



# The Prince George Public Library

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June 28, 2019

Attention: Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Regarding 2020 Government Budget Priorities

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. I am writing on behalf of the Prince George Public Library, a municipal library governed by a nine member, Council-appointed Board. Our Board of Trustees consists of dedicated community leaders who volunteer their time and professional skills to uphold the ideals of a free and democratic society by promoting intellectual freedom and providing free, equitable access to knowledge and ideas. In that regard, we wish to express our ongoing concern for the long-term financial health of public libraries.

Since fiscal year 2009/2010, provincial funding of BC's public libraries has remained stagnant at \$14 million annually. Further, in fiscal year 2012/2013, the public library budget sub-vote was eliminated from the provincial budget and amalgamated within the Ministry of Education's main sub-vote. Continuous erosion of funding due to inflation, along with the loss of protected funding by elimination of the sub-vote, run counter to the notion of sustainable and predictable provincial funding for BC's public library system. These funding realities make it difficult for public libraries to contribute to the provincial government's stated goals of making life more affordable, delivering services that people count on, and helping build a strong, sustainable and innovative economy. Therefore, the Prince George Public Library Board of Trustees urges the provincial government to raise its funding for public libraries to \$20 million in 2020 as this will help address chronic under-funding, lack of increases for inflation, and past government cuts.

The Prince George Public Library (PGPL) system operates with a \$4 million annual budget (of which approximately 5.3% is supported through provincial funds). With this budget, our staff (45 FTE) support provincial initiatives in the following ways:

## **Making Life Affordable**

In addition to more traditional fare such as books and DVDs (860,000 items borrowed in 2018), PGPL offers audio books and electronic books and magazines (71,000 items in 2018), a Northern Routes Discovery Pass (free access to local museums, galleries, and cultural venues), Technology Kits to encourage hands-on learning, and free workshops and presentations (1200 programs with 23,000 participants per year).

*Read, Learn, Discover.*

In 2017, PGPL initiated free access to the Canadian Subsidy Directory which is dedicated to providing information leading to financial help, subsidies, grants, loans, joint ventures or any funding program offered by the federal and provincial governments, associations and foundations.

### **Delivering Services That People Count On**

Our two branches had 309,000 visits last year, and PGPL staff answer 210 reference questions on an average day. Of PGPL's 58,000 patrons (representing two-thirds of the local population), 8550 patrons are 19 years old or younger. Youth borrowed 16,500 items per month in 2018!

During the wildfires of 2017 and 2018, Prince George hosted 14,000 evacuees from the Central Interior region of the province. PGPL offered free temporary library cards to evacuees and staff visited evacuation centres to deliver children's programming.

### **Helping Build a Strong, Sustainable, and Innovative Economy**

In addition to free workshops and presentations, PGPL offers free WiFi and computer access (55,000 wireless and 77,000 computer sessions in 2018). These tools enable patrons to explore career options and upgrade skills. Via computer, PGPL's Gale Courses offer hundreds of instructor-led online courses for free. Topics range from Accounting and Finance to Personal Development. Patrons need only supply their PGPL card number to participate; and participate they did, to the tune of 17,000 hours in 2018.

Since fiscal 2009/2010, BC's public library community has asked the provincial government to provide funding for public libraries that at a minimum includes annual increases to account for inflation. Despite repeated requests and despite rising costs, for the past decade public libraries have received not a single increase to funding from the province. BC's Public libraries depend on their funders. Stable and predictable funding is necessary for libraries to continue to offer the myriad services upon which the public depends.

In closing, the following PGPL patron comments help to illustrate the important social and economic role that public libraries play in people's lives.

"I really appreciate the volunteers and the Home Service Program. I wish the general public knew more about it. It has been a lifesaver to me because I can't get down to the library."

"We love this (Northern Routes Discovery) pass. As a family we were able to go places that are otherwise hard to financially. We have a large family."

"According to her latest report card, our daughter has shown a 'vast improvement' in her Math skills. We have also noticed that her overall personal confidence has increased since she has been enrolled in the Homework Help Program."

"I have just started taking the online course offered through Gale College. This is amazing. I can do the course I need to update my ECE license to practice and now can do at home for free."

"My child and I have attended programs lately; I have met other parents and staff and this makes me feel connected to my community. I think we have a remarkable collection, and the staff are very helpful. I also appreciate that ALL walks of life come to the library. Obviously, everyone feels welcome!"

*Read, Learn, Discover.*

With regards,



Mike P. Gagel  
Board Chair, Prince George Public Library

CC:

Minister Fleming, Ministry of Education

The BC Public Library Partners:

Scott Hargrove, Chair, Association of BC Public Library Directors

Babs Kelly, Executive Director, BC Library Trustees Association

Annette DeFaveri, Executive Director, BC Library Association

Kevin Millsip, Executive Director, BC Libraries Cooperative

City of Prince George Mayor & Council

Prince George Citizen

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