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**Presentation by Stephen Abram, MLS, executive director, FOPL**

**Regional Government Review Consultations**

**Newmarket Ontario: May 6, 2019**

* Good afternoon. Greetings Chairs Ken Seiling and Michael Fenn.
* Thank you for the opportunity today to participate in your Regional Government Review consultations.
* My name is Stephen Abram and I am a professional librarian and the executive director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries / La Fédération des bibliothèques publiques de l’Ontario. We represent Ontario’s over 310 library systems with over 6 million library cardholders – in Ontario’s rural, northern, town, county, suburban, urban, indigenous, and francophone communities including all 82 Southern Ontario communities covered by this consultation.

**I won’t bury the lede!**

You asked that we focus on comments, in particular, on the advisors are looking for your feedback on regional governance, decision-making, and service delivery.

**I believe the context or goal of this consultation is to make recommendations on developing an improved nimble, cost-effective, and efficient governance.**

* Ontario’s Public Library systems are exemplars of good local, community-led, governance, advanced, large-scale consortial and collaborative activities and strong partnerships with local, regional, municipal, provincial, and federal organizations for the benefit of the communities they serve. We have too much data and proofs to share in the time we have today, but we stand ready to provide this at your request. Our model should be reviewed for other sectors.
* Ontario’s local public library boards are **voluntary & community-led**. Unlike county library boards, which are entirely comprised of elected officials, community members are required by law to make up a majority of the members of local public library boards. This lead to strong local ties and community identities being expressed well and local needs being addressed well by the library and in partnership.
* **All of Ontario’s local library board trustees are unpaid**, and take on these important roles to ensure that the public library is able to sustainably deliver critical resources and services to the people of their communities. They take on strategic and fiscal risk to contribute to their local communities.
* Local public library boards are **independent from local municipal government**, while at the same time are **focused on responding to the needs and character of their communities**. Many own their own public library buildings, are independently incorporated, and all maintain independent oversight of local public library budgets as set being guided by municipal fiscal decision-making. It is so rare that a library exceeds their allocated budget as to be almost unheard of.
* This local & independent tradition, which has existed for over a century and is set out in the *Public Libraries Act*, and is what **sets public library boards apart from other municipal boards** established under the *Municipal Act*. They provide local, community-led leadership.
* It reflects the fact that **outside of major urban centres, local & independent public library boards are essential to ensuring that people are able to access critical resources and services through the public library close to home**.
* Our **local library board members are community leaders, small business people and professionals – not always politicians**. They understand how to deliver the most value from every dollar spent and work cooperatively to deliver the greatest impact for local people.
* We strongly urge the reviewers, in preparing their recommendations for the Ontario government, to **maintain the current framework for local, independent public library boards in Ontario** – even if this creates an asymmetrical system.
* We also welcome the opportunity to work together with the Ontario government to **address outdated red tape** that will help our local public library boards deliver essential resources and services even more cost-effectively.
* Public Libraries are in the middle of our new term 4-year cycle We are running governance and accountability training – cost-effectively – for all of our local library boards – supported by online learning and a professional Governance Hub central website of all governance best practices – over one thousand documents with human hotline support.
* Lastly we support our cooperative agencies SOLS and OLS-North that ensure very high cost-effectiveness and efficiencies in local library operations.

**Now on to some further context:**

The Federation highlights today how public libraries help Ontario’s communities.

* Strong public libraries are essential to millions of people in Ontario; they’re not a nice to have. Hard-working Ontarians, families with young children, and seniors in every community across the province depend on them. Protecting public libraries will make sure that people will continue to have access to the critical resources and services they provide – no matter where they live in Ontario.
* Public libraries are Ontario’s farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource, reaching 98% of Ontarians in hundreds of communities of all sizes. Public libraries are local, close to home, and adapt to meet the people-focused needs of their communities. Through strong local partnerships, trained frontline library staff develop & provide programs and services that millions of people depend on. These include job training, small business support and affordable & high-quality children’s and senior’s programs. They also provide reliable broadband access and are the frontline ServiceOntario point-of-access for thousands of Ontario government transactions and services.
* Public Libraries have a huge positive impacting being used by 74% of Ontario’s residents who visit our libraries over six times every second 24/7/365 and growing fast!
* Local Public libraries are Ontario’s farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource as excellent stewards of public funding. Public librarians seem to be able to rub two nickels together and get a quarter’s worth of local impact.
* We’re growing our impact with growth of our programs of 83% as one of the top, most used, most valued, public institutions in Ontario. We want to emphasize that Ontario’s public library systems experts at maximizing the value of every dollar and focused on providing frontline support and people-focused resources. With no funding increase in 22 years for the annual provincial share of public library operating funding, the net present value of the province’s investment has decreased by over 60%. We want the government to be aware that we deliver an incomparable and cost-effective, return on investment. In short, dozens of independent, local community studies who that for every dollar of municipal and provincial investment, the community enjoys, on average, over $5 in raw economic return. Indeed, our ***total*** economic and social return on investment (in 8 new 2018/9 studies published under Ontario government special funding) showed an enviable return of **2,700 per cent!** We help millions of regular people in virtually every community across Ontario – large and small – reach their potential.
* We’re Ontario’s original community hubs, with a proven history of responding to and reflecting local priorities.
* This includes providing access to job training and re-training programs, small business supports, reliable broadband internet, high-quality children’s programs for young families, ER diversion, – as well as supporting self-directed lifelong learning.
* Our contribution to the digital capacity of Ontario’s small, rural, remote and northern communities is especially important.
* Our libraries drive and sustain economic development, especially for the people in smaller towns, northern, indigenous, and rural communities.
* We’re also a lifeline for seniors, keeping them involved and active in their communities as they move through life.
* And in many communities, we’re the frontline access point for digital Ontario government services and transactions through a formal partnership with ServiceOntario
* That is to say, public libraries deliver a big return on investment despite just $2 per resident in annual funding.
* While we’re experts at maximizing the value of every dollar, we’ve reached a critical crossroads.
* Together, we can help make sure that all the people – no matter where they live in Ontario – will have access to their local public library and the critical resources and services it provides.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Minister of Municipal Affairs Regional Government Consultations and look forward to building upon our long-standing partnership with the Ontario Government.

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