.

These issues came to a climax this year, as our capacity to absorb the funding shortfall reached an end. With a new multi-year funding agreement on the horizon and a public announcement of expansion to the east side, it was time for our board to put sustainability of our public library at the top of our priority list.

The issue of sustainability will remain our top priority over the coming year, as we enter into negotiations regarding a new funding agreement with the City of Waterloo. The good news: We have a common goal – a sustainably funded four-branch library system with a new branch at RIM Park – and we look forward to working with the City of Waterloo and the residents of the east side of Waterloo as we embark on this journey.

Thank you

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few people.

I would like to thank my fellow board members. Your love of libraries is evident and appreciated. I sometimes wonder if my ardour for public libraries is a bit odd ... but then we sit down together and I feel somewhat normal.

I would like to thank our CEO, Laurie Clarke, for being an incredible leader and a wonderful person to work with. I knew the minute we met, that you were the one to take us into the future.

To the excellent staff at the Waterloo Public Library – thank you isn't really enough. You have stood tall throughout all of our ups and downs, always serving the public with skill and grace.

Finally, we all owe a great deal of thanks to the citizens of Waterloo. You love this library and when we needed you to, you spoke up. We will continue to work hard for you.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Scian

Chair of the Waterloo Public Library Board