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Rural Library Services: A Preliminary Report



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Introduction

Two reports have been produced to look at Library Services in conjunction with the *Facilities Master Plan* which focuses on the conditions of the library buildings. The *Inner City Library Services Report* described alternative library services appropriate to the inner city which should be developed to meet the needs of those residents. This *Rural Library Services Report*, recaps decisions and starting points raised by the Facilities Master Plan and its consultation process to ensure that resources are being efficiently used to provide the levels of service expected by community residents. It describes the services provided within the rural areas of the City of Hamilton and proposes alternate services appropriate to these areas.

Scope of the Report

This report applies to those areas served by the following branches, which provide service to largely rural areas and hamlets:

- Lynden
- Rockton
- Freelon
- Carlisle
- Millgrove
- Greensville
- Mount Hope

With the exception of Mount Hope, which is located in Ward 11, these branches are located wards 14 and 15 of the city. These branches serve about 15,000¹ or 3% of the total city population. These seven libraries account for 4.6% of the total square footage the system.

The Mount Hope branch is the only other branch which operates for less than 20 hours, with one staff person. It has been included here because the current building is inadequate. A new community recreation centre is planned for 2017, or after, and the Library could partner with the City for a new facility. The short term (up to 10 years) future of Mount Hope is problematic and an alternate location or bookmobile service may be necessary. It is expected that Turner Park will draw business from Mount Hope, but as Mount Hope grows a Library here is needed.

The following branches, which also serve rural areas, are excluded because they are in areas that are transitioning from rural to urban centres:

¹ The 2001 census population of wards 14 and 15 was 40,000 and it is estimated that Waterdown's population is about 25,000, thus leaving 15,000 in the remainder of the area.

- Binbrook – This is one of the fastest growing branches as the surveys around Binbrook fill up. As library use increases the next step will be to increase service hours.
- Stoney Creek - This branch, which opened in 2003, was located to provide library services to the growing lower east city. Planning for this community is taking place now, and the official plan is expected to be in place by January 2010. With a projected population of 16,000 – 20,000 plus the population north of the QEW, this branch will be too small for its population base when the area is fully developed.
- Waterdown – plans continue for a new facility.

Review of the Facilities Master Plan

The results of the *Facilities Master Plan*, which included a consultation process and examined the physical condition of the buildings is summarized here. Also included are key service measurements.

Lynden

2009 operating budget²: \$82,946

Plans are underway to build a new 4,000 – 5,000 sq. ft. branch in Lynden. Design fees have been approved for 2009, and a new branch could be built as early as 2010 which will include such features as expanded public space, increased number of public computers, programming, space and a collection of approximately 20,000 items (up from 14,000). Services would be provided 5 days per week to a total of 35 hours weekly. Programs for all ages would be offered. It is expected that this new library, drawing from western Flamborough, (Sheffield, Rockton, Troy and Copetown and east towards Mount Hope) would circulate approximately 65,000 – 70,000 items annually. While the building is inadequate, it could open 35 hours weekly (up from 27 hours) to compensate for a reduction in service hours (or closure) at Rockton.

Rockton

2009 operating budget: \$68,917

This branch is scheduled to close when Lynden opens, as the facility is inadequate. The intent is to transfer staff so that Lynden can be open more –35 hours weekly. At the public consultation, some concern was expressed about seniors and children's being able to access Rockton is scheduled to close when a new facility is built in Lynden. A bookmobile stop can be offered (at same location in the village, at the Beverly Community Centre, or both).

Millgrove

2009 operating budget: \$69,068

² These operating costs include only those costs charged directly to the branch operating budget. Items charged to a system budget, are not included. For example: collections, delivery, manager salary and benefits, computer costs, support services, etc. The more significant budget efficiencies would be found in the latter cost centres, if alternate services were provided at some rural locations.

Millgrove's circulation has dropped 10.8% bringing it to a new low of 16,425 – the lowest of any branch in the system. The Millgrove Library building has been identified as inadequate, and is slated for closure when Waterdown is built. Programs are offered in nearby Carlisle/ Waterdown as they do not attract a sufficient registration in Millgrove. However, given the availability of bookmobile service (at no additional cost to the system), the satisfaction of bookmobile customers, and the willingness of Millgrove residents to try bookmobile service (as identified in the consultation) Millgrove is an excellent candidate for bookmobile service effective at any time.

Freelton

2009 operating budget: \$66,952

Freelton Library's building is in excellent condition, although it receives little use. Few additional services are supported here, and programming has been consolidated in nearby Carlisle.

Greenville

2009 operating budget: \$139, 999 (includes children's position for these branches)

Greenville, located in a strip mall above Dundas, offers selected programs on a regular basis, particularly as it can handle the overflow from Dundas.

Carlisle

2009 operating budget: \$116,277

The Board has identified Carlisle as a building which cannot continue to provide services in the current location because of the expected future condition of the building. The future of Carlisle will be examined after the new Waterdown facility is open. Selected programs are offered here as a hub for Millgrove and Freelton.

Mount Hope

2009 operating budget: \$ 60,781

The current building is inadequate. A new community recreation centre is planned for 2017, or after, and the Library could partner with the city for a new facility. The short term (up to 10 years) future of Mount Hope is problematic and an alternate location or bookmobile service, may be necessary. It is expected that Turner Park will draw business from Mount Hope, at least in the short term. However, as Mount Hope continues to grow a Library here is needed.

Services

Service Hours

When service hours were adjusted after amalgamation it was determined that the number of hours a branch would be open would be determined by the average circulation of hour. A standard of 30 items per hour was established for the one-person branches.

A 2006 survey of branch libraries of all of the large public libraries across Canada indicates that of the 450 branch libraries in these library systems, 19% have an average circulation of less than 40 items per hour, and of these 14% have a circulation of less than 30 items per hour. The public's perception of a further reduction of service hours would be that we are trying to "kill off" the branch. On the other hand it does not make sense to keep a facility open when no one is using it.

Based on a service standard of 30 circulations per hour:

- Rockton: this branch could be as low as 13 hours weekly.
- Millgrove: this branch could be as low as 10 hours weekly.
- Freelton: this branch could be as low as 12 hours weekly.

Greening of Library Services

The Facilities Plan did not take into consideration the environmental costs of keeping locations open only a few hours per week since they have to be fully heated, cooled and systems such as water and septic systems maintained around the clock. Five branches are only open 17 hours per week, and the other two are open less than 30 hours weekly. The environmental impact of maintaining facilities which are open only 10% of the time is something the Board should take into account.

The Collections

The use of the collections follows the trends elsewhere – a high percentage of use (25%) is holds-based. The issue of stale collections which have been read-out but not worn-out and were an unfortunate feature of the small branches has been addressed by shared collections. As items are borrowed and returned, they will refresh automatically. All small branches have received an infusion of materials recently to replenish their shelves, with a corresponding increase in circulation.

Decreased use: 2008 circulation (decrease over 2007) and long term trend since 2001

- Carlisle 2008 circulation: 38,061 (down 2.8%); since 2001 down 21%
- Freelton 2008 circulation: 18,463 (down 8.43%); since 2001 down 17%
- Millgrove 2008 circulation: 16,425 (down 10.8%); since 2001 down 33%
- Mount Hope 2008 circulation: 30,467 (down 7.15%); since 2001 up 1.7%
- Rockton 2008 circulation: 20,806 (down 11.7%); since 2001 down 32%

Increased use: 2008 circulation (increase over 2007) and long term trend since 2001

- Greensville 2008 circulation: 27,760 (up 4.2%); since 2001 up 2%
- Lynden 2008 circulation: 41,269 (up 6.9%); since 2001 up 14%

All of these branches report heavy use of print resources, and they lead the list with the highest percentage of holds placed on print materials, and the lowest percentage of holds on non-print. This is the opposite pattern of use to the inner city branches which has the lowest percentage of holds

placed on print and the highest on non-print. Only Freelton shows slightly higher percentage of holds for non-print than print by 1%.

Public Computing

High speed networking at the branches libraries remain an important draw of rural branches as high speed network connections are not available for home use in most of the area. Despite this, all of the branches in this report - Freelton, Greensville, Lynden, Carlisle, Rockton and Millgrove -- have excess public computer capacity. In fact, with a minimum of two public computers assigned to each branch, there are more public computers in this part of the city per capita than elsewhere in the system. Dundas and Ancaster libraries have draw a large number of customers from the rural areas.

Wireless access which is gradually being installed beginning with Lynden (new building), Ancaster, etc. will provide after-hours access to the Library catalogue and Internet. Therefore, kiosks in community centres are not required to provide access to the Internet and the Library's catalogue.

Outreach and Programming

There is very little demand for programming and programming is now consolidated at those locations where it is successful. There are no local social agencies to work with. Class visits take place in the local schools and the children of one school could be customers at different branch libraries. Freelton has no schools in its service area. There is a staff position that provides outreach and core children's programs within the rural community.

Alternate Library Services

Bookmobile Service

Bookmobile service is a viable and sustainable service option and a common method of delivery in rural library systems. A weekly (two-hour) bookmobile stop typically serves a neighbourhood of up to approximately 5,000 people, and circulates 20,000 - 25,000 items. As customers are increasingly using holds to preselect the materials they borrow, delivery-based services are a better service option. When bookmobile service is introduced, it is monitored and must meet certain levels of use. If it does not, or if new nearby facilities are built, the location of bookmobile stops are changed.

Customers of bookmobile service highlight the friendliness, personalized service and convenience as the key reasons, for their continued loyalty to this service. In addition, the rotating popular collection located on the bookmobiles provides more browsing variety than the small branch-based collections.

In the future, wireless capabilities will expand to the vehicles. Both new bookmobiles have been designed to incorporate computers when wireless access becomes more prevalent.

Availability

After June 2009, the bookmobile service will be able to offer services to Flamborough on either Monday or Friday, at no additional cost. Either two full neighbourhood stops could be provided each day, or a series of shorter stops visiting more hamlets could be arranged.

Potential locations include:

- Antrim Glen (on 8th Concession) is a survey near Freelton which is largely occupied by seniors. It has its own clubhouse which would provide a focal point for the community.
- Sheffield (school)
- Freelton – in survey, east of Hwy 6
- Westover Village
- Copetown (new seniors residences)
- Waterdown (seniors residences – near current location) – after Waterdown relocates

Books by Mail

This service uses the mail to get Library materials to customers. Books-by-mail are a service developed for outlying Canadian areas where regular library service does not reach, and which could apply to parts of Hamilton. It is subsidized by the Federal government, and is therefore relatively inexpensive for participating libraries. For example, the mailing fee is \$1.00 per item (return) plus staff costs to support it. It could be offered, to a limited geographic area, particularly if use does not support Bookmobile service in some hamlets, and if other services such as Visiting Library Services, are not an option.

Conclusion

This report, prepared for information purposes, summarizes the current situation at the rural branches.