

Union library would provide solutions: consultant

By Sarah Sobanski

In last week's article, "Area libraries discussing what went wrong," *Bancroft This Week* discussed factors contributing to the resignations of three North Hastings library CEOs.

Reasons for resignations included a shortage of hours for CEOs compared to the amount of work they have to do, a lack of resources and an inability to unify the visions of municipalities, library boards and CEOs to accomplish community goals.

As a solution to these discrepancies Southern Ontario Library Service library development consultant Peggy Malcolm has drawn up a proposal to bring together four area libraries and five area municipalities under one board.

"You can come into a union board at any time, it's just tricky to arrange," said Malcolm.

The current proposal looks at library service populations, operating revenues and expenses and total circulation from 2016 for Bancroft Public Library, Hastings Highlands Public Library, Wollaston Public Library, Carlow-Mayo Public Library out of Hermon Public School, and Faraday Township which partners with BPL.

All together the total operating revenue for all the libraries, including with Faraday's support, was \$444,389 versus \$407,133 in operating expenses. Bancroft's library had an operating surplus that vastly outweighed its surrounding area counterparts. It saw \$30,000 in 2016 where each of the others saw around \$3,000 or less.

"One of the arguments for this board to be established is for a full-time CEO? You really need all of the parties to have enough pooled money to have a CEO work full time," said Malcolm. "You could do it with one or two [municipalities] but the value of this district library is for all of the parties to be able to pool enough resources to get a really good full-time CEO and full-time bookkeeper? [those] central admin[s]."

Previously, all CEOs across North Hastings were part time. The shortest workweek for a CEO was in Carlow-Mayo at 15 hours a week. The longest was in Hastings Highlands at 32 hours per week.

The shortest workweek for a library assistant was in Bancroft at 7.5 hours a week. It and Hastings Highlands were the only libraries within the group to employ library assistants? three each. None of these assistants were full time.

The proposal shaves a total of 32 paid work hours between each library and hires one 35 hour per week CEO.

In places where there were three library assistants, one senior assistant now works at 29 hours per week with other assistants on a more part-time basis. In places where there were only CEOs, their titles change to library assistants.

"Usually what they're trying to do when talking about coming together is looking at providing better service across all the communities in that kind of a union library environment," said SOLS CEO Barbara Franchetto when asked why municipalities might choose to establish a union board.

"In some respects, for instance, the [idea] to have just one CEO as opposed to three or four. There is some consolidation of experience and service. [This is] one way of doing that and still allowing for some local focus as well. That's one of the advantages." Franchetto explained consolidation "doesn't necessarily translate into financial savings? but allows "staff in the libraries [to] focus on actually delivering services."

This can increase efficiency for programming as well where additional funding can be hard to come by.

"A lot of organizations we're seeing increased demands, more people walking through library doors looking for services and still faced with limited hours or no funding increases. So you have to match increases with the reality as well. It's a very complicated world we live in and certainly [financial] increases aren't easy to come by."

Malcolm said in the proposal each municipality would continue contributing what they do now to their own library boards but instead contribute it to the union board. Provincial monies would be pooled, she said.

"People said, "Well what if the district library comes together and decides on a big plan?" So in the union library draft agreement there is a guarantee that there would be no more than a one per cent increase? that isn't meant as anything more than to safeguard? The guarantee is five years."

She said capital expenses such as new shelves or new furniture would come from the union board while operating expenses would continue to be paid from each municipality from their contributions.

She noted Bancroft's recent push for a new building or building upgrades. She said there would be written facilities agreements with each of the municipalities and the union board, providing details on responsibilities for building elements.

"The township has to provide the building," said Malcolm. "If they wanted to build a new library that would be up to the township." *This is the third article investigating North Hastings libraries and the proposal of a district or union library board between them. Look for additional articles in future issues of Bancroft This Week.*