

NO: R031

COUNCIL DATE: February 24, 2025

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **February 19, 2025**

FROM: **Chief Librarian**

FILE: **7960-01**

SUBJECT: **LMLGA Resolution related to Provincial Funding for Public Libraries**

RECOMMENDATION

The Chief Librarian recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Approve the resolution, attached as Appendix “I” to this report, and authorize staff to forward it to Lower Mainland Local Government Association (“LMLGA”) for consideration and endorsement for submission to UBCM.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the state of provincial funding for public libraries and to seek Council approval to submit a resolution to the LMLGA regarding provincial public library funding.

BACKGROUND

Public libraries in British Columbia are established, governed and operated under the authority of the *Library Act*. The Municipality of Surrey is predominantly responsible for funding library services, however, all 71 public libraries across BC receive provincial funding to enhance their operations. Provincial funding for the entire public library sector is currently \$14 million per year and has been largely frozen since 2010. Since 2010, Surrey’s portion of this funding has remained at approximately \$1 million annually.

The BC Public Library Partners is a unified voice for British Columbia’s public library community at senior levels of government. An alliance of the Association of BC Public Library Directors (“ABCPLD”), the BC Library Association (BCLA), the BC Libraries Cooperative (“BCLC”), and the BC Library Trustees Association (“BCLTA”), are currently advocating for the provincial government to increase annual core funding from \$14 million to \$30 million. This boost would provide critical support to BC’s public libraries and factor in inflationary needs for future funding. Alongside direct engagement with the provincial government, the BC Public Library Partners also encourages municipalities to bring forward resolutions to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (“UBCM”).

DISCUSSION

Since a 25% funding reduction in 2009, provincial support for public libraries in BC has remained largely frozen. Over the past 15 years, libraries across the province—including Surrey—have grappled with rising costs, population growth, and increasing service demands. Although the province provided one-time enhancement grants in 2022 and 2023 to support post-pandemic recovery, core operational funding has not kept pace, and short-term injections do not allow for sustained programs or services.

Surrey Libraries has benefitted from strong municipal investment, but that municipal share has grown significantly over time. In 2010, 8% of Surrey Libraries' budget came from the province; by 2024, that figure had declined to 4.5%. Without reliable core funding, libraries face tough choices around reducing services and hours—at a time when demand is at an all-time high. In 2024, Surrey Libraries recorded over 2.3 million in-person visits, and nearly 5 million physical and digital items were borrowed.

Public libraries:

- Make life more affordable for families by offering free access to materials and programs;
- Support workforce development through skills training, computer access, and other resources;
- Serve as community hubs that welcome newcomers, connect people with vital services, and foster belonging;
- Contribute to community health and wellness through diverse programs for all ages;
- Provide essential emergency support during climate crises like heat domes and atmospheric rivers;
- Help reduce social isolation, especially among seniors and unhoused individuals; and
- Quietly fulfill government mandates by offering critical community supports.

Long-term, predictable funding will help Surrey Libraries continue meeting our community's growing needs. Increasing annual core funding to \$30 million, as requested by the BC Public Library Partners and recommended by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, will ensure public libraries can sustain vital programs and services well into the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information provided, the Surrey Public Library Board and Chief Librarian seek Council's approval to submit a resolution to LMLGA. The resolution is attached as Appendix "I", and is titled "Provincial Funding for Public Libraries: Overdue".

Surinder Bhogal
Chief Librarian

Appendix "I": Resolution - Provincial Funding for Public Libraries: Overdue

APPENDIX “I”

Title: Provincial Funding for Public Libraries: Overdue

Sponsored by: City of Surrey

Whereas in the past 15 years, BC’s population has grown 29%, while public libraries have continued to rely on stagnant funding to provide services in increasingly challenging circumstances, including addressing the province’s important goals of enhancing economic growth, reducing costs for families, and making communities safer;

And whereas public libraries continue to meet these goals by supporting the economic and social health of their communities, providing information and services for consumers, individuals seeking employment and career enhancement, entrepreneurs and small businesses, providing critical locations of refuge during emergencies, and supporting the process of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; and

Therefore be it resolved that UBCM call on the provincial government to recognize the evolving and challenging situation for public libraries as well as their unique role in keeping costs low for British Columbians and making communities safer, and increase the annual core provincial funding for libraries to \$30 million in keeping with the long-standing request made by the BC Public Library Partners and the recommendation of the province’s Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.