

Municipality Of Chatham-Kent
Community Human Services
Library Services

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Tania L. Sharpe
CEO / Chief Librarian
Date: July 27, 2021
Subject: Chatham Branch – Chatham-Kent Public Library Space Limitations

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The recommendation from the Chatham-Kent Library Board to increase the square footage of the Chatham Branch to a minimum of 35,000 sq. ft., as per the Library Master Plan, if it is moved to the Downtown Chatham Centre (DCC) be approved. Further information about costing for the proposal will be included in a report to Council for approval as part of the entire proposal to move some Municipal services to the DCC.

Background

In 2008, the Library Master Plan identified 61 recommendations. The Library Master Plan is available at the following web link: <https://www.chatham-kent.ca/localgovernment/Documents/Studies%20and%20Plans/CKPLFinalMasterPlan.pdf#search=library%20master%20plan>

These recommendations were approved by the Library Board and in principal by Council in January 2009. Administration has been working to achieve many of these recommendations over the last twelve years.

The first fifteen recommendations address the lack of space in Chatham-Kent Public Library's (CKPL) main and community branches.

Specifically related to the Chatham Branch, the following recommendations were made:

Recommendation 9:

By 2015, the library should review population projections against actual growth, reconfirm growth-related space needs in the Chatham service area, and investigate options for providing 13,000 additional sq. ft. of library space in

Chatham. This plan should consider all options for providing the required amount of space, including expansion at the existing branch through the addition of a third story or the purchase of adjacent properties; replacement of the Chatham branch with a new, larger library at a new location; or development of a second branch within Chatham. It should also address any internal restructuring of the existing branch, as required.

Recommendation 10:

Based on the findings of the Chatham Branch expansion study, an additional 13,000 sq. ft. of library space should be provided in the Chatham service area by 2020.

The Chatham Branch was built in 1967. During the 1999 renovations, the auditorium was removed to make space for staff, and the children's room was moved to the first floor. In 2009-2010 space was carved out of the reference area to create a working space for the IT/Reference Librarian as well as the IT Library Technician. In this same space, the part-time Library Technicians share a desk and any grant employees such as Tech Trainers and Community Navigators are also housed in this office area.

Over the past few years, there have been several conversations around the sustainability of medium and small branches. The Library Master Plan made the following recommendations with regard to medium branches:

Recommendation 7:

In the short term (2008-2010), a study should be undertaken to assess all community level libraries except Wallaceburg and identify opportunities to accommodate an expansion of approximately 2,000 sq. ft. to accommodate program space, more seating and workspace, and additional space for an expanded collection.

Recommendation 8:

Subject to the results of the branch community library expansion study, approximately 2,000 sq. ft. should be added to the Community branches in Ridgetown, Blenheim, Tilbury, and Dresden. The expansions should occur as soon as practical but prior to 2015.

The recommendation to increase the size of the Chatham Branch is not to be at the expense of any medium or small branches.

Three documents were used to provide standards and best practices to inform this business case for expansion of the Chatham Branch: Wisconsin Public Library Standards (WPLS), Guidelines for Rural / Urban Public Library Systems by the Administrators of Rural and Urban Public Libraries of Ontario (ARUPLO), and the Ontario Public Library Guidelines by the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Monitoring and Accreditation Council.

Comments

Space Justification

1. Space Deficits at the Chatham Branch

Currently, the Chatham Branch combines staff space, programming space, and shelving space. There is very little library space for residents of Chatham-Kent. In the Library Master Plan, it was recommended that for populations over 35,000, a main branch should have a minimum of 35,000 sq. ft. with a 2,000 sq. ft. program space. According to 2016 Census data, Chatham's population was 42,260.

As well, the Ontario Public Library (OPL) guidelines recommend a minimum of 35,000 sq. ft. or one sq. ft. per capita in the library's catchment area, whichever is greater. Using OPL's guidelines, the Chatham Branch's recommended square footage would range from 45,000 to 55,000.

ARUPLO guidelines also recommend that "urban branches located within a rural/urban library system serving a catchment area population of 35,000 or greater should have 35,000 sq. ft. as a minimum or one sq. ft. per capita in the library's catchment area, whichever is greater."

Currently, there is a deficit space within the Chatham Branch, based on the minimum guidelines of 35,000 sq. ft. noted above.

The current programming space is less than the 2,000 sq. ft. recommended in the Library Master Plan.

Chatham-Kent Public Library is experiencing a surge in the number of requests from community groups, local authors, and patrons for program, meeting room, and quiet study space.

In the last two Customer Service Surveys implemented by CKPL in 2016 and 2018, patrons repeatedly commented that they would like more space for the community, including both quiet study space and group study space. The Chatham Branch lacks suitable areas for recreational reading; independent and group study; meeting, presentation, and programming space; and sufficient comfortable seating options.

ARUPLO guidelines recommend seating for five people per 1,000 capita. For the Chatham Branch that would require a minimum of 215 seats for the approximately 43,000 Chatham residents. Based on a catchment area of 50,000, the requirement is as high as 250 seats. Currently, the branch has 160 seats in total: 39 seats and 18 internet stations on the second floor, 60 seats on the first floor (including six seats for the Library Café) plus 38 seats and five internet stations in the children's area.

The Chatham Branch has also experienced a large increase in requests for exam proctoring. Currently, staff use the board room when it is available. However, space is often at a premium, and staff must use the Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) room,

when not in use by volunteers, or staff office space to support this revenue generating service. Additionally, the library is not adequately wired for the needs of current and expected technologies.

The introduction of the Internet and eBooks has led to a change in the way libraries are accessed, but not in the way libraries are used. Libraries are evolving, however, they continue to have a valued role in the community as a community hub for social learning and collaboration, a place to access technology, and a place for programs for all ages.

2. Sustainability Opportunities

With increased bookable space for community groups, CKPL could increase revenue for the library system. Currently, the meeting room and board room are booked on a regular basis by external groups. Revenue raised through these rentals is used to offset expenses in other areas of the library.

Additionally, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is lacking as a whole in bookable room space, therefore, with additional space in Chatham branch, the library could ease meeting space shortages for municipal staff.

3. New Service Opportunities

An expanded Chatham branch would allow for the organizing of larger community events, such as the Local Author Festival, How-To Festival, author events and children's performers. Events such as these are very popular but are limited by lack of space. These events build community and are essential to maintain an engaged community.

Increasing the square footage of the branch will enable the library to increase its service offerings for community space, programming, and social learning. At the moment, the library has no private space for group or collaborative work. During high school exam periods, the meeting room is opened up as a study hall but it is not conducive to group study.

As the library embarks on more creative programming, such as Local Author Festivals and How-To Festivals, staff are required to collaborate more with each other and with external individuals and groups. Space for staff to work on projects is extremely limited as there are few private offices. Currently staff use tables in the public area which takes away from public space and again is not conducive for lively discussion and debate when planning major events.

Steps Taken to Maximize the Utility of Existing Space

Staff have worked diligently to ensure that collections at the Chatham Branch are up-to-date and that items no longer used are discarded. Staff have condensed the adult non-fiction collection and eliminated some shelving to allow for additional quiet study space.

New accessibility standards have had an impact on the way existing space can be utilized. When shifting resources on adult shelving, staff have been eliminating the top row of the current stacks to increase accessibility. The OPL guidelines recommend that 75% of the materials shelved in the adult collection are stored so that the highest shelf is 60 inches or less from the floor.

The third floor of the branch has been re-organized with new shelving installed to allow for better storage of play packs and story kits so they are not being stored in the Children's Room office. Additionally, discarded materials stored for the twice yearly book sale at the Chatham Branch are stored on the third floor.

Primary Focus of Expansion

The primary purpose for the expansion of Chatham Branch would not be for the addition of extensive amounts of shelving. If the branch were to move, administration would ensure that sufficient shelving is obtained to meet AODA requirements coming in 2025. The requirement would be that no shelving be higher than 60 inches. The Chatham Branch now has 95,000 items (2020) in its collections which meets current OPL guidelines. These guidelines require a main branch to have a minimum of 70,000 items, or two to three items per capita.

The branch expansion would create more comfortable seating areas, bookable group study spaces, and both dedicated children's and adult programming areas, as well as clearly defined quiet study areas. A recent example of a successful program that required more library space to host was when CK Reads author Plum Johnson came to the Chatham Branch. Over 100 people were in attendance and the program, hosted in the café area, was at capacity. The following year, author Kelley Armstrong was hosted at the Kiwanis Theatre rather than the Chatham Branch so that more people could attend. The purpose of all library programs is to connect people to library resources and services; when events cannot be hosted in library branches, these connections are more difficult to make.

In recent years, a number of investments have been made in the Chatham Branch, including: a new boiler; new roof; HVAC balancing; and upgrades to the elevator.

Investigations have taken place to see whether the third floor can be expanded, however, this is not a feasible option.

The concept of moving to the DCC with multiple municipal assets is interesting and definitely a viable, even desirable, option for the Chatham Branch but only if more space can be provided which includes dedicated children's and adult programming space for library services. As well, assurances would be required that technology within the space would meet the Library's current and future needs.

In conclusion, should the Chatham Branch be moved to another location additional space that both meets the established standards and is sustainable to provide library service to this community would be required. In the event that the library does not move

to the DCC, administration will return to Council with a plan of increasing the library at its current location.

Areas of Strategic Focus and Critical Success Factors

The recommendation in this report supports the following areas of strategic focus:

Economic Prosperity:

Chatham-Kent is an innovative and thriving community with a diversified economy

A Healthy and Safe Community:

Chatham-Kent is a healthy and safe community with sustainable population growth

People and Culture:

Chatham-Kent is recognized as a culturally vibrant, dynamic, and creative community

Environmental Sustainability:

Chatham-Kent is a community that is environmentally sustainable and promotes stewardship of our natural resources

The recommendation in this report supports the following critical success factors:

Financial Sustainability:

The Corporation of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is financially sustainable

Open, Transparent and Effective Governance:

The Corporation of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is open, transparent and effectively governed with efficient and bold, visionary leadership

Has the potential to support all areas of strategic focus & critical success factors

Neutral issues (does not support negatively or positively)

Consultation

The Chatham-Kent Library Board met for an emergency meeting on July 16th and approved in principle that the Chatham Branch as the main branch serving the largest urban centre and the entire Municipality of Chatham-Kent should be at a minimum 35,000 sq. ft.

Financial Implications

The additional space will increase the cost of the DCC proposal, but this is the opportune time to consider this addition recommended in the CKPL Master Plan. The additional costing will be presented to Council for approval as part of the entire proposal to move some Municipal services to the DCC.

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Attachment: None

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