



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Catherine Biss, CEO, Markham Public Library
Copy to: Brenda Librecz, Commissioner, Community and Fire Services
Date: June 17, 2019
Re: **Improving Access to Digital Publications in Public Libraries – A Campaign of the Canadian Urban Library Council**

Purpose

To request, on behalf of the Markham Public Library Board, and pursuant to pricing issues regarding digital publications, that Markham Council endorse the following motion of support for the Canadian Urban Library Council Accessing Digital Publications Government Relations Campaign:

WHEREAS, the City of Markham recognizes the important role that libraries play in our community. Libraries and the early literacy programs that they run are integral to developing proficient readers and ensuring that children succeed in school. More and more, digital literacy programs run by libraries also help ensure that citizens can contribute to our digital world. Additionally, vulnerable demographic groups, including seniors, low income families, youth, and new Canadians rely on access to libraries as an important tool for their participation in the community – from education to searching for jobs to consuming Canadian cultural materials, and

WHEREAS, libraries in our community recognize that our users increasingly seek to access digital publications offered by multinational publishers, and that access to those publications is too often curtailed by prohibitively high licensing fees or else entirely denied to Canadian libraries, and

WHEREAS, libraries must be in a position to offer digital publications to their users as part of their service offering to our community, particularly given the contemporary rapid pace of digitization of educational and cultural materials,

Now, there be it resolved that the City of Markham do hereby:

1. Indicate our support for the Canadian Urban Libraries Council in its efforts to increase access to digital publications for library users in Markham and across Canada;
2. Call on the Federal government to investigate the barriers faced by libraries in acquiring digital publications and the problems that poses for vulnerable demographic groups in Canada; and

3. Further ask the Federal government to develop a solution that increases access to digital publications across Canada and assists libraries in meeting the cost requirements to acquire digital publications.

Discussion

Digital content – including ebooks and digital audiobooks – is the fastest growing area of borrowing for public libraries. At Markham Public Library, eBook and digital audiobook use in 2018 increased by 50% over the previous year and continues to grow.

However, the **restrictive pricing models and high prices of digital content** as set by multinational publishers are creating significant budget challenges for public libraries. This jeopardize the ability of Canadian public libraries to offer universal access to content.

- Multinational publishers, sometimes referred to as the “Big Five”, include Harper Collins, Hachette, Penguin Random House, Macmillan, and Simon and Schuster.
- Some of these, including Hachette, offer perpetual licenses that sometimes exceed six times the retail eBook price paid by consumers, or the “list price.”
- Other publishers offer limited term licenses for 26 circulations (e.g. Harper Collins) or 52 circulations/2 years, whichever comes first (e.g. Macmillan).

The City of Markham has recognized the issue of pricing for digital library materials and generously provided support – through a capital project entitled *Customer Service Improvement (E-Resources)* – approved through the annual budget process from 2015 to 2019, to help build MPL’s ebook collection. In 2015, it was anticipated that the ebook pricing issue would be resolved within five years. However, this has not happened.

An equally concerning issue has recently emerged regarding **access to, and pricing of, digital audiobooks**.

- Some publishers are not negotiating rights for digital audiobooks for the Canadian market, thereby denying access for Canadian public libraries to purchase the digital audiobook format as soon as it is released to consumers.
- Instead, rights have been licensed strictly for pay-per-use subscription services including Audible.ca and Kobo.
- The digital audiobooks available for purchase by libraries are very costly, with a single copy priced as high as \$140.
- Digital audiobooks are the fastest growing sector of the publishing industry.
- They are also a popular choice for individuals learning English, with low literacy skills, or with a print disability.

To provide a unified **advocacy** voice across Canada, the Coalition of Canadian Public Libraries for Fair eBook Pricing (Coalition) was established in 2015. Its primary purpose was to lobby multinational publishers, Members of Parliament, and Members of Provincial Parliament, and engage in discussions to find sustainable solutions for the provision of eBook, digital audiobook, and electronic resources through Canadian public libraries.

Although the Coalition was disbanded in 2016, the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) Digital Content Taskforce continues this important advocacy work.

Earlier this year, from January 14 to 25, 2019, under the leadership of CULC, Canadian public libraries joined forces to advocate for stronger digital content for libraries, drawing attention to the issues of digital audiobook access and fair digital content pricing. The campaign objectives were to:

- Raise awareness of issues facing Canadian public libraries with regard to digital access and pricing;
- Engage public libraries (and their customers) across the country in a discussion around the issues; and,
- Encourage multinational publishers to open a dialogue with public libraries.

The main campaign components were social media and media outreach, encouraging Canadians to use #eContentForLibraries to spread the word, and to voice concerns directly to the multinational publishers.

However, **the pricing challenges remain unresolved**. Despite advocacy work and repeated attempts to discuss the situation with publishers, multinational publishers have not significantly adjusted their practices in the past eight years.

CULC is now launching the **next phase of its campaign**. This phase will focus on extending public library outreach to municipal and federal political leaders in an effort to attract attention, gain public support and advocate for solutions that can assist public libraries in providing digital publications to communities across Canada. Through government support to alleviate or eliminate the digital access problem, it is hoped that public libraries will be better able to sustainably procure the resources necessary to build their collections and provide modern, digitized services.

Accordingly, the Markham Public Library Board requests the City of Markham Council to approve a motion of support (as per page 1-2 of this memorandum) for the Canadian Urban Library Council Accessing Digital Publications Government Relations Campaign

Next Steps

Subject to Council's endorsement of the motion, the Library Board will forward the approved motion to local Members of Parliament and all candidates in this October's federal election. The intent is that federal MPs be aware that municipal leaders are **allies** in CULC's campaign to find a solution to the digital access issue.

In the longer term, CULC will develop and offer specific proposed **policy solutions** to the Federal government in advance of the 2020 federal budget to overcome the barriers that Canadian libraries face in accessing digital publications.