

Rossland Public Library Board

Rossland, BC

June 24, 2019

Attention: Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Regarding 2020 BC Government Budget Priorities

Dear Committee Members,

This submission is on behalf of the Rossland Public Library Board. We are writing in support of the \$20 million for 2020 campaign to help all of BC's libraries to continue their important work in their communities.

First the good news from Rossland, population 3,700:

Best of all, we completed an interior renovation in 2018, entirely grant funded. It looks great and the community is enjoying more space, more accessible staff, better study and meeting spaces, and 2 terrific window seat areas for laptop use.

With over 50,000 annual visits in 2018, our library is an important and valued part of our small town. Because it is free and welcoming, the library fits a unique niche, the only such place in our rural community.

Our programs are well used by our diverse members- Books and Babies, the Lego Club, the Robot programming club, children's gardening club, for the growing number of young families. The Book Club, the Rossland Reads Debate series, author visits, are popular with adults. Seniors participate in the Lost Sheep knitting circle and technology classes.

Our 2 meeting rooms are booked over 40 times each month by a variety of local groups- ukulele, mental health, English language classes, recreation organizations, exam writing, etc.

Through our membership in the Kootenay Library Federation, we are now offering online education with the Gale Courses platform. With over 350 courses to choose from, it's a fantastic addition to our community. Members can upgrade job and technology skills or study personal interest courses. Taken privately, these courses cost \$150, unaffordable for some. Feedback from people using Gale is very positive, and the Library staff and board members are really pleased to be able to provide this important service, which can help grow our local economy as well as giving opportunities for excellent lifelong learning.

Thanks to BC Library Interconnect, our members have access to all the province's library resources- hard copy books, e-books, audio books, etc. This is an amazing resource, but it is not cheap- 30% of our staff hours are dedicated to this service.

Our 3 computers are in constant use. Many people, especially young people, have only cell phones today, and rely on our computers for other needs; we observe much resume writing and job searching.

Our printer is extremely popular, many residents have found it cheaper to print at the library than to maintain a home computer.

Now, here are our concerns:

Our Library staff are paid just over minimum wage, not a living wage.

Our computers receive steady use, and are getting old. Our budget will be hard pressed to replace them, and keep up with new technology. We are the only game in town for our low-income residents, and we make life more affordable for them.

We want to continue offering online education courses, but at \$739 annually, this may not be possible. It is an important public service, potentially a life changer, if used to acquire work skills.

We would like to add to our "Collection of Things" we lend, (currently a canner and dehydrator) but can't afford to.

Our staff is being asked to do more, with less funding. They have good ideas for more programming, but just don't have the time or money to support their ideas.

As a Library Board we are informed and well aware of the very serious issues that the urban libraries are facing, with large populations and needy patrons. The fact that BC public library funding was reduced by 20% in 2009, along with no cost of living increase for the past 10 years is of great concern to us.

With most of our funding dependent on our local Rossland taxpayers, we worry about the future of our Library.

Our little town of 3,700 residents has many urgent needs, including rebuilding our outdoor pool and ice arena. Increased provincial funding, funding that keeps up with inflation, is vital to maintain our current programs, and meet the growing needs of our community.

Your attention to this urgent issue is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Catherine Spence

Rossland Public Library Trustee