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June 28, 2019

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Via E-Mail

Regarding 2020 BC Government Budget Priorities

Dear Committee Members,

We are writing on behalf of the staff and board of the Squamish Public Library. You will have received a long letter from other public libraries and our various organizations outlining the fine work done by BC's public libraries and asking that the provincial government grant to public libraries be increased to \$20 million in 2020. The staff and board of our library fully endorse this letter but doubt that you need another copy. Rather, we would like to emphasize several issues.

Last year, in the section on Sports, Arts and Culture (which is odd; public libraries are under the Ministry of Education) your committee's recommendations 90 and 91 were:

90. Provide increased, predictable, transparent multi-year funding to public libraries, and support the delivery of library services in indigenous communities.
91. Commit to providing adequate broadband across BC, including in rural, remote and indigenous communities.

These were welcome recommendations and deserve further action. Unfortunately, funding has been all too predictable.

Many libraries, including our own, have collaborated with our First Nation communities in initiatives toward reconciliation. First Nations and public libraries, with the support of the provincial government, should review these initiatives and broaden the scope of the more successful programs. Such a collaboration might also work toward the preservation and use of the many indigenous languages in BC.

Technology is a major issue for public libraries. Many predicted that the digital revolution spelled the demise of the public library. The reality is just the opposite. The public come to libraries to access the Internet, access equipment and learn to use their devices to access information. Important thinkers such as Margaret Atwood and Yuval Noah Harari have stressed

the danger to our society if access to technology and information is limited to a few. Like it or not, the job of providing this access is falling to the public libraries and we often lack the resources to provide it. We need the backing of the provincial government to assure:

1. Broadband access.
2. Appropriate training for librarians and other staff.
3. Up to date equipment.
4. Life-long learning opportunities for all age groups in the community.

Individual libraries, especially small libraries, should not have to struggle with these important technological issues on their own. Provincial government leadership and support are needed.

Squamish is not unique in being a small town, rapidly outgrowing its infrastructure, including its library. We believe stand-alone libraries, at least in small and medium-sized communities, are a thing of the past. Rather, we should be planning to gather related functions into town centres: galleries, libraries, archives, museums – known as GLAM – plus, perhaps municipal and provincial offices. We would ask the provincial government to consider this vision since such projects will require significant funding from all levels of government.

We love our library and we appreciate our relative independence. However, we need your financial support and we feel that there are areas where collaboration between the libraries and the provincial government would lead to better library services for our communities.

Sincerely,



Hilary Bloom
Director of Library Services



David Gayton
Chair, Library Board

cc.

Minister Fleming, Minister of Education

Jordan Sturdy, MLA West Vancouver – Sea to Sky

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