

July 22, 2015

Municipal Legislation Review  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
777 Bay St., 13th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

To whom it may concern:

**RE: Review of Municipal Act, City of Toronto Act and Municipal Conflict of Interest Act**

I am the executive director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL.ca). The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries represents Ontario’s over 400 public library systems which have over 1,100 branches in virtually every Ontario community. 75% of Ontarians own library cards. Over 5 million Ontario residents make hundreds of millions of visits to our libraries, in person and virtually, *every* year. Libraries are trusted, accessible community hubs providing freely accessible professional service, technology, programs, and resources to a more diverse range of residents than any other cultural institution. Ontarians have voted with their library cards and passionate support for and use of public libraries continues to grow in the digital age.

The success of public libraries in Ontario has been largely due to a unique collaboration that has been sustained for over a century. Public libraries are led by their CEO and management staff. However, this is balanced and enhanced by an equally important governance activity – the independent public library board of directors – often called trustees who provide community input and leadership. Our independent boards are authorized and mandated by the Public Libraries Act and appointed by municipalities and are non-partisan and impartial. This governance structure provides the checks and balances to protect the role of libraries in our society, economy and communities.

Library Boards make important and strong contributions and provide volunteer, community-based leadership for strategic and financial planning, advocacy, new building and development planning, and partnerships. Boards are usually appointed, after consultation, by the municipality to provide independent oversight of the library system and CEO. Here are their responsibilities:

The Public Libraries Act, RSO 1990, c. P.44 requires:

* Boards shall hold regular meetings once a month for at least 10 months each year and at such other times as it considers necessary.
* Meetings are open to the public.
* Majority of members must be present.
* Chair may vote with other members.
* Tie vote is deemed to be negative.
* Members are appointed by municipal council according to rules set out in the Act.
* Minimum size for a library board is five members.
* The number of municipal councillors on a library board may not exceed one less than the majority; a county board may have a bare majority of councillors.
* Library or municipal employees may not be board members.

Library boards’ responsibilities include:

1. ***Responsibility***: To define the library’s purpose and direction The Board is responsible for determining the purpose of the library and ensuring that it achieves what it is meant to achieve. It defines new directions in response to changing environmental conditions and broadly drafts a course of action to be undertaken by staff to meet the needs of the community. The board reviews and defines library policies.
2. ***Responsibility***: To delegate authority and resources to the staff to run the library The Board ensures that the best possible staff is in place and let the staff do the job. This requires the Board to put in place a CEO who is capable of managing the entire operation as well as a comprehensive framework for operations. The Board DOES NOT have direct responsibility for operations and programming. The Board does, however, ensure that the financial resources are available to provide library service to the community.
3. ***Responsibility***: To act as a bridge between the library and the Municipal Council and the library and the community The Board represents the public in its stewardship of the library. The Board works with the staff to determine what the public wants and, in turn, to let the public know what the possibilities of library service are. To do this, the Board maintains regular contact with the public – with both those who use the library and those who do not. The Board collects data that will guide the Board in setting future directions for the library. In order to achieve future goals, the Board communicates this information to the Municipal Council and advocates for the necessary resources. It is essential that the Board maintain a close working relationship with the Municipal Council – the library‘s major funder and partner.
4. ***Responsibility***: To report on the library’s effectiveness The Board must be constantly aware of its requirement to report on the effectiveness of organizational achievement. It carefully monitors policies and controls and elicits appropriate information to be able to report to Council, the community and the province in a meaningful way. The Board reports on the library’s effectiveness in a variety of ways. Examples include the annual report to Municipal Council and to the community showing the library’s achievement of its annual goals and objectives and the annual audit demonstrating the library’s ability to manage financial resources.
5. ***Responsibility***: To practice good governance The Board is responsible for its own operations - those of the Board itself. Included in this are the organization and structure of the Board, how it conducts meetings, its committees and the role of its officers.

Ontario public library services have evolved to be much more than books and buildings. Today’s libraries have a measurable and valuable impact on the quality of life and the success of our communities – economically, socially, educationally, and culturally. In recent FOPL polls of Ontarians, public libraries are one of the most highly valued and used services that Ontarians taxes support. FOPL ensures that funders and decision-makers know the full breadth and depth of the role of public libraries in Ontario, and advocates for the needed support, programs, and resources to continue to make a difference for all Ontarians. Our Boards play a strong role in our mission to have a positive impact on the residents of Ontario. Indeed, we value the role and contributions of our volunteer trustees so highly that we bring our local board members into our professional associations and agencies as board members and province-wide leaders.

**Therefore, given our history of good governance, great financial management despite difficult economies, and successful adaptation to changing times and environments, the members of FOPL strongly support the current mandate for community-driven, independent, non-partisan, impartial library boards and would be strongly opposed to any changes that negatively tamper with our current successful leadership, governance, partnerships or financing.**

I’m just at the end of the phone or e-mail if you have any questions or comments. If you would like to meet with me or members of our Board, we can make ourselves available at your convenience.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our input as Ontario’s public library systems.

Sincerely,

Stephen Abram

Executive Director,

Federation of Ontario Public Libraries

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*The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is a non-profit with a mandate to benefit Ontario public libraries through advocacy, research, and marketing.*

*La Fédération des bibliothèques publiques de l'Ontario est un organisme à but non-lucratif. Elle a comme mandat, de répondre aux besoins de toutes les bibliothèques, en concentrant leurs efforts dans la recherche, en marketing et en agissant comme plaidoyeur.*



Cc:

Michael Coteau, Minister of Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport

James Hamilton, Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport

Kevin Finnerty, Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport

Rod Sawyer, Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport