

September 10, 2010

(address of municipal council candidate)

Dear Candidate for Municipal Council:

You are to be commended for seeking public office to serve the residents of (name of municipality). The work of elected municipal officials requires tireless efforts that often go unrecognized. Your registration as a candidate in the election on October 25, 2010, demonstrates your commitment to your community.

To help you prepare for your potential four year commitment, we are pleased to provide you with the enclosed background information on public libraries, which as you know provide important municipal services and could become a point of discussion in your campaign. This information was prepared by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and highlights the range of contemporary public library services, how those services are integral in achieving municipal priorities, how public libraries are governed and funded, and the key issues currently facing public libraries in Ontario.

Today's public libraries are more than just books. They are a treasure trove of valuable digital information and equipped with technology that citizens can use to empower themselves and attain personal goals, often from home on a 24/7 basis. Libraries provide expert service in searching out and finding the information your residents need to be successful in today's dynamic and global economy. Particularly relevant are the wide range of public library services designed to support:

- small business and entrepreneurs,
- career development and employment,
- literacy development,
- integration of new Canadians, and
- access to information on government and community support programs.

Market survey after survey ranks public libraries in the top three of all municipal services, along with fire and ambulance.

In these tough economic times, public libraries are indispensable. During the economic downturn over the past year, overall library utilization in many municipalities has risen as much as 20%, but as high as 70% in specific areas such as enrolment in employment programs, computer access, DVD lending and library website visits. Long waiting lists for in-house computers at public libraries are the norm because a significant number of Ontarians do not have access to computers or the Internet at home. When times are tough, people make the most of the library's free services. Public libraries are mitigating the impact of the recession on the people adversely affected.

Your local public library needs sustainable ongoing funding in order to properly plan and deliver services that support the priorities of municipal governments. Your public library provides a significant return on investment. Its services are indispensable. Without them your community is at a significant disadvantage in attracting knowledge workers,

recovering from the current economic recession and growing a knowledge economy. The reliance on municipal funding is all the more acute because provincial operating grants to public libraries have not changed since the 1990's.

We encourage you to study this background information and to champion strategies that will benefit your local public library, and in turn, the residents of (name of municipality). This information was prepared by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, a not-for-profit association of over 200 member library boards, which strives to enhance library policies and programs in communities across the Province.

Please contact the Federation's Chief Executive Officer, David Allen at davidallen@fopl.ca or 416-395-0746 if you require clarification or elaboration on any of the material contained in this mailing. Good luck in the upcoming election!

Yours truly,

[Federation will insert Jim's signature and the letter will be placed on Federation letterhead]

Jim Bennett
Chair, Board of Directors
Federation of Ontario Public Libraries

or

(Name)
Chair, _____ Public Library Board

BACKGROUND ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES – September 2010

Public Libraries Transform Communities

The public library is more than a building full of books. The public library is the one community gathering place, both physical and virtual, which provides equal access for all to information, knowledge, culture and learning resources in print and electronic format, along with advice, assistance and connections, to transform individuals, communities and the economy, in the 21st century of a digital, globalized world.

Public Libraries Offer a Wide Range of Services Free to Patrons:

<p><u>Information skills development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assisting users find relevant, accurate information quickly, through both print and electronic sources 	<p><u>Support for small business and entrepreneurs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing information to support local business, economic and workforce development
<p><u>Reference centre</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining up-to-date and accurate information on a wide range of subjects of interest to users in print and electronic formats 	<p><u>Newcomers' adaptation to Canadian society</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offering settlement support, accreditation and employment support, and ESL programs
<p><u>Virtual/digital information</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using communications technology so users can connect virtually to the library, each other, their community, and a world of databases and cultural resources 	<p><u>Government and community services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitating access to information on services and programs of community agencies and government at all levels.
<p><u>Career development and employment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining up-to-date reference materials on market trends and career opportunities 	<p><u>Pre-schoolers' door to learning</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing materials and programs for young children, which encourage an interest in literacy and learning
<p><u>Popular materials</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offering current, high demand materials in a variety of formats (eg. books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, etc.) 	<p><u>Support for formal education</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing materials and programs that complement formal studies <p><u>Cultural heritage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining and providing access to local historical collections

Public libraries contribute to a community's overall liveability by being at the core of community engagement and lifelong learning, enhancing cultural and social activities, and generating economic improvement. Public libraries are mitigating the impact of the recession on the people adversely affected. Public libraries are key to cultivating a knowledge economy and of closing the persistent digital divide among residents in the community. Safeguarding municipal funding to public libraries is crucial, even in this period of financial restraint.

Public Libraries Support Municipal Priorities

The programs and services of public libraries benefit the following priorities of municipal governments:

- Economic Development: supporting small business and entrepreneurs, who will drive local economic recovery and job creation, by providing them with resources such as electronic databases on market trends and information on regulatory obligations;
- Employment: providing services and resources for career planning, job search and upgrading skills;
- Integration of New Canadians: helping newcomers to Canada succeed through settlement support, language acquisition including ESL programs, accreditation and employment support and maintaining cultural connections;
- Early Literacy Development: facilitating success in the school system by drawing on the expertise and infrastructure that already exists in public libraries through their vast array of pre-school and children's literacy programs;
- Efficient Government Services: serving as the first point of contact for information and referral on community and government programs, making public libraries logic partners in rationalizing services with Public Health Departments and 211 organizations; and
- Cultural Vitality: feeding the community's cultural framework, which is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability.
- Affordable Leisure Activities: offering free borrowing of books, music and movies or library programs for children, families and all ages.

Public Libraries Provide Unique Benefits to Their Communities

Public libraries provide municipalities with unique opportunities to reach constituents and minimize costs in the delivery of other municipal services.

- No other cultural institution sees as wide a range of residents (demographically) as the public library. Libraries are community hubs and are already a trusted part of the public's travel and usage patterns.
- Librarians are expert search partners and provide users with free access to data that is often costly and sometimes not available. The ability to search is not the same as knowing how to search and more importantly find. Librarians know how.
- Because of their customer service trained staff, long operating hours, and close relationship with residents, public libraries are the natural partner for municipal governments which need unconstrained, non-intimidating access to the public to deliver their programmes in communities.
- The physical plants of public libraries are available now and can be co-locations for other municipal services.
- Public libraries give lower income, First Nations, new Canadians, and older Canadians free access to Internet resources.
- Public libraries are sought-after amenities that are needed to attract investors to communities. They offer a safe place for children and adults.

Key Issues for Your Local Public Library

1. Need for Growing, Sustainable Operating Funds from Municipalities

- Public libraries provide a significant return on investment. Their services are indispensable. Without them communities are at a significant disadvantage in attracting knowledge workers, recovering from the current economic recession and growing a knowledge economy.
- In the past year, overall library utilization has increased by as much as 20%, but as high as 70% in such areas as enrolment in employment programs, DVD lending and library website visits. In these tough economic times, citizens are seeking free access to computers, the Internet, online databases, entertainment materials and specialized training programs.
- Increased reliance on municipal funding to sustain public library operations is because the Ontario government's operating grants to public libraries have not changed since the late 1990's.
- *(optional)* **The Ontario government's operating grants to the agencies which support public libraries, such as the Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS) and Ontario Library Service North (OLS North) have been static or decreasing over a number of years, further threatening the quality of service in all Ontario communities.**

2. Difficulty in Accessing Infrastructure Funds

- Public libraries have a considerable need for sustainable capital/infrastructure funding, especially for electronic information systems in order to keep pace with the new generation of users with fundamentally different information seeking habits.
- The funding currently available to public libraries through municipalities is insufficient to address the requirement for periodic or ongoing facility updating, accessibility, etc.
- Only 35 public library capital projects (or 3.2% of Ontario's 1093 service points) received funding through the recent Building Canada Fund and Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, in which municipalities contributed one-third.

3. Need for Expanded Programming Targeted to Newcomers

- Many municipalities are challenged to attract and support newcomers as a key to economic development.
- Public libraries contribute to the successful adaptation of newcomers to their community and to Canadian society by offering settlement support, accreditation and employment support, ESL programs and information on community and government services.
- Public libraries serving large populations of newcomers have no designated funding source for multi-lingual collections or specialized programs.

Legislative and Funding Framework

- Public libraries are independent legal corporations that have governing boards with the authority to set policy and manage library affairs under the Public Libraries Act.
- Public libraries are established under subsection 3(1) of the Act by the passing of a by-law by a municipal council. With the exception of county libraries, the number of council members on a public library board is limited to one less than a majority of the board.
- Since the inception of the Act in 1882, public libraries are required to provide their services free of charge, under subsections 23(1) and (2). All public libraries must provide free admission and free use of materials, onsite. Residents of library service areas must also be permitted to borrow library materials and use reference and information services free of charge.
- Fee for service is regarded as a barrier to people using the library, especially the disadvantaged segments of the population.
- On average, municipalities fund 85% of the operating revenues of Ontario public libraries. Only 5% comes from the provincial government.
- Because municipalities fund the lion's share of public libraries' annual spending, serve the same constituents and address common issues, many library boards have adopted their municipalities' financial policies and procedures in an effort to align agendas and streamline business processes.
- However, public libraries are not departments of municipalities. The library board is the employer of all library staff, including its Chief Executive Officer.

About the Federation

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is a not-for-profit membership association established in 2005 to provide a single, strong voice for public libraries in Ontario to enhance library policies and programs. Its services focus on four strategic pillars: advocacy, marketing, research and consortia purchasing. The Federation's membership has a good cross section of libraries of all sizes and from all geographic regions. Its 200 member libraries are responsible for serving 78% of Ontario's population. Its Board of Directors is composed of an equal number of library board trustees and library chief executives.