

April 12, 2009

Public Library Infrastructure Study

Attention Library Board Chairs/Liaisons and Library Directors:

Some time ago we advised the BCLTA membership that we would be conducting a study on public library infrastructure needs throughout the province. We are pleased to announce that Daphne Wood, an MLIS candidate at San Jose University, has been contracted to undertake this study. Ms. Wood will begin work immediately, and will be contacting every public library system in BC in April to request facilities data.

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the local government “infrastructure deficit”. Many local governments across Canada, as well as in BC, have not been able to provide adequate resources to maintain their infrastructure. As a consequence, they are now faced with the task of finding significant resources to pay for deferred works. In this climate, libraries must compete for capital funding with other types of infrastructure. And unlike roads, sewers and other “hard” infrastructure, there are few opportunities for senior government assistance to build new or upgrade existing library facilities. As a consequence, securing capital funding for library facilities has always been a challenge.

This study will assess the state of public library facilities in BC – in areas such as accessibility, safety and ergonomics, capacity, and expected life. The end result will be an inventory of facilities with relevant statistics and an objective assessment of the library “infrastructure deficit” in BC. This will help put libraries on the radar with other types of infrastructure; it will assist all levels of government in planning; and it will provide public libraries with a planning tool and a tool for preparing business cases for new facilities.

The end product of the study will be a publicly available final report providing information on individual library systems, as well as data in aggregate (e.g., comparing different regions of the province, comparing large municipalities with each other, focusing on challenges unique to northern regions, etc.). Where facilities information is not available, it will be recorded as pending – with the hope that the necessary information will be ready when we undertake an update of the study in a few years’ time.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of this study. With timely cooperation from all our members, Ms. Wood’s findings will result in a truly comprehensive assessment of our province’s public library facilities. If the study is a success, we expect it will be updated at regular intervals, thus providing trustees and library directors with a crucial advocacy tool in approaching all levels of government for capital funding – in both the immediate future and beyond.

Generous financial support for this project has been provided by the Public Library Services Branch. In addition, the project has the support of the Union of BC Municipalities, which sees the value in an end product that will assist BC’s local governments in their infrastructure planning.

Please ensure that every effort is made to provide Ms. Wood with the data she will be requesting in the coming weeks. Questions can be directed to BCLTA Executive Director Errin Morrison at 778-355-9979 or execdirector@bclta.org.

