

Cobourg Public Library

C. Gordon King Centre
King Street West, Cobourg

Business Plan (1998-2000)

Summary

A change has occurred in the role of libraries over the past few years. Yesterday, excellent libraries meant building large book collections, archives and files. Today there is immediate access through a vast communications network to other libraries via inter-library loan systems, via telex, e-mail, telephone and computer networks, including the Internet. Tomorrow, libraries will still store the printed word, but also embrace the electronic media. Through the expanding computer-assisted network, libraries will enable their members to find information for themselves, communicating via TV screens, satellite and audio-visual technology. Libraries will not change what they do, but how they do it. This business plan describes how the Cobourg Public Library will effect that change to serve the communities of Cobourg and Hamilton Township.

CPL Board of Trustees
26 March 1998

Background

1. The Library's place in the community

Cobourg Public Library is an important part of the combined communities of Cobourg and Hamilton Township, of their education, recreation and culture. Over 60 per cent of the community uses the library's services regularly. Of a total population base of 25,000 people, more than 15,000 are registered members of the library. Weekly, the library serves about 3,000 visitors, which is 20 per cent of its membership. The library is not only a source of strength, enhancing the quality of life of the community, it is a tangible asset that increases the area's marketability in any effort to attract commerce and industry to the town. Set in its prominent position at King, Ontario and Albert streets, the C. Gordon King Centre is also a source of pride to the community.

2. The Library Board

The library's Board of Directors is appointed by the councils of the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg and Hamilton Township with nominations by County Board of Education and the Separate School Board. The Board develops and implements policies that are in accordance with the Public Libraries Act of the Province of Ontario and its mission statement. This stated aim is to provide a library service that reflects the range and needs of the community at large, a service characterized by courtesy to visitors and flexibility, giving everyone who seeks a forum for knowledge, education and recreation an opportunity to do so. The Board believes that it is the library's job to reach out and extend opportunities to a diverse community. To make sure that it uses its full potential to provide advocacy leadership to the community, in March 1998 the Board instructed an ad hoc committee to develop a strategic plan.

3. Development of the plan

The job of the committee was to answer three questions: where are we today? where are we going? and how will we get there?

To assess and answer the first question the committee reviewed the library's role and function in the community. What is the purpose of the library, what services does it provide and what are its operating guidelines? The Board's committee inquired into the library's funding base, defined its services and the perceptions and expectations of its membership and funding sources, principally the municipal councils and, to some extent, the terms and conditions of 1992 Ontario Development Act. The library also relies on provincial funding and two other potential sources: the Library Foundation and the Friends of the Library organization.

4. Milestones

The extent of the community's effort to provide a first-class library is demonstrated by its recent history.

1990 – A plan to build a new library was given strong municipal support pending a public commitment to contribute a substantial share of the necessary funding.

1990–1995 – The community proved its enthusiasm through the creation of the CPL Foundation and subsequent fundraising efforts.

1995 – The agreement between the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg and Hamilton Township was ratified and the doors of the new library were opened for business.

1995–1997 – The Board of Directors adopted the principles of the Carver model (see Appendix 1), which deals with policies of governance.

1996 – The Friends of the Library organization was established.

5. Operating guidelines

The library operates in accordance with specific guidelines:

1. The Public Libraries Act, 1984
2. The Agreement between the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg and Hamilton Township
3. Board approved policies and procedure
4. Existing long-term contracts
5. CPL Foundation capital funding grants
6. 1992 Ontario Development Act

Highlights of the main guidelines under which the library operates are:

Public Libraries Act – Boards must allow the public within their jurisdictions to reserve and borrow circulating materials and use the library's reference and information services without charge. There is, however, some flexibility within the Act for internally generated funds through the use of equipment [e.g., computer] rental charges, local fund-raising, donations and bequests.

The inter-municipality agreement – Negotiated between Cobourg and Hamilton Township in 1994 and signed also by the previous Library Board, the agreement provides for sharing library operating expenses based on the contributing membership. [This currently stands at 68 to 32 per cent/Cobourg to Hamilton.] A 1995 expense cap of \$530,000 is set plus an annual CPI in subsequent years. Municipal funding is based on net operating costs after the deduction of all revenues, including self-funding receipts.

The 1992 Ontario Development Act – Under the Act, the Province permits municipalities to charge development fees to cover incremental hard and soft services associated with development growth.

Where are we today?

In measuring where the library is today statistical data must be reviewed; for example, the strength of the library's membership, the population it serves, analysis of the most recent user survey, the operating funds available to the library and its hours of operation. There are also non-statistical elements that help to define where the library is today.

7. What is the library product?

Put simply, the library is in the information, education and entertainment business. It fills this role by means of its materials collection (i.e., CD Roms, periodicals etc.), its electronic resources, programmes and its meeting rooms in the C. Gordon King Centre. Committed to equal access to information for all, the library strives to give superior service to its patrons by its teamwork. Its services include:

- lending books, video and audio records
- providing information through its reference collection, and technical assistance to meet individual and corporate needs
- its collection of newspapers, periodicals and journals for recreation and information
- local history collections and special collections in areas of local interest
- an inter-library loan service, helping users locate and borrow materials from other libraries
- talking books for people who cannot use print material
- meeting rooms for public use
- on-line special programmes for children, which include story hours and craft programmes
- a home delivery service to the elderly and disabled
- access to electronic databases via the internet and the library book collection records
- trained staff to assist library visitors in getting the maximum benefit from library services
- satellite libraries in Bewdley and Gore's Landing

The Present Situation

8. Service delivery in the past

In 1997 the library was open for an average of 41 hours per week. Because of what the board considered to be insufficient operating funds, the library was closed in 1997 for an equivalent time of seven weeks, much to the dismay of users, including students wishing to do research for their assignments and working people who found the hours of closure inconvenient.

9. Community perceptions

In addition to its membership, the library community is made up of various bodies including its patrons, staff, the municipal councils, the CPL Foundation and the Friends of the Library. Each has its own perceptions of library service and what it expects of the combined library management and governance.

The membership – According to the late 1997 user survey conducted on behalf of the library by the Friends of the Library organization, users expressed general satisfaction with the quality of service provided but wanted it to be improved, particularly with respect to the hours of opening. The number of

users expressing concern over the hours of opening increased from 5 per cent in the 1996 survey to 30 per cent in 1997, a considerable increase in the level of criticism.

Library staff – Members of the library staff are without question committed to the library and its operations, but nevertheless feel discouraged by the continuing uncertainty concerning future operations and the working environment.

The municipal councils – The councils are committed to supporting the library and its operations, but are perceived to be looking for innovation in budget management and leadership in library governance.

The CPL Foundation – The Foundation, providing capital funding in certain areas, supports the library and the work of its staff to provide excellent service, but like the councils is looking for leadership from the library Board.

Friends of the Library – Supports the library, but looking for agreement on common objectives.

Assessment of the Present position

1. The library enjoys a high penetration of use with a membership of over 60 per cent of the community using it regularly. For instance, approximately 3,000 visitors attend the library each week, which is 20 per cent of the membership. The membership has a positive attitude to the facility and the service provided with over 50 per cent of the 1996 and 1997 survey respondents expressing satisfaction with the service received.
2. However, 25 per cent of the members want improved materials and more than 30 per cent want-improved hours of opening. In the 1996 survey, only 5 per cent wanted longer opening hours.
3. The new library is still in its infancy, a condition that requires original and responsive approaches to the way it does its business and provides service to the public. In co-operation with the councils and Foundation, past library boards did an exemplary job in securing support to build an outstanding library. Now is the time to chart a path for the future by working to a methodical and logical plan of governance. The Board needs to embrace the councils' enthusiasm and commitment to deliver the highest quality information and recreational service in the area consistent with the public's expectations.
4. The current library Board has inherited a mission statement from the previous Board that dealt with providing equal opportunity to all for knowledge, information and recreation. The enlarged mission or aim of the Board must reflect the range and needs of the community. Its service must be characterized by innovation and flexibility in the way it provides that service to a diverse community.

Where are we going?

5. The Business Plan

The balance of this report summarizes the strategic plan based on the foregoing analysis and specifies what measures the Board will take to support the strategies and provide the leadership necessary to maintain a vibrant cultural centre that delivers information and provide an attractive atmosphere for education and cultural entertainment. Further, in taking measures that support the plan, it will be necessary to specify by what criteria the Board can quantify and evaluate the success of the steps it takes. The budgetary and operational assumptions, and indices used, are given in Appendices A through E.

How will we get there?

The Board's plan is to implement seven key strategies over the next three years and, to make sure the plan remains current, the Board's ad hoc committee will review it annually. The Board will carry out its business plan in the first year on the basis of the existing inter-municipal funding agreement, in confident expectation that prudent application of the plan will increase the efficiency of library operations. The following is a summary of the seven strategies and the steps to be taken to reach them.

Strategy #1

Make the citizens of Cobourg and Hamilton Township aware of the library as a cultural community centre and encourage their participation in its continued development.

- Appoint members of the community to the Board's committees.
- Work with the CPL Foundation and Friends of the Library to establish common objectives.
- Encourage public participation in a variety of endowment programmes through development of a sustainable fund-raising plan.
- Develop a materials donation policy that encourages public acceptance and participation.
- Increase awareness in the community by means of a targeted advertising plan

Strategy #2

Address budgetary constraints while delivering superior service.

- Review and improve the management information systems.
- Develop and institute a hours-of-operation plan that reflects community needs.

- Work with the councils to modify the inter–municipal agreement concerning 'self–funding' limitations, which discourage fund–raising initiatives.
- Prepare and introduce a fund–raising/endowment programme, which is sustainable in the long term.
- Investigate and implement opportunities to add revenue–generation through services not constrained by the Libraries Act.
- Conduct a function analysis that supports superior quality service.
- Develop a volunteer programme, which complements complex functional areas.
- Explore and implement a continuous–improvement programme.

Strategy #3

Provide information services that are timely, accurate and responsive to public and community needs.

- Institute service measurement systems.
- Conduct a comprehensive collection review.
- Develop a comprehensive materials acquisition policy that matches available funding to the selection preferences of the library's patrons.
- Develop a long–term technology plan that includes electronic gateways to external sources of information.
- Foster improved awareness of the strategic direction of school boards and neighbouring communities.

Strategy #4

Make sure staff are trained, knowledgeable and responsive to the changing needs of the community.

- Present the approved strategic plan to the library staff.
- Increase staff knowledge and skills in computer literacy.
- Enhance staff skills in customer service and public relations through training
- Provide tools and resources to increase staff efficiency.
- Appoint staff to the Board's working committees as appropriate.

Strategy #5

Improve community perceptions of the library.

- Develop and execute an advocacy plan.
- Work with the municipalities in creating a common agenda.

- Foster an open and mutually beneficial relationship between the councils, the CPL Foundation and Friends of the Library through frequent updates and communication.
- Be open to sound suggestions and ideas.

Strategy #6

Through the selection process, ensure Board trustees are knowledgeable and prepared to dedicate time to the long-term development of the library.

- Assess the knowledge and skill requirements of the Board and work with the councils and school boards in recruiting members who meet those requirements.
- Provide ongoing training for trustee training and development.
- Review the timing of trustee turnover to ensure continuity.

Strategy #7

Implement the Carver (see Appendix A) Model of Governance.

- Appoint a policy and procedure sub-committee to write policies that fit the strategic direction of the Board.
- Broaden the existing committees to make sure the seven strategies of this plan are executed.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the business plan through presentation to the staff, councils and Foundation supporters, Friends of the Library and the public.

Appendix A

The Carver Model

In his book *Boards that Make a Difference*¹, business consultant John Carver discussed principles by which a board of directors or trustees could govern a public corporation. These principles while not entirely original have been so well circulated and used that they are, collectively, known as the Carver Model of governance. The Carver Model is in fact applicable to any organisation that operates under a board of director system.

Carver's cardinal rule is that effective direction stems from well-written policies. A board of directors' job is to govern, not to administer or to direct the staff that it governs. Operation is the CEO's job. Four categories of policies are at the heart of the Carver Model:

Ends: Policies that deal with the needs to be met, for whom (outside the operating organisation), and at what cost or relative worth. In the case of a public library, what policies meet the needs of the library membership, the public, business community, students and scholars.

Executive limitations: Policies or principles of prudence and ethics that limit the choice of staff means. That is, policies that govern the operating practices, activities, circumstances and methods by which the staff deliver quality service to the membership.

Board-executive relationship: Policies that govern the manner in which power is passed to the operating executive and in which the use of that power is assessed.

Board process: Policies that govern the manner in which the board represents the ownership of the organisation and provides strategic leadership to the organisation.

Other documents on governance exist to help library boards do their work; the Public Library Act, for example. In the case of the Cobourg Public Library, however, the previous board adopted the Carver Model as the one to follow in developing the policies that control operation of the Cobourg Library. It is not the task of the present board to reverse the decision of the previous Board, but rather to embrace the resolution and to continue where the outgoing Board left off.

It is to this end that the 1998 Board has produced its three-year business plan as a means of carrying out its mandate.

AWC
17 March 1998

¹ Second edition, 1997, Published by Jossey-Bass, Publishers, San Francisco.

Appendix B

1996 Globe & Mail Best Cities Citation Focus – Quality of life

Describe the number and quality of educational facilities, including public schools, private schools, community college, university, libraries. Think in terms of teaching awards, special programmes, number of computers in classes etc.

Quote

In September of 1995, the new \$3.3 million C. Gordon Cultural Centre was opened which houses the expanded library and archive room. Within the next few months, the library will be the home of the first community internet access station, designed to allow all members of the community access to the world wide web. In addition, the library is part of the inter-library loan program, allowing Cobourg residents access to books from libraries across Canada.

Appendix C

CPL 1998 Business Plan Hours of Operation

Note: In 1997, in an effort to address perceived budgetary constraints, the board's primary course of action was to limit hours of operation to an average of 41 per week.

Develop an hours of operation plan that reflects community needs consistent with superior delivery of service.

Monday – Friday	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Saturday – Sunday	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Total time open weekly	64 hours