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T.O. libraries forced to cut \$1.2 million
Revised operating budget means fewer new books, hiring freeze
By BRIAN GRAY, SUN MEDIA

Cost cutting is on the books at the Toronto Public Library.

Service cuts, including closing 16 of 27 branches on Sundays from September to December, a hiring freeze and fewer new books on the shelf, were agreed to by the library board yesterday in a move that slashed \$1.2 million from its 2007 operating budget.

All city agencies, boards, committees and divisions were told to look at cost-cutting measures after city council chose last week to defer a vote on Mayor David Miller's proposed new taxes.

"It hurts," said library board vice-chairman Matthew Church. "We are already operating pretty close to the bone."

Operating hours and acquisitions are really the only areas where they have room to cut, he said.

Funding levels to the library's 99 branches across the city were just returning to levels they were at before the city amalgamated in 1997, Church said.

The library spends as efficiently as it can and any additional cuts must result in service reductions, he said.

The board is also hacking \$330,000 from its acquisition budget -- a move Church said will put the library behind in providing new materials for users at the largest library in North America and second busiest in the world.

"It's cumulative, that's \$330,000 we aren't going to get back," Church said.

Board member Paul Ainslie, Scarborough East councillor, said the remaining 11 branches which will continue to open Sundays are in areas identified by the mayor's office as priority high-risk areas, where they are used by youth and families.

"We are trying to be supportive of the mayor at the same time we have to be protective of the services we provide," Ainslie said.

Alex Nicholson, who lives in the city's west end, wishes there had been some public consultation.

"It'd be nice for it to be open on Sunday because most people work during the week. It's especially bad for students," he said.

Student Cheyenne Walls spends half her weekends in the library during school months. "I think it's all a great loss, especially on the weekends," she said.