



Friends of the Regina Public Library

frpl@sasktel.net www.friendsofrpl.ca (306)535-9570

2042 Garnet St., Regina, SK S4T 2Z6

December 6, 2018

Mayor Fougere and Council
City of Regina
Regina, SK, S4P 3C8

Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: Regina Public Library 2019 Budget at Regina City Council Budget Meeting, December 10, 2018

The following are comments from the Friends of the Regina Public Library (FRPL) for presentation to City Council on the proposed 2019 Regina Public Library (RPL) Budget.

The library continues to have excellent staff and provide innovative programs, and its many activities in 2018 are outlined in the RPL's 2019 budget submission.

Following up on some items brought forward in FRPL's presentation last year, the book *Biblio Files: A History of the Regina Public Library*, initiated by FRPL members and edited by Susan Birley, Anne Campbell and Jeannie Mah, was published in 2017. RPL's support for this project has been appreciated. In May 2018 a presentation on *Biblio Files* at the Saskatchewan Library Association conference in Regina brought this valued history to wider provincial and national audiences.

Another item raised last year was the relocation of the Albert Branch and the sale of the historic library building – a goal of the RPL was to sell it to a community-related organization and it was purchased by a faith-based group.

We find in reviewing our letter from last year that a number of questions were asked which have not been answered. Rather than repeat the questions, e.g. the RPL's plans to meet potential demand for additional library services in new neighbourhoods. Perhaps City Council and the RPL could review last year's letter and provide a response to this and other questions.

In its 2019 budget submission, in which it asks for a 1.8% mill rate increase, the RPL details a number of its outcomes from 2018, much like an annual report. However, there is only a page and a half describing what will be done in 2019. The RPL submission also refers to a new Service

Plan that will guide activities for 2019 and was to be available in November 2018. While this plan was approved at the RPL Board meeting of November 27, 2018, the plan was not available to the public at that time and to date is not locatable on the RPL website. The RPL budget document also refers to “Baseline Studies” to be done in late 2018 “...about commitment and contribution to sharing ideas and further social and economic development in the city ...” and “...the RPL as a hub in the community and the degree to which the library is viewed as a gathering place ...”. The exact meaning of these surveys is not clear from the generalized descriptions and to date no information is provided about those studies. Thus, the RPL is asking for approval of a mill rate increase for which inadequate information has been provided.

For 2019 there are significant reductions in Grants in Lieu of taxes and Other Grants – changes due to factors outside the control of the RPL. An explanation of the reason for such major changes in financial resources would be a helpful addition to the budget document. What are the reasons for these changes?

The RPL Board continues to review the options for the heritage modernist Central Library building. Some building maintenance and internal layout changes have occurred. The need to tear down the current building and build a new mega building is something we need to question. What will be the future for Central Library and other branches when the proposed RPL capital plan is introduced in 2020?

As we have stated previously, while fundraising can support some capital expenses, rather than relying on public-private partnerships, FRPL continues to emphasize the importance of a strong publicly-funded budget for maintaining the Library’s buildings, high-quality services and staff.

Many changes have been introduced and while there is a lot of good programming provided by the RPL, change management processes and the transition and valuation of staff is something that needs attention to maintain the spirit and enthusiasm of the library’s excellent staff.

We also continue to be concerned with the naming of library users as customers rather than patrons. The library is not a business, we are not its customers. It is a service that is owned by us as taxpayers and residents of the City of Regina. The “customer” language encourages a slide into an attitude of the library having to be a self-sustaining business – a dangerous road that can lead to erosion of the foundation of this important public service.

Participating in the provincial loaning system among libraries is very important but the RPL would like to expand its collection of materials for local use and has allocated additional funds to this end, which is a good adjustment. Will this expansion only be in multiple copies of popular fiction? As we said last year, the practice of emphasizing popular literature means that resources are expended on books that are quickly culled from the system and sold or shredded. Is this a wise use of cultural resources? With the emphasis on popular reading materials, there seems to have been a great loss of material and staff resources for reference and research, a role of the library that the general public needs and appreciates. While many people welcome the addition of digital and innovative information sharing technologies, we continue to receive

comments about the need for a strong collection of Canadian literature and historical resources. There is also concern about the library's culling of classical literature, cultural resources and research resource books. Not all of these resources are available in digital format. Some patrons are concerned that the library's catering to "popular" materials has led to a great diminution in the library's role as an historical and contemporary cultural resource.

Recently there was a power outage in Regina and Saskatchewan locations. The three RPL branches that were not affected by the power outage provided a welcome space for patrons in reading or using computer services. This brings to mind the important role of the library in handling its own services in case of emergency and also the library as a public resource in general in times of emergencies. How does the RPL integrate with city and provincial plans for emergency preparedness and what funds are set aside to deal with these situations?

The Library instituted changes to the Film Theatre operation in 2017 and 2018, some of which aroused great public concern. If the Library is offering more free programs and fewer nights of films for which people pay, how can it try to say that the Film Theatre should pay for itself, when this is not a criterion used for any other library service? What is the impact on revenues by cutting the paid screenings from four nights to three nights? Since the programming change, a significant percentage of the films they're screening on the paid nights have already screened in Regina at other theatres, so what is the impact on attendance on paid nights? The Film Theatre started using social media ads in a way they didn't use to. What are the costs of these and have they led to an increase in paid admissions?

This past year, on May 29, 2018, the RPL Board approved a new policy for making presentations and submissions to the RPL Board meetings. FRPL is in a process of communication with the RPL Board about the implementation of this policy, which in some ways does not seem to be encouraging public dialogue with the Board.

In 2017 the provincial government tried to cut library budgets, a public protest ensued, and the overall budget was restored. At that time the provincial government promised to review the library situation. An internal review was conducted this fall, with participation from a representative of the RPL. We are urging the provincial government to communicate the results of this review and consult with the public before decisions are made.

While we are suggesting areas for improvement, we continue to recognize and appreciate the services provided by the RPL, the efforts of the RPL administration and staff and the continuing support of the library system by City Council and the citizens of Regina. Thank you for the opportunity to present these comments.

Sincerely,

Joanne Havelock
Chair, Friends of the Regina Public Library