

February 22, 2012

Library Board Report – Operating Budget Cuts 2012

Alexandra Youngberg on behalf the Union, CUPE 391

Thank you for listening to our presentation this evening. I am here tonight to share CUPE 391's insights on the 2012 operating budget report, to point out some concerns about its impact on the library's users and staff and to suggest some constructive solutions that might reduce these impacts.

Renee Chalut and I were invited to a meeting on February 14, to hear the results of Management's deliberations regarding the operating budget shortfall of the City of Vancouver.

At the December 15th City Finance and Service meeting, the original shortfall from the Preliminary Budget Plan showed expenses totalling \$1,100 million against Revenues of \$1,048 million resulting in total budget pressures of \$52 million. Union presidents were assured by the City that this estimate was indeed "preliminary" in nature and budget pressures would no doubt be found to be lower by the time a thorough review had been done. We presumed that the new estimate for the library portion would be about three fifths less and that appears to bear out and echo what has occurred in previous years.

It is now February 22nd and the Union Executive has requested a delegation to comment on how Management recommends these cuts to staffing be delivered. Usually the membership is given sufficient notice so that they may comment on the effect of cuts to public service. In this case, the membership been given one day's notice after I sent several e-mails to the Director of Human Resources and the Chief Librarian regarding the past precedents set in other years. The memo regarding the distribution of the budget cuts appeared on February 21st. This is the gist of memo.

After much discussion with the City, the following items will be put forward for the cost reduction in the City's 2012 operating budget:

1. Central Information and Reference Service – Staff reduction (\$405,000)
2. Technical Services Department PT/replacement Hours Reduction (\$40,000)
3. Cataloguing or Cataloguing Support Department – 1 FTE staff reduction (est. \$55,000)

You can imagine the members concern. There is a lack of transparency in a process which gives one day's notice for concerned staff to prepare a delegation – to say nothing of the general public who pay for services.

When the membership hears terms such as "hiring freeze" particularly during these very difficult times, we become fearful. We worry that the work of the library positions not posted will be spread amongst the members without careful consideration of the workload. We have the Workload Survey, the Morale Survey and the Hayes Report to testify to the unfortunate results of the previous lack of planning and

evaluation of distribution of work during periods of re-organisation. We become concerned for the future of the library when vacant positions are not posted, then deconstructed without measuring the effects of that action.

Here we have not only a hiring freeze but positions that will not be returning. There are four current scenarios now in the vacancy management pool that the Employer is currently subscribing to and they appear to hopelessly entangled. To calm the members' worst case scenarios and to try and quantify some possible outcomes, let us look at what a sum total of these measures might cost us.

1. Radio Frequency Identity Tagging Program (RFID) # of Positions not posted to pay for the RFID maintenance program. When Paul Whitney applied for capital funding for the RFID program he forgot to factor in maintenance costs. The current management has come to us with a request not to post the equivalent number of Library Assistant II positions.

The Union agreed to not grieve LAll positions that were vacant until the cost of the maintenance program had been recovered. We wrote a Letter of Understanding that the Employer negotiated with us in good faith. It promises to find new positions for staff and to benchmark work to make sure that service is still adequately delivered.

2. RFID - # of positions that might not be directly affected by RFID technology but are the same classification – positions that are not part of the circulation process. We have library Assistant II positions at Central that do simple tasks such as data input, holds processing, REO sheets, newspaper sorting. There has been some recent effort by the Employer to download these tasks to the Shelves. The tasks are not in the Shelves' classification nor do we believe this exercise is practical in the overall understanding of how the Letter of Understanding will operate. We are not giving away work that still needs to be done to another classification, we are acknowledging some work might be displaced and replaced by technology.

3. The Hiring Freeze – the Employer asked us not to grieve any vacancies that were not posted during the recently announced hiring freeze. The Union Executive brought this to the next General Meeting. The Membership voted overwhelmingly in favour of grieving any position not posted during the hiring freeze. Our Collective Agreement does not accommodate the Employer's position and the members believe that we need to track these positions so that they are posted at a later time.

4. Central Information and Reference Services - Current Recommendation that the Library cut \$405,000 (6 to 7.5 FTE)

What concerns me is that the sum total of those four scenarios looks like a lot more than \$405,000 in vacancies. The Union has no control over the 4th recommendation but we do have some input and negotiated content on the first three. The Union needs a lot more clarity on how this is going to play out. We have a duty of service to our public which cannot be casually discounted.

Our public rate their library service above police and firefighters. They have no interest in how we are managed. They are only interested in direct public service. We have to remind them that their library

shelves and computers are stocked by people behind the scenes. Libraries are a very basic enterprise: We acquire materials, pay for them, make them findable through a catalogue, help people locate the information and product, circulate the materials and keep all related databases consistent with current information. This does not require much overhead in managing.

It is during downturns in our economy when strong public libraries and library advocacy is needed most. It is the public library that people go to when they can no longer subscribe to their favourite magazines or newspaper, or to their Internet service. It is from the public library that people borrow rather than buy the latest bestseller, music CD or DVD. It is the public library that families bring their children to for free literacy-building programs. There are opportunities to build relationships with the teen and the list goes on.

As the public's buying power shrinks, people will be relying on their public library for:

- Vital information on job opportunities, career planning, small business management and computer training, book-dating clubs
- Computer skills for downloading (and downloaded) government forms, sending resumes, online applications, email, support for e-books
- Building skills for reading, writing and numeracy, manuals and meeting rooms for tutoring
- ESL, literacy, and learning languages
- Entertainment, genealogy, travel, escape literature, citizenship, and cultural networks.

These difficult times really give an opportunity for you, the Board, to assess the true value of what Vancouver Public Library represents.

There is strong support from the Board for the Community-Led model but the Management team has not been able to determine what the deliverables are as we have not enough staff to fill this designation. Further to this, the Public was not given any information as to the proposed budget cuts for 2012 for Vancouver Public Library. We usually have several delegations to the Board when cuts of this size are being delivered. Do you believe that a life-long library user is going to say, "What a good idea! Let us cut \$405,000 in direct public service staff who answer reference questions and help find materials for research, and \$55,000 in staffing that helps us find materials via the catalogue."

Let us NOT fill the vacant Director's position (worth a minimum of \$120,000 with extensive benefits package) - the review of the recommendations from the Haycock review is incomplete (lacked evidence, literature review and bibliography). The ratio of exemption to full-time staff is currently a little over 10% and to FTE is approximately 7.3%. If you consider auxiliaries in the ratio, the ratio of exempt to members is about 4.5 %. As part-timers and auxiliaries rarely see a manager, these ratios are not usually used by accredited institutions.

We would like to suggest, that the board consider conducting an independent, external review of exempt staffing levels that measures performance. As previously mentioned in the report on systemic growth of exempt management, this group has grown significantly in comparison to unionized public service staff but, to our knowledge, there has been no evaluation to determine whether this growth has

been effective in improving the library's services. If the unionised staff which has measurable value to the public (see years of surveys and delegations to the Library Board), has to take a \$500,000 hit in workload and the public has to bear it in loss of service, we believe the administration should be prepared to make a sacrifice. \$120,000+ could restore much needed service in the cataloguing area and increase speed of delivery of materials to the shelves and electronic databases.

The cut to technical services is undeserved, since this department has already been a constant focus of budget reductions and has recently undergone a review and a re-organization. The staff were promised that they would not have to suffer cuts or another review for some time to come if they participated in the last review. This occurred within the last year. Our Management should keep the promises it makes, otherwise we have to contend with chronic morale problems on top of workload issues.

Far from being unrelated to direct public service, technical services is responsible for directly providing one of our key public services; our materials and the cataloguing that allows patrons and staff to find them. For this reason, we believe the cut to Technical Services should be considered as a cut to public service, and its implications weighted accordingly. We do not see fairness in the application of this cut, and are concerned for the morale and workload implications it will have for this already thinly stretched department. However we have a suggestion. The cut of one director's position is not a cut to public service. As the work of management is currently being re-organised, by not filling the director position vacancy, there will be an opportunity to redistribute the workload and save money. This is only one position and will not dramatically unbalance an organization that is realigning itself to manage its strategic direction.

Union's Recommendations:

1. The best result would be no cuts at all. Let us celebrate excellent service rather than diminish public service by ill-considered cuts. These cuts may only result in a flattened, less educated reference service with packaged services that would not enhance our vision and mission.
2. Hiring Freeze savings from wages and benefits of frozen positions – over \$1,000,000 was saved in 2009 and 2010. We currently are experiencing a hiring freeze in 2012. We recommend those savings go towards the 500,000 shortfall that the Library is responsible for. We should need no cuts in that case as the savings will likely be similar to 2009 and 2010 - \$1,000,000 twice the amount required.
3. Two future exempt positions if brought back in scope – Savings of \$43,242.20 per annum plus large benefits in direct public service
4. Share Security costs with the City – combine staffing - we currently have a separate security force. We can amalgamate ours with the City through shared services – our three exempt security staff could be placed in vacant City security positions. Savings of about \$2220,000+ with benefits
5. Quit contracting out strategic planning, facility planning, reviews without RFPs. We have doubled the number of managers in the past five years. Surely we should be doing planning in-house rather than

having outside organisations do it for us. One of the strategic objectives to be community-led, to be informed by the community. This is called outreach and it is part of every librarians practice.

6. Do not fill director vacant position – savings of \$120,000 minimum + benefits

These difficult times really give an opportunity for you, the Board, to assess the true value of what Vancouver Public library represents. It is important that we refresh and update our product, but is more that we have a vibrant front-line service, with a strong core foundation of technical services to support our public service delivery.

Public libraries represent common gathering places where people feel socially connected. During these uncertain economic times it is important to sustain front-line public services so that our public has a place to go for information and the support they need. Please support direct public service; it will pay dividends in strong communities for present and future generations.