



THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

November 30, 2011

Library chair demands Del Grande apologize for 'program creep' comments

By Patrick White
Globe and Mail Update

Budget chief stands behind his allegations that the library spends too much on DVDs and non-English resources

The chair overseeing Toronto's library books is demanding an apology from the chief of Toronto's financial books.

Councillor Paul Ainslie took the floor of council on Wednesday to demand that Budget Chief Mike Del Grande express regret over comments about ethnic materials and Hollywood DVDs at city libraries.

Mr. Del Grande suggested the Toronto Library is suffering from "program creep" by offering movies such as the *Pirates of the Caribbean* and dedicating a large portion of its budget to non-English books.

"Should the city library become a Blockbuster?" he told reporters, adding that the library devoted 25 per cent of its budget to movies. "Is that what we are doing. Is that our core program? Or is that program creep?"

The actual budget portion used to purchase movies is closer to five per cent, library staff later stated.

On ethnic materials, he stated "our common language is English...should we not have a discussion of how much of the budget should go for non-English resources?"

Mr. Ainslie, chair of the library board, said the statements were insulting.

"I think his comments reflect badly not only on myself as chair of the library board, the library staff and members of this council. And ask him to withdraw his comments and apologize on behalf of the city council to the staff of the Toronto Public Library."

Mr. Del Grande, a stern fiscal hawk, wasn't biting.

"I don't have any apologies to make," he said. "I think it's very appropriate for me to suggest that we need to have dialogue, which is what I said, with respect to what we do at the library and how we do it. I don't make any apologies for that."

Mr. Del Grande's comments arose during a conversation with reporters about what he sees as taxpayer funded "freebies" on offer from City Hall, free parking for motorcycles and disabled drivers being two other examples.

The budget chief has teamed up with Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam for a motion that would force motorcyclists to start paying up for city parking.

Mr. Ainslie rejected any talk of library services as freebies and invited the budget chief to bring his concerns to the next library board meeting.

Having the *Pirates of the Caribbean* DVD in stock is no different than having a New York Times bestseller on the shelf, he said.

"It's a public library that should be available to all citizens across the city regardless of demographics, regardless of income," said Mr. Ainslie. "That's what the whole idea of 'public' is."

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