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Toronto's library board has rejected Sunday closures and other cuts to branch hours, voting Monday to leave the public library system's budget up in the air until after the city's official budget launch next week.

Mayor Rob Ford has demanded a 10 per cent cut from most city entities. The library board already approved a cut of 5.3 per cent, or \$9.7 million. The chief librarian, Jane Pyper, had proposed to make up most of the remaining 4.7 per cent, or \$7.3 million, through cuts to hours at 59 branches.

"You know, we have the highest per-capita-used library system in North America," said Councillor Paul Ainslie, the board's chair and a Ford ally. "And we've 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 board asked Pyper on Monday to study alternatives, including the elimination of 60 jobs. Pyper said that cut would save \$5.1 million, but that it could impact cherished services, such as bookmobiles, adult literacy programs and homework clubs. The board already authorized the elimination of 100 jobs earlier in the fall.

It remains unclear whether the board will eventually decide to meet Ford's 10 per cent target. Councillor Janet Davis, a left-leaning board member, has urged her colleagues to simply refuse.

But city council will make the final decision. After the previous library board repeatedly refused early this year to vote to close the Urban Affairs branch, council forced it to do so. Hours reductions therefore remain possible.

"I'm not even sure City Hall, that they're actually gonna make us cut 10 per cent," said civilian board member Ken Stewart, a lobbyist. But he also said he did not want to leave the decisions to budget chief Councillor Mike Del Grande, a fiscal hawk, and council's budget committee. "I'm afraid what they'll send back to us," Stewart said.

Other than cutting hours and jobs, Pyper does not appear to have many options to make a significant dent in the 2012 budget. She told the board in a previous report that their numerous budget suggestions – such as introducing fines for holds not picked up and introducing pay parking at some branches – would take too long to study and to implement to help much this year.

Pyper will not likely get major assistance from the efficiency study conducted by the consulting firm DPRA. Pyper told the committee that the consultants' biggest suggestions were likely "unpalatable" to them: closing branches and reducing hours. Council emphatically rejected branch closures after another consulting firm, KPMG, suggested them.

The board will consider Pyper's latest recommendations at its next meeting on Dec. 12.