



June 14, 2019

Attention: Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Re: 2020 BC Government Budget Priorities

Dear Committee Members,

The Surrey Public Library Board is concerned about declining provincial funding for Surrey Public Library. At around \$1 million, provincial funding forms a significant part of the Library's core budget and the City relies on these funds to help provide services to our rapidly growing community.

Across BC, provincial funding for libraries has fallen from 6.9% in 2008 to 4.6% in 2017 as a portion of total library revenue. In 2008, provincial funding to public libraries was \$18 million, and in 2009 it was cut to \$14 million, where it has remained for 10 years. The cut in funding led to reductions in library services across the province; in Surrey, library opening hours had to be reduced and have continued at that reduced level as the City is unable to increase their funding to make up for the provincial shortfall.

Although provincial funding has remained stable for Surrey since 2009, the grant was reduced in 2018 and 2019. If this trend continues, it will impact our ability to provide adequate library services in a City that welcomes almost 1,000 new people each month.

Our libraries continue to deliver on provincial priorities and have transformed to meet the communities' emerging needs for spaces to connect, access to technology, and additional social support. The programs and services highlighted below show some of the ways our libraries are making life more affordable, delivering better services to families, and laying the foundation for a strong and sustainable economy to improve the lives of all British Columbians.

- Many in our community struggle to afford their homes and basic living expenses. Our libraries offer free community space for families, access to books, DVDs and online entertainment, often in multiple languages and formats, for those who can't afford to buy material. We offer free programs and access to activities that bring people together and build social cohesion. *In 2018, almost 215,000 people participated in library programs, such as career and resume workshops, tech training, author readings and book clubs.*

City Centre Library.....604-598-7420
10350 University Drive V3T 4B8

Guildford Library.....604-598-7360
15105 - 105 Avenue V3R 7G8

Port Kells Library.....604-598-7440
18885 - 88 Avenue V4N 5T1

Cloverdale Library.....604-598-7320
5642 - 176 A Street V3S 4G9

Newton Library.....604-598-7400
13795 - 70 Avenue V3W 0E1

Semiahmoo Library.....604-592-6900
1815 - 152 Street V4A 9Y9

Fleetwood Library.....604-598-7340
15996 - 84 Avenue V4N 0W1

Ocean Park Library.....604-502-6304
12854 - 17 Avenue V4A 1T5

Strawberry Hill Library.....604-501-5836
7399 - 122 Street V3W 5J2

- Results from UBCs Human Early Learning Partnership show that 34% of Surrey's children entering Kindergarten are not ready to learn. The library is the only community agency to provide universal and freely accessible early literacy services across the City. Our libraries teach parents about the importance of reading to and interacting with their children through free babytimes, and provide books that can inspire a lifelong love of learning and reading. Participation in early literacy programs affects future success and build a sense of belonging. *In 2018, over 170,000 children and youth participated in Surrey library programs.*
- Our libraries deliver programs that support love of learning, offer spaces to study, and computers with internet for those unable to afford them at home. These programs and resources help every parent and caregiver enable their child's success, at every income level. They help ensure that no child is left behind because their parents can't afford what they need for school success. *In 2018, 1,289 children and teens participated in digital literacy programs at the library including 200 children joining an after-school code club in a catchment area where this type of programming was unavailable at school. Over 16,000 children participated in the Summer Reading Club.*
- Our libraries are a critical source of reading material for Surrey residents. A recent study by BookNet indicated that the most popular source of books in Canada, whether print or digital, is the library. 78% of Canadians read or listened to a book in the past year, and 25% of them get their books from public libraries. Canadians read in multiple formats: print, eBook and audiobook, so our libraries need to purchase the same titles in all formats to meet reading needs. *In 2018, residents borrowed over 4 million print and digital items from Surrey Libraries.*
- Surrey is home to the highest percentage of immigrants and refugees in the province. 25% of Metro Vancouver's immigrant population live in our City, and 1 in 4 refugees in BC settled in Surrey last year. Our libraries support social and economic integration of newcomers through tailored programs such as English Conversation Circles and ESL book clubs. We provide welcoming spaces, offer books, newspapers, DVDs, and wealth of online resources to expose newcomers to our culture, help them learn English, apply for a job, upgrade skills, or connect with their neighbours. *In 2018, over 28,000 new people registered for a library card in Surrey.*
- An estimated 40% of the Canadian workforce lacks the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to succeed in the workplace. Our libraries offer job search and resume workshops, resources to support a career change, and opportunities to learn new skills through online tools like lynda.com. We offer resources and support to entrepreneurs and small business owners. *In 2018, Surrey Libraries partnered with Google and local business associations to offer free workshops to help small businesses expand their online presence. We offered STEAM (Science, Tech, Engineering, Arts and Math) programming to enhance our youth's digital, collaboration and leadership skills.*

- Government services have moved online, yet those who need the most assistance are the least likely to have the tools and skills they need to access those services. Surrey Libraries provide free computers with internet, staff who teach digital skills through tech help classes and personalized instruction, and referrals for additional support. We help people navigate through lengthy online forms and complex processes. *In 2018, library staff offered technology instruction in free scheduled and drop-in classes in the libraries and out in the community at seniors centres, homeless shelters, and settlement service agencies.*
- Our 9 branches provide a warm or cool, welcoming space for people to spend their day. Local shelters close during the day, and people are not welcome in other indoor spaces if they have no money to spend. *In 2018, we prioritized partnering with social service agencies to better assist people with addictions, homelessness, and mental health issues. Our City Centre Library hosted the first 'Stop Overdose Surrey: Connections that Saves Lives' event in the City.*
- Our libraries support and welcome vulnerable and marginalized groups in our communities. With a growing and young urban Indigenous population in Surrey, the library has prioritized efforts on reconciliation with Indigenous communities. *In 2018, we built stronger Indigenous book collections, featured Indigenous authors in book clubs, hosted medicinal plant walks led by Indigenous guides and created Aboriginal Read-to-Baby kits for Indigenous families with newborns. We also offered Rainbow story times to welcome our LGBTQ+ families and regularly participate in the Pride Festival.*
- We work with over 100 community partners each year to help build capacity in addressing community issues such as poverty reduction, employment, settlement of newcomers, social inclusion and lifelong literacy. *In 2018, the library offered anti-racism presentations in collaboration with community agencies to help build multicultural awareness, tolerance, and community well-being.*

In conclusion, our libraries are a vital part of the social fabric of our communities, empowering people to learn, grow, and contribute to the economy. Libraries throughout the province work hard to provide excellent services to their communities and it is important to ensure adequate funding. When funding doesn't keep pace with inflation, population growth, the languages our residents speak, the diversity and complexity of our communities, and the growth in digital formats, our ability to help improve the lives of our communities is impaired.

We call on the BC government to restore library funding to a minimum of \$20 million* to reflect inflationary and population increases, and to recommit to a progressive funding approach that reflects the role of public libraries in advancing both provincial and municipal priorities.

The Surrey Public Library Board appreciates the opportunity to participate in the provincial budget process. We trust you will consider our input to support the impact of public libraries across the province for the 2020 budget.

Yours sincerely,



Karen Reid Sidhu
Surrey Public Library Board Chair



Councillor Jack Hundial
Library Board Council Liaison



Surinder Bhogal
Chief Librarian

cc: Minister of Education, Rob Fleming
MLA for Surrey / Whalley – Hon. Bruce Ralston
MLA for Surrey / Cloverdale – Marvin Hunt
MLA for Surrey / Newton – Hon. Harry Bains
MLA for Surrey / Green Timbers – Rachna Singh
MLA for Surrey / Panorama – Hon. Jinny Sims
MLA for Surrey / Fleetwood – Jagrup Brar
MLA for Surrey / Guildford – Garry Begg
MLA for Surrey / White Rock – Tracy Redies
MLA for South Surrey – Stephanie Cadieux
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

NOTE: *The CPI for recreation, education and reading since 2008 has risen 12.66%¹ and the population in BC has grown by approximately 13%². If provincial funding for libraries had been indexed to inflation and reflected population growth since 2009, in 2019 it would be over \$20 million.

1. Per Statistics Canada, 2009 Basket, "Recreation, Education and Reading" component, comparing published fiscal 2008 average to published March 2019.

2. Per BC Statistics, BC population estimates, comparing published 2008 population to *estimated* 2019 population (calculated using BC Statistics 2017 estimate, assuming the same percentage increase in 2018 and 2019 as for 2017, as BC Statistics has not published estimates for 2018 and 2019).

ENC: Sample Comments from Surrey Public Library 2019 Customer Satisfaction Survey

Sample Comments from Surrey Public Library 2019 Customer Satisfaction Survey:

I love the library for what it makes accessible to all. The fact that anyone who is interested can go into a library to hear stories, meet authors, and access so much up to date print and digital material for free helps promote a reading culture and powerfully supports our democratic community.

I love all the services that the library offers. my life would not be as good as it is if I did not have the library. all the staff are extremely helpful and friendly. this is a wonderful use of our tax dollars!!!

I like that the library creates a more even playing field in basic education for people of all backgrounds.

I adore the public library and try to get in once a week with my small children to browse and read together. I value the very fact of libraries- which I think shows the best things about an open, inclusive society which values life-long learning.

The wealth of information and products available for a few dollars a year of my taxes -- added up, all the resources I get from my local library are probably the best return on investment I've ever made in my life.

It offers educational opportunities to anyone who is willing to learn, without prejudice. The library strengthens the communities that it serves. It is an integral part of providing education and literacy to ALL community members. The best no-charge service available!

It's a community hub that promotes literacy!

Of all the services offered by Surrey, I personally value the public library the most. For people who are restricted by how far they can travel and how much disposable income they have, a short trip to the library can provide weeks of pleasure and knowledge. I love the library.

The libraries in Surrey have truly reinvented themselves as a community gathering places for everyone with access to computers, audio / video materials, newspapers / magazines from around the world. A welcoming environment for everyone from babies to seniors.