



**Rural Library Service in the Municipality of Port Hope
Update from the Port Hope Public Library Board
October 2017**

Background

The Port Hope Public Library has a rural branch in Garden Hill where space is shared with the Garden Hill Fire Station. The Fire and Emergency Services Working Group has undertaken a review of fire services, a part of which will address the need to make improvements or changes to the Garden Hill station and possibly the other two municipal fire stations.

The report will be presented to Council on October 19, 2017 at a special Municipality of Port Hope Council meeting scheduled for 7 pm at Town Hall. It is expected to have a possible impact on library operations at Garden Hill. The Port Hope Public Library Board believes this process has presented an opportunity to review rural library service in the Municipality. This is not to say that consideration of rural library service is not required otherwise. The Garden Hill branch usage statistics have been declining and the question of how to address this decline is timely.

In early 2017 the Library Board began to examine the need for rural library service in the Municipality, and the possible best location and/or service model. This analysis has included board and staff level meetings and discussion, a visit to the Canton Municipal building to consider the possibility of using space there for library services, and the hosting of a public meeting to receive input from residents of the Municipality. The public meeting was held in April 2017 and the results including an overview of possible options identified by the Board and Library Management are summarized in this release.

Public Meeting

Approximately thirty members of the public attended the April 26, 2017 meeting to consider rural library service. Of those in attendance, the vast majority reside north of the 5th Line, and are current users of the Garden Hill Branch. The Board believes residents south of the 5th Line currently use the Mary J. Benson branch in the urban ward for their library needs. Although most of the attendees were in a senior age bracket there also were several younger adults who have school age children at the meeting.

The attendees were broken into small groups and asked to weigh in on five questions. Each group discussion was led by a library board or staff member. The following categorizes their recorded responses to these questions.

Question 1

What are the important aspects/elements of the current rural library service? Please prioritize.

Most frequent answers: community interaction, books and movies, internet access, public meeting space

Other answers included: library staff members and their expertise, programs - especially for children; availability of technology: computers, printer, and photocopy service

Question 2

What would be the priorities if rural library service could be expanded?

Most frequent answers: programs - partnerships with Parks & Rec, repeat popular programs, allow public input into programming, more children's programs, computer classes; improved rentable and flexible meeting space - separate from the books area

Other answers included: electronic devices loaded with content, musical instruments, tutoring, and increased presence in the village

Question 3

What would be the impact if there were no rural library services?

Most frequent answers: loss of community gathering space - attendees presented a strong identity with the north (Garden Hill) area and consider it to be their "community" and where they want be active

Other answers included: would increase rural/urban divide and the feeling of lack of service to the taxpayers in the rural area; consider the impact the 407 extension might have on the County Rd 9 corridor; no book return option

Question 4

What role does the library play in the rural community?

General consensus was that it provides an opportunity for a stronger connected community.

Question 5

Would you be willing to use the Canton Municipal Office for rural library services? If not, could you suggest sites or alternate methods for providing library services?

Most frequent answer: would rather the branch remain in Garden Hill, and build on existing strengths and infrastructure through library area building expansion and improvement, creation of joint meeting room for fire hall and library, changing the physical attributes of the G.H. branch to be more attractive and noticeable or purchase a mobile structure to house a library in the same location

Other answers included: would use Canton if offered more programming and an attractive reading space were provided; going to Canton would require combining activities and trips to that part of the ward; consider use of a mobile library; would increase online access instead of going to Canton

Conclusion

Based on the results of these questions and general observation throughout the evening, the strongest theme that ran through the discussions at this meeting is the desire to have a library branch in the Garden Hill area where there still is a sense of a village community. The attendees would like to see improvements to the physical building where the branch is now housed so that public meeting space, Wi-Fi service and programming could be still maintained. The idea of having the branch at Canton was not disregarded. Attendees felt that a community library at this location would have to offer new and improved services to attract current Garden Hill branch users.

Latest Steps

At a Library Board Planning and Visioning meeting in August 2017, the Board reviewed the options for rural library service and considered the results of the Public Meeting. The following service options were discussed.

#1 Remain at Garden Hill in some form of service model

#2 Close Garden Hill and not offer rural library service

#3 Use an alternate service model

#4 Relocate to the Canton Municipal Office

#5 Partner with North Hope Public Central School at the school site

As a result of its discussions the preferred choice of the Library Board is to continue to offer rural library service in the Garden Hill area.

Next Steps

The Library Board will continue to solicit feedback from the rural community through the upcoming survey of Port Hope Public Library services which is scheduled to be completed by late fall 2017. This will allow more people than those who attended the public meeting to express their opinion on rural library service. Survey data may produce additional input to support the Board's conclusion that Garden Hill is the best location for rural library operations.

The Board also will be reviewing models of service delivery so community feedback on this issue is critical. As the Municipality moves ahead with its plans for the Garden Hill fire station, the Library Board will be interested in participating in the decision making process as it relates to the physical space at the Garden Hill building.

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