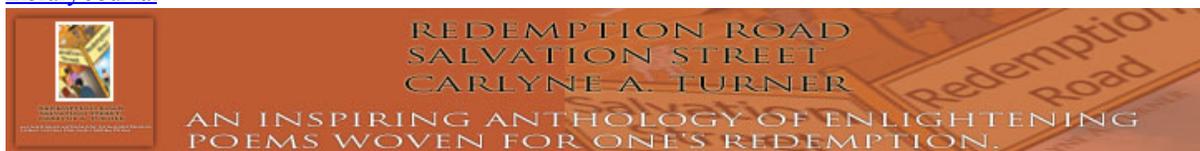


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Toronto Public Library Struggling to Cut Budget 10 Percent

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By Michelle Lee Dec 9, 2011

The future of the Toronto Public Library's operating hours and other services is up in the air as city officials require further cuts to the upcoming budget.

The Toronto Public Library had to cut its \$170 million operating budget by 10 percent, or \$17 million, for the 2012 financial year, which starts in January. The city reportedly faced a \$744 million budget gap and Mayor Rob Ford required all other city departments to reduce their budgets by 10 percent as well.

The library board reached about [5.7 percent of that goal](#) in October by approving a \$9.7 million cut that eliminated 100 full time jobs and reduced library operating hours. Other changes include the installing of new technologies, such as a self-checkout system, increasing fines, consolidating of the Urban Affairs Library at

Toronto Reference Library and centralizing three book mobiles into one location.

Library officials are still struggling to decide where the additional \$7.37 million, or 4.3 percent, in budget cuts should come from. The city's budget committee last month recommended cutting 51 more jobs, reducing operating hours by 7 percent, or 19,444 hours, and reduce the collections budget by \$1.89 million, or 27.1 percent.

Library officials rejected the proposal.

In her [budget comments](#), City Librarian Jane Pyper wrote that given the lead time required to assess and implement the latest suggestions, "it is

unlikely that significant revenues or cost reductions will result in 2012 from the suggestions. There is, however, a potential for greater impact in subsequent years.”

Anne Marie Aikins, a Toronto Public Library spokeswoman, said this week that library officials are “trying their best” to avoid further job cuts and reducing operating hours and the collection and they are still looking for other ways to reach the 10 percent goal.

Aikins said the library hopes to avoid layoffs by having most of the staff reductions come through attrition. Buyout packages are available, she said, and the deadline for the voluntary separation program is Dec. 14.

Other suggestions made by the budget committee to increase library revenues include looking for the sponsorship for library programs and Wifi services, selling e-books online, introducing paid parking at branches, increasing overdue fines and introducing a new fine for holds not picked up.

The library board will discuss the budget at a meeting on Monday.

Interview requests made this week to Mayor Ford’s interim spokesman and the library board chairman, City Councilor Paul Ainslie, were not answered.

However, in a [general statement](#) made on Nov. 28 about the draft 2012 budget, Mayor Ford said the overall cuts were needed to “rebuild Toronto’s fiscal foundation” and the proposed library reductions were necessary because the city faced closing library branches to save money for child care and emergency services.

“Instead we’ve managed to avoid library closures by digging deep to find efficiencies in the library system,” the mayor said.

In an interview with [The Star newspaper](#) on Nov. 22, Ainslie said he would reject further cuts to library branch hours.

“You know, we have the highest per-capita-used library in North America,” Ainslie said. “And we had a number of public consultation meetings, and I think the board members that attended those (heard), and the people who contacted my office said loud and clear, ‘We don’t want hours cut.’”

The Toronto Public Library has 98 branches. Last year, the library had over 32 million items circulated and over 18 million visitors.

The budget cuts and talks about possible branch closures and outsourcing work drew a huge backlash from the public over the summer. Many people wrote protest letters and filed complaints. Renown author Margaret Atwood [even tweeted](#) about the cuts and directed the public to an online petition created by the Library Workers Union 4948, causing a computer server crash.

Margaret O’Reilly, president of the Toronto Public Library Workers Union 4948, said she’s against the latest proposed cuts and she said the mayor has “truly created an artificial financial crisis.”

“Torontonians highly value their public library system and have participating in all the cost-containing measures the city amalgamated (since) 1998,” O’Reilly said. “The union’s view is there is no more fat left to be cut.”

O’Reilly said the union is still calling on the public to speak out against the latest cuts. She noted their [online petition](#) has over 50,000 signatures now.

O’Reilly said the library staff cuts will have an impact on services and she is concerned that it could lead to the future outside contracting of work. She also said bringing in self-checkout machines and book sorters “is really putting a distance between the library user and staff.”

There has been no discussion of outsourcing work and it hasn’t been on the library board agenda at all, Aikins said.

Aikins said the self check-out machines give patrons another service option, and they can always go to a librarian.

Reader Comments (3)

We just got scanning machines at Morningside and Port Union branches. They occupy most of the desk space and the machines are NOT being presented as an option. When I asked for a librarian to check out my books, they insisted that I do it. They refuse to check out my books. This is

not being presented as an alternative. It must be that they are being told they should "train" patrons to do this. I resent being an instrument in the loss of decent jobs. We should fight back on this.

Posted by Diane Tucker on December 24, 2011 10:37:27AM

I was at the Barbara Frum library for the first time since they made the change to "Express self check out". There are no instructions anywhere in the library about the change. I queued up behind a woman at the desk and was then shown by one of the librarians what to do. There are no indications anywhere in the library about the change. I told the librarian when she was in the middle of trying to explain to me what to do that I didn't want the book. It is not just the loss of jobs but the implementation which is deplorable. I am boycotting Barbara Frum library.

Posted by Tanya Horgan on January 12, 2012 05:48:56PM

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