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# Libraries facing budget challenges

'We've cut as much as we can'

**Don Lajoie, The Windsor Star**

Published: Saturday, December 15, 2007

Taxpayers, library staff and management have reacted with dismay to news that city council has ordered the Windsor Public Library Board to make \$800,000 more in budget cuts next year, without reducing hours or eliminating any of 10 local branches.

Brian Bell, chief executive officer of the library, said management is at a loss on how to achieve the goal, stating that the directive gives the cash-strapped institution next to no room to maneuver. He noted that a half million dollar cut had to be absorbed in 2005 even as the system grew from nine to 10 branches.

"How we can achieve those cuts and still keep 10 open will be difficult," he said, adding that there are 91 full-time staff and about 80 part-timers. "We've cut as much as we can.... If you don't have the staff to keep buildings open, well, you can't have one without the other."



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**Jacqueline Mathurin studies with Chris Parton (not pictured) at the central library branch in Windsor on Saturday, Dec. 15, 2007. The city is planning to cut \$800,000 from the library's budget and it is unclear at this point where that money will come from.**

Tyler Brownbridge, The Windsor Star

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He noted that up 12 to 14 staff cuts might have to be made to cover part of the \$800,000 shortfall but some

branches currently only have two employees working. Operating with as few as one, he said, may not even be possible under current labour agreements.

He said there are 13 professional librarians in the system, earning between \$45,000 and \$50,000. Clerical and library services staff earn about \$30,000 to \$40,000. Moving people around to fill the holes, he added, will cause "a ripple effect" throughout the system, ultimately leading to chronic staff shortages.

Aside from closing down a branch or two, the only other area where cuts could be made, suggested Bell, is in resources and materials such as book and computer supplies.

He noted that the system averages about \$1.3 million in purchases each year. Cutting back, he said may mean that rather than 100 copies of the latest Harry Potter novel, they may purchase only 28. He predicted that such resource cuts would double the number of orders on hold from 6,000 a month to 12,000.

"People will have to wait," he said. "Perhaps each location won't even have one copy (of a given book)."

Taxpayers and employees interviewed Saturday at branches across the city said libraries are important, if not "essential,"

services and worried that cuts could threaten the integrity of the system.

"I don't think it's good to cut back on Library services," said Joseph Ducharme, who was reading at the main downtown branch and who comes to the library everyday to read. "People use libraries for educational purposes. Students use the library. Anything to do with school, you shouldn't cut those areas."

George Levidis, who was working at a library computer terminal, agreed.

"A lot of decisions politicians make are not the best or most appropriate," said Levidis, who regularly comes to the library for research and study. "Why don't they cut their own wages and not useful public resources like the library . . . Council has to think about how to do things for people and stop taking things away."

The technician for Sutherland Global said no matter what route the library board takes to achieve the cuts, the users of the library will be inconvenienced. He explained that closing branches will have a detrimental impact on the neighborhoods and schools they serve.

He suggested that cutting back on resources will ultimately mean less choice, longer waits and fewer resources for the public. Cutting staff would have the added adverse effect of putting more unemployed on the streets.

"Libraries are my lifeline," said Chris Parton, a law student at the University of Detroit studying at the downtown branch. "I'm here all the time. I don't know if they have too much staff but a library is an essential service for the community. . . Maybe buying fewer resources would have the least impact."

His study partner, Jacqueline Mathurin, also a law student, added that cutting staff would be another blow to a community already suffering massive job loss. She suggested that a study be done to see which of the library services has the least public usage and, perhaps, savings could be found in those areas.

Sahra Farah, who brought her son to a "reading buddy" program at the Remington Park branch - the smallest in the system, said her neighborhood would severely impacted if staff cuts or closure threatened their library, which is now open just three days a week.

"If the library closed we'd be forced to travel," she said. "This is good because it's in a residential area. Maybe they could reduce hours at other branches. This staff here does everything so I can't see more cuts here."

Library Clerk Maria Caruana said the Remington Park branch draws users from across the neighborhood, many of whom are single mothers or low income families. She said the library offers the children a place to have access to study materials and computers they may not have at home. Travelling to other locations is not an option due to lack of transportation for many of them.

"I don't see how they can make any more savings at this branch," she said. "We're only open three days a week. We see a lot of students, a lot of seniors. It would effect this neighborhood immensely."

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## COMMENTS ON THIS STORY

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Mariyln

Sat, Dec 15, 07 at 07:04 PM

I know students are man-dated to do volunteer work to obtain their High School degree, can we get some students in the libraries on a volunteer basis to help short staffed libraries. Just a thought. Maybe they already are though.

sat

Sat, Dec 15, 07 at 08:29 PM

It will affect alot more people than what may be realized!!! Im part of Remington Park community area and this Library is of great value to our childrens lives now as well as for their future.Please spare our library from closing>

Coalhouse Walker

Sat, Dec 15, 07 at 09:28 PM

The libraries were kept open during the 3-year siege of Leningrad.

Larry

Sat, Dec 15, 07 at 10:22 PM

If I'm reading this story right there are 10 libraries and 91 full time staff thats 9 people per library plus 80 part time staff thats 8 per library total is 17 people per. If some only have 2 people running them where are all the others?? I find that most of the things being run by the city is not run in a business like fashion. And if services are going to survive the next ten years they have to get things in order because the way things are going with the cost of everything going crazy people can't afford 10 libraries 2 separate school boards ice rinks concert halls more taxes water rates sewer charges airports capital theaters and the list goes on forever. All

these things have to start thinking of ways to produce some of their own monies to help float their cost if they want to survive.

Robert

Sat, Dec 15, 07 at 11:01 PM

I tried on several occasions to donate perfectly good and high quality hardcover books on science, politics, biographies, Canadian history, etc. [not junk novels] to the library system for 'resources', as well as tapes and quality music CD's - even book tapes for the blind. They wouldn't accept them. Just spend our tax money with no regard to cost ... and then complain when your services need to be cut. I fully support the need for libraries, school buildings, art museums - but it's time to get real - build functional stuff without all the fluff that blows money for superficial looks that no one else cares about but the spenders.

Concerned

Sun, Dec 16, 07 at 04:41 AM

Maybe the Library Board could borrow from the Police Department's budget which was increased, both services are really important.

LAURA

Sun, Dec 16, 07 at 10:41 AM

Shame on the mayor, and shame on city council. Windsor's unemployment rate is already increasing at a rapid rate, and now add 14 more jobs to the list. The mayor and city council should be looking at ways to make the city more viable and cutting library services are not the way. In a city that supports a university, as well as a college, libraries are important services. In a time where we are trying to get kids to turn off the tv and video games, we spend money on physical activity (arenas, sports complexes) but cut money from education. Kids also need librarians, they need help finding information for school projects, as well, us adults need them. Even just to help us find a good book to read. Librarians are professional people, they get paid for the work that they do. Volunteers are great - they help make lots of different services run. But you get what you pay for when it comes to professionalism, I don't see an unpaid volunteer sitting in the mayor's seat- do you?

Northern Librarian

Sun, Dec 16, 07 at 12:05 PM

Welcome to the problems Northern libraries are having! Cutting back does mean that you have to wait for a book - I've been in your libraries and have seen bestsellers that I have a huge waiting list for - sitting on your shelves untouched! We can only afford 1 copy - you get 100! CUT BACK - you people should have to wait; we do. Our budgets are so low that we only have one staff member on at a time, very few computers and don't get me started on highspeed!

J Rupert

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 04:35 AM

Ever since Eddie Francis became mayor Windsor has went down. Eddie and his pals spend money like compulsive shoppers. I never have nor will i ever vote for you or any of your friends. I wonder what the people who voted you back in are thinking now? I hope they are happy cause the rest of Windsor isn't.

farmmesca@telefonica.net

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 06:31 AM

The Autonomous Catalan Government ceated many public libraries, even in small villages, to promote education and culture..After general Franco's victory, most of them were closed, under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, which, at least in Spain, has been always strongly against literacy. Don't follow his example! Every cent spent in improving people's education is worth spending!

Will

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 07:09 AM

Welcome to Eddie Francis' Windsor, Where big time wrestling, kiddie bars,strip joints, and the Casino are KING ! Down with reading !

Tom Ward

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 10:18 AM

Politicians hate knowledge.

Mrs. Dewey

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 10:35 AM

Some very well-taken points above. City council has engineered this crisis in order to take more direct control of library budgets and decisions; which is in direct contravention of the Public Libraries Act. If you feel your libraries are important, step up to the plate. Volunteer for the Public Library Board, which at present is imbalanced with City Councillors. This is a dangerous and ominous situation. Citizens of Windsor must stand up and re-assert their right to free and maximum service. Is the library board representative of the community? Are there youth reps? Demographically accurate reps? And, where's the vision from the senior staff? Is a strategic plan in place to inform and justify all decisions over the next four years? If you must cut the collections budget, go for it. Don't buy 100 copies of the latest Harry Potter. For free, people can wait in the queue a little bit. Senior staff, there are still lots of openings, but if you've not already got a strategic plan informing all your library decisions, than you've just left yourself open to all this meddling from blind beancounters with big axes! Library users of Windsor, get serious, develop long memories, and remember under whose political control the library board was forced to make all these decicions. And, if all you can do is join the "Friends" of the library and make a charitable donation, go for it. Don't let this city council pull the rug out from under your libraries while all you did was write letters to the editor..Get engaged and make a difference.

librarianne

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 10:55 AM

And while you're at it, why not get h.s. students and other untrained volunteers to cover medical staff shortages, for legal representation for indigent people, or any other professional job requiring advanced degrees?

Gemma Jones

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 01:18 PM

Interesting comment earlier from "Larry" - who seems to be ignoring all the "behind the scenes" staff who give us library services. I'm talking about technicians, cataloguers, admin staff, etc. - who may not be on the front lines serving the public but who are all essential to a city giving good library service. Also - it's amazing to see any major city even considering cutting library services when governments at most levels are finally clueing into the fact that they can dispense important info inexpensively through public libraries as so many of us access them frequently. I'm talking about things like "Service Ontario" or the recent conference on the roles libraries can play in helping new citizens and assisting multiculturalism to grow in our communities. Libraries are essential for so many people who don't have access to info, computers, services, etc. in other ways. I hope city council will work with the library so Windsor doesn't lose the benefits of a great library service.

Urbanrat

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 03:57 PM

The Mayor Francis and his more than wise council want to have several ways with the library system, they want to take almost \$800,000 dollars in cuts and cut 20% of the staff, when they took a half a million a year ago..I guess that cut went to Ron Jone's fireman, AND keep all ten libraries open in their wards. What they want is a shell of a library system with nothing in them but not the angry citizens when facing the voters when it comes election time. With Windsor dead last in literacy, 27th and according to the last Canada Census, Windsor is the city with the largest population of citizens with no post secondary education..his Worship wants a smart city, closing libraries and cutting it to the core is indeed a smart move on his part then we will know nothing except for what he wants us to know.

Colleen

Mon, Dec 17, 07 at 04:38 PM

As an employee of the Windsor Public Library for 23 years, I feel the need to respond to these posts. With regard to Larry's comment on there being 17 staff per branch and where are all the others; please note that not all staff at libraries are public service staff. Therefore simple division of branches and numbers of staff does not reflect reality in our system, or any library system. Many vital positions are behind the scenes in job categories that are not public service in nature. For instance, staff that receives and processes new books. This job category entails unpacking new items, entering the titles in our online catalogue, barcoding the books, etc. A vital job in libraries - but not public service front line. This is an area I might add that is already taken "hits" through attrition and we are down to bare bones in staffing with processing new materials. There are positions such as our Book Buddy Coordinator making up vital cogs in our wheel. This coordinator is our lead in tutoring school age children in reading and what libraries are about - LITERACY. Employee numbers reported in the Star also include our caretaking staff. They don't checkout books, or help find material, or fill your reserves, but they keep your libraries clean. Not public service, but I think everyone agrees they are an essential component in any workplace. I could go on with many important positions in libraries that are not

front-line in nature, but I think readers can get the picture. When our CEO refers to full-time staff there is misconception on what full-time means in our already trimmed to the bones system. Full-time positions at the library can and do include anywhere from 25 hours per week to our maximum of 35 hours per week. Part-time on the other hand are made up of positions that range from 13 hours to 24 hours per week, with most of those again cut down to bare bones and being closer to that 13 hour range. Part time positions being created or vacancies through attrition have been a reality for our system for years now in order to save money. Reality is that at the majority of our branches you do only have 2 public service staff working, and certainly not a librarian any more! We've made our trims to staffing; where can more be trimmed from ? You cannot have one person staffing a library all day long. Where numbers are slightly larger, it is because of patron traffic and demand. We are certainly not overstaffed; we are understaffed. Addressing Robert's comments on the library not taking donations, this is not wholly accurate. We welcome donations that can be catalogued into our collection. Certainly we sometimes do not take those donations that have been in basements, attics, or garages for years and have sustained damage, or are so out of date they are not able to become part of our permanent collection. For instance, many want to donate encyclopedias that are 30 years old; useful once to their children but no longer current in the information therein. Or sometimes it is a 20 year old book on troubleshooting your computer. No longer relevant where technology seems to change with every exhalation as everyone knows. But certainly items that we cannot catalogue but we KNOW the public would be interested in, we take and store on site for our booksales. And while everyone's books are their treasures and we realize that, not all can find a permanent place on our shelves, nor will they be able to be sold to another. People like me love their books, and sometimes having to make the decision that it is okay to recycle them, is a hard one. But sometimes not all we have in our possession are truly in the best of shape. Its hard for us to realize that sometimes - especially book lovers like myself who works here and knows this ! The library as well cannot charge for certain things because we are governed under the Libraries Act; so raising revenue in new ways is limited. It is not as easy as one thinks. We cannot just blatantly assign fees for this and that but where we can, we have. For instance, introducing our popular computer classes for those who need to learn from turning one on to creating your own web page. But we also cannot assign overdue fees that are through the roof as some I've heard suggest. Lower income families who rely on the libraries because they cannot afford to buy their own books could not pay such fines. And really, who amongst us has not been late on a phone bill, or hydro bill. However for those that abuse the system, we have been doing something about it. We do send those accounts to collection agency. We are trying to retrieve our material and /or fines. We are actively doing things to address the cuts over the years. Libraries are a vital component in our society. Literacy is something to be accessed by all. Libraries are accessed by people even more so in times of layoffs - a horrible reality for this city that we are experiencing in large numbers. Reducing services even more with that more added need, it incomprehensible.

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