

Report CAOR-CW-04-17

To: Warden Barfoot and Members of Grey County Council
From: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer
Meeting Date: January 26, 2017
Subject: **Reassessing Potential of Grey County Role in Provision of Library Services**
Status:

Recommendation(s)

THAT Report CAOR-CW-04-17 Reassessing Potential of Grey County Role in Provision of Library Services be received; and

THAT Council direct the CAO to prepare an updated environmental scan of library services and an assessment of the merits of proceeding with a more comprehensive library services project for Council's consideration in March 2017.

Background

In Ontario, the Public Libraries Act provides for the provision of universal access to public library services for residents. The Ministry of Culture has responsibility for the Public Libraries Act and provides programs and support for libraries under the Southern Ontario Library Service. Public libraries are created by municipal bylaws and governed by public library boards.

There are a number of governance models for library services operating across the province. An individual municipality can establish its own board as have Hanover, West Grey, Town of the Blue Mountains, Meaford, Southgate and Grey Highlands. A municipality can contract with another library board to provide library services for their residents. Municipalities can agree to provide services jointly under a union library board as have Owen Sound, Chatsworth and Georgian Bluffs. Many Counties provide library services to some or all of their member municipalities, either alone or jointly with another County. Perth County has local library boards and an incorporated nonprofit

organization Perth County Information Network that provides for a shared library management system or ILS.

There has been a long standing interest in exploring the costs and benefits of a county-wide public library system in Grey County. Since 2011, the question of a greater role for Grey County in providing library services has been discussed on three different occasions.

In 2014 when the question was last in front of Council, resolution CC34-14 recommending that the County not proceed with a county library feasibility study was passed. As noted in report CAOR-CS-01-14, without a compelling vision for service improvements and the support of all parties, e.g. member municipalities, library boards and library staff, the study was unlikely to be successful in developing a model for county library services that could be implemented. County Council encouraged local municipal councils and their library boards to work together towards a shared integrated information management partnership to improve the scope of and access to library services available to residents across the county.

According to the Ontario Public Library Statistics, in 2015 there were 30,486 active library cardholders from a population of 48,012 households in Grey County. Total operating expenditures for library services in Grey County totaled \$4.35M with \$192,532 (4%) contributed from the province and the remainder of the funds coming from municipal resources. Compared with the figures from 2010, operating expenditures have risen 22% while there has been an 11% decline in active cardholders. More research would be required to understand the factors contributing to these trends.

Library Services Continue to Evolve

The Ministry of Culture published *Third Generation Public Libraries* in 2008 which laid out the vision for libraries in the future.

“Public libraries of the future will be catalysts and leaders in community-based economic development. They will have a strategic role in knowledge-intensive industries like digital media. They will also be mainstays of community-based cultural planning and development. The amount of information available will grow, and much of it will be of questionable value and accuracy. Public libraries will play an increasingly significant role in the literacies of the twenty-first century that enable people to select, assess and use the information that will best meet their needs. As the number of technology devices increases, libraries will enable increased equality of access and participation and help people create and exchange new content. One of the ways libraries will do this is by collaborating, within the library sector and beyond, to develop stronger networks.”

The 2014 provincial budget provided \$10M over three years in the Ontario Libraries Capacity Fund to assist libraries in moving towards this vision. Unfortunately, the deadline for applications has passed. Our neighbouring counties of Wellington and Simcoe used provincial funding to support the purchase of internet hotspots that they could lend out to patrons who lacked access to internet capability at home. In some communities, libraries have become hosts to Maker Spaces, Digital Media Labs, Digital Learning Centres, Self-Publishing Centres, Recording Studios and host leading edge technology like 3D printers.

The City of Pickering was one of the communities who, along with Grey County that was recently selected as one of the world's Smart21 Communities of 2017. The selection process focused heavily on Pickering Public Library's contribution to creating a smart community through access to technology and skills training.

The proposed environmental scan would provide information to Council regarding current service delivery metrics across the county as well as any planned capital investments or service enhancements and note where there may be economies of scale or efficiencies to be gained through collaboration.

Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology

Considerations

There are no legal or financial considerations with the recommendation as drafted. The proposed environmental scan and preliminary assessment could be completed by the Chief Administrative Officer with assistance from County staff and the participation of library services stakeholders.

Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

Library Services and supporting digital literacy and connectivity is part of Goal 1, Growing the Grey County Economy. The evaluation of a potential role for the County in library services contributes to Goal 3. Excellence in Governance and Service.

Attachments

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Wingrove
Chief Administrative Officer