

**Toronto Public Library  
Workers Union**  
Local 4948

Affiliated with  
CUPE and the  
Toronto & York Region  
Labour Council

**Maureen O'Reilly**  
President

**Brendan Haley**  
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# BVI.1.4

February 2, 2015

City of Toronto Budget Committee  
City Hall  
100 Queen St. W.  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Crawford, Chair, and Members of the Budget Committee

**RE: TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD 2015 OPERATING BUDGET**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the 2015 budget for the Toronto Public Library.

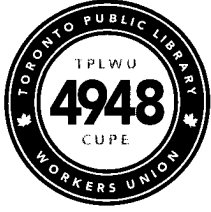
I would like to approach this by putting myself in your place for a few minutes and try to look at the library funding issue from *your* point of view as stewards of the public purse. You have so many decisions to make about how we spend our tax dollars and I do not envy your job. Whatever you decide, you're going to disappoint someone and everybody's a critic.

So what I propose is a framework for making your decisions, some basic principles you can turn to when you make your budget decisions, and then apply these principles to the library.

First of all, we have to ask ourselves this about any public service: Is the service necessary for the well-being of the City and its residents, now and in the future? I don't think we're going to get any real disagreement on this point. It is the very foundation of civilization that we preserve and transmit our knowledge, ideas and culture across generations. That's the purpose of libraries.

It's true that some people say the Internet will make bricks and mortar libraries obsolete. But that idea hasn't yet filtered down to the increasing numbers of Toronto residents who use the library for all kinds of reasons. We had over 19 million visits last year, nearly a million more than in the previous year. What does that say about the ongoing need for libraries?

Of course just because a service is needed doesn't mean we can spend whatever we want on it. We do not have unlimited funds. So the next question is how *much* of our collective resources should we spend on the library? That's the essence of the budget issue and here are some ideas to help guide our thinking.



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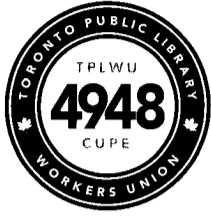
All public infrastructures have to be maintained in order to keep their value. Look what happens if we don't properly maintain our roads, our transit system, our electricity system, our health care system and so on. And as our population grows, so do our infrastructure maintenance needs. Toronto is an increasingly stressed city because political decision makers in the past have neglected adequate maintenance, as if the laws of physics could be put on hold. And frankly, we have pursued enough revenue tools to keep all of this in play.

For entirely different but just as compelling reasons, our library infrastructure must be maintained. Because of past cuts to the library budget, we're not quite keeping up with current human knowledge, with cultural and literary advances, and with the very diverse needs of the world's most multicultural city. For our library, even just standing still means going backwards.

In fact, that is exactly what is happening. During the past four years, Toronto library funding has been below the inflation rate. A staggering 90% below the rate of inflation. There are fewer professionals working in the system and many other aspects of the library service has suffered. Our share of the city pie has dwindled.

The other way to look at library funding is on a cost-benefit basis. And here we're fortunate that this has already been done by the Martin Prosperity Institute of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Their report on the economic impact of the Toronto Public Library on the City of Toronto was issued a little over a year ago and its findings were quite dramatic. For every dollar invested in Toronto Public Library, Torontonians receive \$5.63 in benefits. Those who use the library receive as much as \$500 per year in benefits. And the total impact of the library system on Toronto's economy is one billion dollars.

Now in the face of this report, what can you on the Budget Committee say? You either believe that this study is a credible cost-benefit analysis or you don't. If you *do* believe that it's credible, then cutting the library budget is *bad* for Toronto's economy. Why would you vote to harm our economy? By contrast, reinvesting in the library, reinvestment that is badly needed because of years of cuts, would be *good* for Toronto's economic development. So how could you be criticized for voting for something good



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for Toronto? Not just good but *measurably* good, as measured by people who are experts in this area.

Even if you agree with everything I've said, however, I realize that ultimately you have to come up with a number. How many of our tax dollars are we going to devote to our library system? You could debate that forever or you could accept the judgement of those who manage the library system. They are world class professionals and they have said that the TPL needs a 2.6% increase this year just to maintain the status quo.

The Library Board recommended that library security services be slashed to bring the increase down. They did this even though the instances of violent behaviour in the system went up by 49% from 2012 to 2013. Talk about turning a blind eye to a public safety concern!

In closing, I urge you to accept the very modest 2.6% increase asked for by TPL management. You can be assured that Torontonians will be behind you on this. A large majority have library cards and use the library a lot. There are more library visits every year than to the city's top ten entertainment, cultural and sports venues *combined*. The TPL is Toronto's favourite public institution by far and no City Councillor has ever lost votes by standing up for our public library.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Maureen O'Reilly  
President  
TPLWU Local 4948

cc. TPLWU Executive Board