Beyond Books:

How Public Libraries are Redefining Municipal Social Service Delivery

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PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE

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The Librarian's Guide to HOMELESSNESS

Canadian Urban Institute

The Case for Canada's Public Libraries

OVERDUE

THE LIBRARY BOOK

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IN SEARCH OF NEW PUBLIC DOMAIN

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This research delves into the critical role of urban public libraries in Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria British Columbia (B.C.) amidst the backdrop of rising inequality and social service needs. Drawing on qualitative methods that include content analysis, site visits, and interviews with key stakeholders, the research explores the challenges faced by urban public libraries and their responses to the increasing demands people have for social services. Findings reveal that public libraries, traditionally seen as bastions of knowledge, have transformed into vital community hubs, particularly for vulnerable populations. The study uncovers the complexities of partnerships between municipal planners and public libraries in addressing urban inequality, shedding light on both successes and areas for improvement. Through a multifaceted analysis, this research highlights the pressures on urban public libraries and also identifies opportunities for enhanced collaboration and innovative programming to better serve the diverse needs of urban populations. By amplifying the voices of municipal planners, senior library administrators, and library governance representatives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how public libraries can remain resilient and responsive in the face of evolving urban social challenges.

Résumé

Cette étude se penche sur le rôle essentiel des bibliothèques publiques urbaines de Vancouver, Surrey et Victoria en Colombie-Britannique (B.C.) dans un contexte d'inégalités croissantes et de besoins en matière de services sociaux. S'appuyant sur des méthodes qualitatives telles que l'analyse de contenu, les visites de sites et les entretiens avec les principales parties prenantes, la recherche explore les défis auxquels sont confrontées les bibliothèques publiques urbaines et leurs réponses aux demandes croissantes de services sociaux. Les résultats révèlent que les bibliothèques publiques, traditionnellement considérées comme des bastions du savoir, se sont transformées en centres communautaires vitaux, en particulier pour les populations vulnérables. L'étude met en lumière la complexité des partenariats entre les planificateurs municipaux et les bibliothèques publiques dans la lutte contre les inégalités urbaines, ainsi que les réussites et les points à améliorer. Grâce à une analyse multidimensionnelle, cette recherche ne met pas seulement en évidence les pressions qui s'exercent sur les bibliothèques publiques urbaines, mais identifie également les possibilités de renforcer la collaboration et d'élaborer des programmes novateurs afin de mieux répondre aux divers besoins des populations urbaines. En amplifiant les voix des planificateurs municipaux, des administrateurs principaux des bibliothèques et des représentants de la gouvernance des bibliothèques, cette étude contribue à une meilleure compréhension de la manière dont les bibliothèques publiques peuvent rester résistantes et réactives face à l'évolution des défis sociaux urbains.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This first chapter introduces this research project, including an overview of the role of public libraries today, research questions to be explored, and methods used.

British Columbia (B.C.) is known for its highly livable cities, but they are also routinely identified as some of the most expensive in the country. The Globe and Mail's 2023 inaugural list of Canada's Most Livable Cities ranked 12 B.C. cities in the top 20, with Victoria (1) taking the top spot (Singh & Wang, 2023). However, while B.C. cities are recognized for their strong economies, education, and amenities, an analysis of housing affordability paints a very different picture, with Victoria (253), Vancouver (373), and Surrey (416) ranking on the opposite end of the spectrum (Singh & Wang, 2023). Amongst Canadian provinces, data from Statistics Canada revealed that B.C. had the lowest estimated income to expense ratio (Aslam, 2023). At the city level, Vancouver (1), Victoria (3), and Surrey (8) all fall within the 10 most expensive cities in Canada (Aslam, 2023). With increasing housing, food, and gas prices taking their toll people's pocketbooks, individuals and families are struggling to make ends meet.

Challenges with affordability are even more pronounced amongst vulnerable populations. As indicated in the 2023 Homeless Counts, Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria continue to see increases in observed homelessness year over year. At the same time, B.C. continues to see record population growth with over 100,000 migrants arriving in the province in 2021 (Office of the Premier, 2022), while the corresponding gap between the rich and poor further widens (Statistics Canada, 2023). As a result, cities, social service providers, and vulnerable residents are facing the challenges of urbanization daily (The Canadian Press, 2023). In addition, Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria have been identified as the three communities with the highest number of unregulated drug deaths in B.C. (Romphf, 2023). Therefore, the limited availability of social services and supports, such as affordable housing, comprehensive mental health and addictions care, and adequate income supports have pushed vulnerable people concentrated in downtown areas to seek support in non-traditional public spaces.

Often anchored in the centre of these downtown areas is the public library. Public libraries have long served as important gathering spaces in urban communities. As one of the few free, accessible public spaces for all members of a community, people from all walks of life have relied on their public libraries to access information and education. In recent decades, however, public libraries have begun facing new acute pressures. No longer simply places of quiet contemplation, today public libraries are responding to rising numbers of people experiencing homelessness in city centres. In the absence of adequate

social service supports, North American public libraries have assumed the role of triage centre (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). As a critical frontline service, public libraries have had to adapt and introduce new innovative solutions to support the many at-risk and vulnerable individuals frequenting urban branches.

To better understand how demographics differed within library service areas and within the wider municipal context, preliminary research was commissioned in 2019 by the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC). Through the mapping and review of 2016 Canadian Census data surrounding 562 urban libraries, the research found "systematically higher levels of social need within library walk-sheds, with higher core housing need, lower income, higher unemployment, and more visible minorities and immigrants when compared with surrounding areas," (Belot et al., 2019). Higher levels of social needs in surrounding areas (as shown in Figure 1 below) have made public libraries even more important in addressing social service needs. Urban librarians are therefore situated on the frontlines of providing vulnerable people with social service supports, regularly responding to incidents involving patrons experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges.
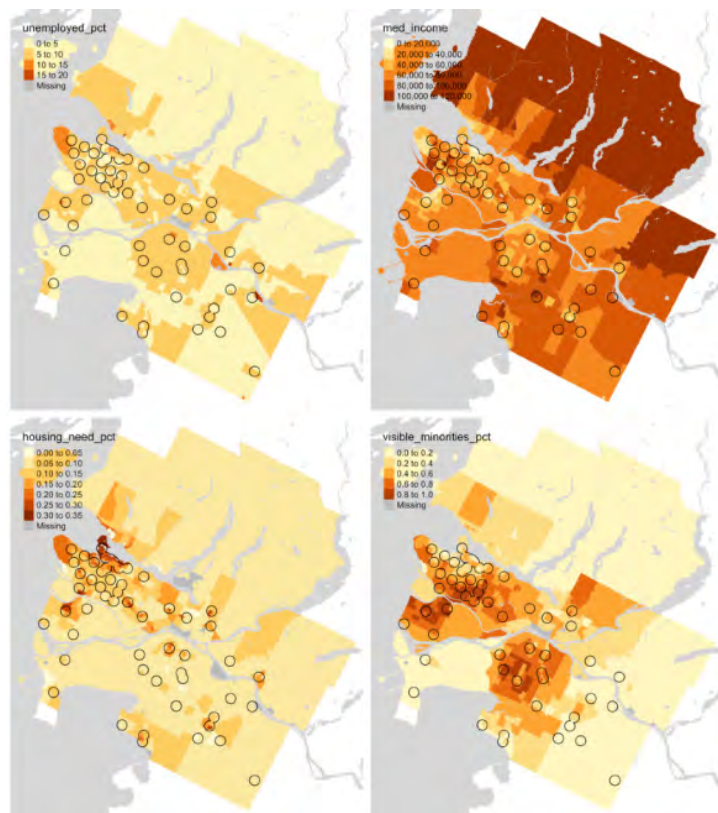
Figure 1: Graphs of Vancouver CMA showing Unemployment, Household Income, Core Housing Need, and Visible Minorities and Immigrants being high within library walk-sheds
Source: Belot et al., 2019

As a form of critical social infrastructure, public libraries are known for their contributions to social capital and the overall health and wellbeing of a community. However, their ability to play this role is contingent on broader patterns of urban development and state investment. With library systems being pressured to respond to increasingly diverse needs within their city centre branches, their ability to perform their core functions has been brought into question.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is threefold. First, it aims to provide an understanding of the role of the urban public library as an accessible public space, including the regulatory environment they operate within, the pressures they face, and the current social service programs being offered. Second, it aims to assess how public library systems in three B.C. urban municipalities – Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria – are performing this function and the ways in which municipal planners, librarians, and library trustees are contributing to this work. Third, it aims to explore how public libraries can better support library patrons through the introduction of new social programming and the perceptions of municipal planners, library staff, library governing bodies, and provincial public servants in addressing this reality. Amidst persistent affordability challenges in B.C. and an overburdened social service system, this research presents an opportunity to highlight the contributions and challenges faced by urban libraries in delivering services to at-risk and vulnerable populations. In addition, it provides an opportunity to identify how different actors can better work together to ensure the library remains an important and responsive civic institution to changing urban needs.

Research Question

The aim of this research is to identify how municipal planners have partnered with public libraries, located in British Columbia's downtown areas of Vancouver, Surrey, and Greater Victoria, to best address rising inequality and increasing social service needs. Further, this research aims to identify how planners could be doing this work better. Additional questions surrounding my research include:

- How do municipal planners view the urban public library?
- What are the social priorities of each city?
- What existing and what expanded services could libraries provide?
- What current pressures are libraries facing as a result of rising social needs and existing funding frameworks?

Methods

For the purpose of this study, the research approach consisted of three qualitative research methods: 1) content and document analysis; 2) site visits and virtual attendance at the 2024 OLA Superconference; and 3) semi-structured interviews. The Principal Investigator received a Certificate of Ethics Approval from the McGill University Research Ethics Board Office on December 15, 2023. The corresponding REB file number is 23-11-070.

The first research method was content and document analysis and began with a review of relevant academic literature spanning social and community planning, social infrastructure, and library operations, pressures, and positions. Several professional reports and policy documents listed were reviewed, including municipal social plans, library service plans, annual reports, library codes of conduct, and research reports and presentations on Canadian public libraries (shown in the Appendix).

The second research method consisted of site visits to select urban libraries in three Canadian provinces between January and March 2024. These site visits provided an opportunity to explore different branches, learn about available services, and observe the ways in which diverse publics used these spaces at different times of the day. Sites visited included the Central Library in downtown Vancouver, the Carnegie Branch in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, the Millennium Library in downtown Winnipeg, and the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BanQ) in downtown Montreal. In addition, virtual attendance at the January 2024, three-day Ontario Library Association (OLA) Superconference provided additional exposure to the social and financial pressures felt by urban libraries. As Canada's largest library conference, the event attracted library practitioners from across the country who presented on a range of topics.

The third and final research method used was semi-structured interviews with three municipal planners, three senior library administrators, three library governance representatives, and one provincial public servant. These interviews sought to reveal perceptions, opportunities, and challenges surrounding the ways in which planners and libraries could work together to support at-risk and vulnerable people through the delivery of new social service-oriented programming. A total of 10 interview participants were selected, representing each of the three municipal jurisdictions investigated. A full list of interview participants is shown in the Appendix.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This second chapter provides an overview of the academic literature as well as professional reports and policy documents surrounding the pressures faced by public libraries today, the role of social planning and social infrastructure, and operational questions surrounding current and future library conditions.

Introduction

Amidst increasing challenges related to urban poverty playing out within their branches, many Canadian public library systems are assessing how they can best work with vulnerable populations. Some have begun to offer new programs and services in partnership with community organizations, while others have focused on hiring specialized staff focused on community and social integration. Most, if not all library systems are working to ensure their staff have the appropriate training and supports to respond to these increasingly diverse needs while often considering best practices for information sharing and service coordination across their branches. Overall, these interventions have sparked larger conversations both within the library community and beyond surrounding the extent to which the public library should respond to these growing needs.

While pressures continue to build within the library, the response from professional planning practice and the role of the municipal planner remains unclear. To what extent do planners think about the role of libraries in contemporary cities and factor them into municipal plans and initiatives? In order to understand the role of urban public libraries and the ways in which municipalities rely on them to assist with local social service delivery, this literature review: 1) tracks the historical evolution of libraries as sites for social service provision; 2) explores the pressures currently faced in urban public libraries; 3) describes the role of social planning and the library as form of critical social infrastructure; and 4) addresses operational questions related to library funding, the role of library leadership, and the spectrum of current and possible future social service supports.

Historical Overview of the Public Library Offering Social Service Supports

Libraries, as an institution offering social service supports, have long served as places of refuge for vulnerable people. During the Progressive Era, Jane Addams recognized the value of public libraries by founding one at Hull-House (shown in Image 1 below) (Wahler et al., 2020, p.34). During the Great Depression, libraries began providing free entertainment and new social service supports aimed at helping connect people to employment and retraining opportunities (Wahler et al., 2020, pp.34-35). At the time, such programs were seen as innovative and represented an emerging trend of growing social service supports available at public libraries. The deinstitutionalization process that began in the 1960s

across North America brought new waves of people experiencing homelessness into urban city centres. With some experiencing mental health challenges, many who left these facilities ended up at the library (Wahler et al., 2020, p.35). Overwhelmed shelters and clinics began to refer those looking for social service supports to the library as a temporary remedy (Klinenberg, 2018, p.85). Subsequent economic difficulties in the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s, compounded by popular neoliberal policies introduced in the 1980s brought new challenges of poverty, food deserts, and a lack of access to health care facilities to the library (Wahler et al., 2020, p.35). In recent years, the rising cost of living in urban communities across the country are placing even greater economic pressures on those experiencing homelessness.

Image 1: Interior of Hull-House library
Source: Swarthmore College Peace Collection

Image 2: Carnegie Public Library, Vancouver
Source: City of Vancouver Archives, 1932

Today, libraries are increasingly being viewed as "de facto shelter[s]" while librarians are beginning to be seen by some as "de facto psychotherapists, security guards, surrogate parents, [and] advocates," (Wahler et al., 2020, p.35). These changes both reflect and reinforce the expanding role of the library and by extension, the role of the 21st century librarian. Wahler et al. (2020) argue that the expanding role of the librarian was principally driven by three factors: the switch toward electronic government portals, the development of the 211-information system, and the rising number of patrons experiencing homelessness or mental health challenges in cities (p.35). As the public library has long been viewed as a space to access information and support, this evolution of library service is logical. However, this evolving role needs to also be understood within the urban context of cities, including the critical social infrastructure that makes up a broader, diverse metropolis (Nevarez, 2021). As a public space which is ingrained both conceptually and physically within our urban fabric and considering that libraries have long served the public in accessing knowledge, libraries have 'naturally' evolved into their role of expanded service delivery amidst a weakening social safety net (Nevarez, 2021).

Public Library Pressures

What is really happening in Canadian public libraries today and should we be alarmed? According to research conducted by Rivest and Bellemare (2024), library patrons with high needs fall within two categories. The first are those who are aggressive or express violent behaviour that jeopardizes the safety of the library community (Rivest & Bellemare, 2024). The second are members of vulnerable communities whose needs cannot be addressed solely by the library; this group may include seniors, newcomers and immigrants, the unhoused, and people with mental health challenges (Rivest & Bellemare, 2024). The first demographic has resulted in an unprecedented increase in safety and security incidents at public libraries across Canada, a rise that has prompted the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) to form a Safety and Security Working Group for the first time. The Working Group produced a best practices toolkit outlining 10 themes to support libraries on their journey in ensuring the safety and security of staff and patrons. The content of this toolkit is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Four; however, it is important to recognize that pressures related to social development, incident prevention, and incident response are at the forefront of consideration amongst Canadian urban libraries. The following section details some pressures faced within urban public libraries including rising third-party violence and incivility, diminishing staff morale, and dwindling public investment in social services.

Rising Third-Party Violence and Incivility

Despite the urban public library being deemed a low-risk workplace, the recurrence of violence and rising incivility has been well documented across academic and grey literature (Stevenson, 2022; Canadian Urban Institute, 2023; Canadian Urban Libraries Council, 2024). Alike the well-documented abuse and harassment faced by frontline workers in health care as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, library workers have also been on the receiving end (CBC News, 2020; Hune-Brown, 2023). In a survey of workers at four Canadian public library systems, 97 percent of the over 500 respondents reported having observed verbal intimidation, 85 percent witnessed an unwelcome invasion of personal space between a patron and another patron or staff member, 84 percent experienced verbal intimidation, 75 percent experienced physical intimidation, and 4 percent were the subject of an attempted rape (Stevenson, 2022, p.340). It is important to note that workplace violence and incivility exist along a continuum and can take many forms, including disrespect, harassment, and assault. Further, one does not need to be the direct recipient of the abuse in question to be impacted by it. Therefore, violent and uncivil behaviours within the library may have a larger spillover effect on other library staff, patrons, and community members. While the library profession holds a core value of open access and services to all,

public libraries also have a responsibility as an organization to keep all employees safe (Stevenson, 2022).

Violence against librarians on the rise
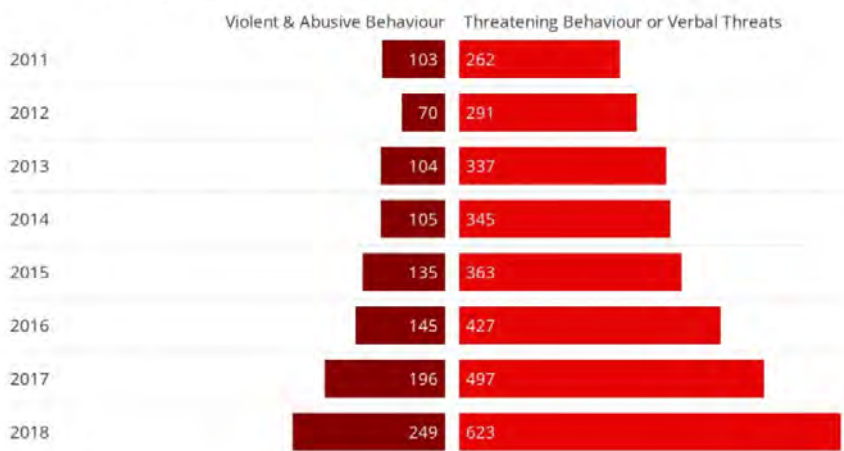
Figure 2: Graph showing a rise in violence at the Toronto Public Library, pre-pandemic
Source: CBC News, 2020

Diminishing Staff Morale

While the vast majority of encounters within the library are positive, workers aiming to support vulnerable community members may be subject to uncivil or violent behaviours. Over time, these repeated exposures have the potential to negatively impact staff morale. A second portion of the Stevenson (2022) survey completed by 373 respondents found that 72 percent of frontline library workers reported having to deal with an individual whom they suspected might be experiencing what appears to be an untreated mental illness or crisis (Stevenson, 2022, p.345). 65 percent of respondents reported having to deal with library users whom they suspect are intoxicated or under the influence of drugs anywhere from once a day to a few times per month (Stevenson, 2022, p.345). A qualitative study on low morale amongst 20 accredited librarians from Canada and the United States revealed that emotional abuse from library patrons was an issue identified by 50 percent of respondents, with verbal abuse being the primary form at 93 percent (Davis Kendrick, 2020, p.7). The same study identified that physical and verbal abuse were most often performed by unhoused patrons and those dealing with possible mental illness or substance use issues (Davis Kendrick, 2020, p.10). One librarian shared:

> We are situated [less than a block] from a homeless shelter… a lot of the homeless come into the library and we're dealing every day with alcoholism, drug use, mental illness… Sometimes I'll have to wake up patrons that are sleeping and then I get told, "fuck off"…this guy called me a fucking whore and a fucking bitch…it's almost like that at least once every other week. No joke. (Davis Kendrick, 2020, p.10).

The same study also identified gaps between participant's formal Library and Information Science education and workplace experiences, challenges with library administration not providing adequate staff supports, and the increasing perception and practice of the library as a default social services provider (Davis Kendrick, 2020, p.17). Librarians in the study identified that they are not trained to provide the types of social service supports required by patrons and how mission creep is increasingly becoming a concern amongst librarians (Davis Kendrick, 2020). Overall, there was recognition amongst librarians that their workplaces are situated within the social contexts of their communities; therefore, the lack of affordable housing and mental health and addictions supports within their communities means that patrons will be turning to librarians – and by extension library workers – for support (Davis Kendrick, 2020). However, the repeated exposure to emotional, verbal, and potentially physical abuse in their workplace, alongside increasing demands on their time may contribute to a diminished morale amongst library workers.

Dwindling Public Investment in Social Services

The pressures felt by public libraries today need to be understood within the extensive neoliberal restructuring of the Canadian welfare state which began in the 1980s. These seismic shifts redefined the responsibilities of lower levels of government in delivering social services (Frederiksen, 2015). Therefore, while greater responsibilities were downloaded from the federal government to the provinces – and by extension to municipalities – fewer financial resources were provided to address these needs (Frederiksen, 2015). While public libraries were not restructured as a result of these changes, as entities which are almost exclusively funded from municipal governments, they are directly impacted by the budgetary pressures faced by local government (Woroniak, 2012).

As other public venues and services have been constrained or dismantled, public libraries have become increasingly important community spaces (Frederiksen, 2015), especially amongst vulnerable populations like the unhoused (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). Unhoused library patrons have specific needs they hope the library will meet. Banwell and Kingham (2023) identified that 'home' exists as a grounding place, providing the centre of one's physical life, offering a sense of structure and control. In the absence of such a place, unhoused patrons turn to the public library as a site of familiarity and spatial refuge. The library serves as a space of socialization, offering programming, services, and resources (Terrile, 2016). The consistency of staff supports, as well as the recognition of names and faces, personalizes the library and builds stronger affinity between patrons and staff (Terrile, 2016).

Image 3: Patron sleeping in a London Public Library branch
Source: CBC News, London

Image 4: Patron sleeping in an Edmonton Public Library branch
Source: CBC News, Edmonton

However, in the absence of robust social infrastructure and accessible mental health support, libraries have also taken on the role of triage centers within urban areas (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). This requires library workers to assist patrons in crisis, which may include mental health episodes, violent behaviours, and overdoses (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). A 2009 national study of public librarians in the United States found that "61% reported that patrons with serious mental illnesses use an inordinate amount of resources and staff time," (Torrey et al., 2009, p.46). The same study also found that 85 percent of respondents have had to call the police regarding the behaviour of those deemed mentally ill (Torrey et al., 2009, p.46). Therefore, libraries are increasingly finding themselves in a dilemma, trying to balance the rights and needs of people experiencing homelessness, while also ensuring the library remains a safe space for other library patrons and staff (Torrey et al., 2009, p.46). This leaves libraries grappling with the question of how to appropriately respond.

Social Planning and Social Infrastructure

Questions remain surrounding the extent to which municipal planners are engaging with urban social challenges. Municipal planners are often focused on issues related to traditional land-use and development planning. However, as a diverse, multi-disciplinary profession, planning encompasses many other areas of practice which includes social planning and the planning of social infrastructure. While some municipalities have hired dedicated planners focused on addressing social issues within communities, others rely on general planning staff to carry out this work. As illustrated below, findings from the academic literature on social planning, as well as the ways in which they work to plan for social infrastructure is limited and result in more questions than answers.

Role of Social Planners

Whether referred to as social planning, social innovation, or social policy, there has long been discussion amongst academics and professional planners about approaches to reduce or eliminate social problems within urban environments. As a profession which has long sought to address the externalities from market forces which otherwise shape our cities, planners – and specifically those working to advance reform-oriented agendas – have an opportunity to advocate for the interests of equity seeking groups (Davidoff, 1965; Rein, 1967). Considering the political and social values of minority perspectives, municipal planners can advance these interests within their bureaucracies by championing progressive policy and planning solutions (Davidoff, 1965; Rein, 1967). However, the literature recognizes that there are inherent legitimacy challenges of both the planner, and the reform-oriented (or social) planner (Davidoff, 1965; Rein, 1967). As just one municipal actor, planners have "tended to bias strongly many of [their] recommendations toward [the] perpetuation of existing social and economic practices," (Davidoff, 1965, p. 336). Planners interested in championing different social causes have often had to organize municipal coalitions to garner greater legitimacy (Rein, 1967). As highlighted by Rein, "Legitimacy depends on bringing together a broad range of groups representing old and new sources of power – influential leaders, established organizational interests, and government," (p.236). This raises an important question surrounding which actors need to be involved in order to advance social progress at the local government level – is progress dependent on action from specific municipal departments, various levels of government, community actors, and, or members of the public? Further, is this the only way to advance social interests?

Another challenge surrounds the differing ideologies, values, and interests held by planners and municipal bureaucracies as a whole. While the work of planning scholars and practitioners like Davidoff (1965) recognize that social planning should exist as a supplement to professional and academic planning training (p.243), cities have historically been more focused on the physical components of city planning (Rein, 1967, p.243). In part, this may be why academic planning literature surrounding issues of a social nature are far less researched than their physical and economic counterparts. Further, the role of City Hall as a political force shaping the priorities of a municipality cannot go unmentioned. Recognizing that "politicians are committed to political survival" (Rein, 1967, p.234) and therefore "respond to the preferences of the constituencies that elect them rather than the needs of the inarticulate and hence unrepresented groups," (Rein, 1967, p.234) the entrenched nature of planning practice towards prioritizing the interests of higher socioeconomic classes makes challenging the status quo all that more difficult. This raises the question of whether planners interested in advancing social issues feel confident and capable of doing so? Further, for planners interested in addressing social issues in

communities, how can they use social infrastructure – and in particular the public library – as a vehicle to deliver upon their desired future state? Recognizing that planning for social services often lack a "comprehensive planning outlook," (Dyckman, 1966, p.66), efforts to address specific urban social issues are often addressed through ad hoc solutions. In order to address these challenges at a larger, systemic level, a comprehensive and consolidated social plan is likely required. Such a process allows for the establishment of public goals and milestones for municipalities to work toward. In the absence of such a framework, how can a municipality assess their progress toward reaching a social objective?

Libraries as Critical Social Infrastructure and Public (Third) Spaces

For over two decades, libraries contributions to social capital have been reflected in the literature (Leckie & Hopkins, 2002; Johnson, 2010; Klinenberg, 2018; Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). In his seminal book, Palaces for the People, American sociologist Eric Klinenberg (2018) articulates how public libraries as a form of 'social infrastructure' can help rebuild our fractured society. Positioning the public library as key infrastructure for forming social connection, Klinenberg writes about how "Everyone is welcome at the library, regardless of whether they're a citizen, a permanent resident, or even a convicted felon" (p.57). But what is social infrastructure and how does it differ from other forms of infrastructure?

Social Infrastructure

Latham and Layton (2019) suggest that at a conceptual level, infrastructure can be understood as the "background structures and systems that allow social, economic, cultural, and political life to happen" (p.3). When one thinks of conventional infrastructure, systems come to mind like water and sanitation, or electricity and transportation networks. Latham and Layton (2019) suggest that, in contrast, social infrastructure can be viewed as an extension of what counts as infrastructure within the social sciences (p.3). Klinenberg defines social infrastructure quite broadly as:

> Public institutions, such as libraries, schools, playgrounds, parks, athletic fields, and swimming pools, are vital parts of the social infrastructure. So too are sidewalks, courtyards, community gardens, and other spaces that invite people into the public realm. Community organizations, including churches and civic associations, act as social infrastructures when they have an established physical space where people can assemble, as do regularly scheduled markets for food, furniture, clothing, art, and other consumer goods. Commercial establishments can also be important parts of the social infrastructure (2018, p.17).

Social infrastructure can be understood as "the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops" (Klinenberg, 2018, p.24). Klinenberg writes about how robust social infrastructure promotes connection and collaboration, whereas diminished social infrastructure fosters solitude and loneliness (2018, p.24).

Latham and Layton emphasize that different forms of social infrastructure usually serve a primary function other than to promote sociality, "however facilitating sociality is an essential component of how they manage to provide their primary function" (2019, p.3). Therefore, the public library serves as a prime example of critical social infrastructure. As Klinenberg states in his book, *Palaces for the People*, "Everyone is welcome at the library, regardless of whether they're a citizen, a permanent resident, or even a convicted felon" (2018, p.57). With libraries remaining accessible spaces for all, "librarians do all sorts of unexpected things for surprisingly large numbers of people. Their core mission is to help people elate themselves and improve their situation" (Klinenberg, 2018, pp.72-73). As the public library is situated at the centre of urban communities from both a physical and social standpoint, their unique vantage point has made them critical community actors in helping manage and resolve urban issues. However, as a form of social infrastructure, can libraries respond to the needs of all users? Further, without the appropriate resources, is the public library still able to live up to its potential as a form of thriving social infrastructure?

Properties of Infrastructure

Star (2012) offers a multidimensional approach to libraries as a form of social infrastructure, identifying nine distinct properties that can help assess the potential of libraries to respond to different needs. The nine properties of social infrastructure are described briefly below:

1. Embeddedness: the way in which infrastructure exists within established networks and relationships (Star, 2012, p.381). In the case of the library, it serves a primary function of material distribution between users and branches.
2. Transparency in use (Star, 2012, p.381). Library users understand how to navigate the infrastructure, bringing a sense of invisibility to well-understood processes. A user does not need to reinvent the process for how to borrow a material, rather they can simply do so for an established amount of time.
3. Reach or scope: either spatial or temporal (Star, 2012, p.381). To this end, the library can be used repeatedly, with materials in circulation being shared by community members.
4. Learned as part of membership: how processes can be taken for granted within a community of practice (Star, 2012, p.381). In the case of the library, there are rules

and expectations of use that become learned over time. When these expectations are challenged, issues arise.

5. Links with conventions of practice (Star, 2012, p.381). In the case of the library, its programs and services must evolve alongside user needs and expectations. There are important questions surrounding the extent to which libraries should respond to increasingly diverse needs within their branches.

6. Embodiment of standards: the ways in which infrastructure plugs into other forms of infrastructure (Star, 2012, p.381). In the case of the library, their operations are contingent on being able to connect to existing infrastructure systems such as electricity, heating, plumbing, and the Internet.

7. Built on an installed base: how infrastructure wrestles with the strengths and limitations of their existing base (Star, 2012, p.382). To this end, the library's historic function of facilitating the distribution of books is by no means its only function today. Departures away from this function however are met with questions and challenges surrounding several of the other principles, including reach or scope, and links with conventions or practice.

8. Becomes visible upon breakdown: how the normally invisible quality of functional infrastructure becomes noticed amidst disruption (Star, 2012, p.382). When library operations break down, it is no longer an invisible service. Such breakdowns impact regular users reliant on the library, and may also, depending on the severity, alarm a broader audience.

9. Fixed in modular increments: how infrastructure is "big, layered, and complex" (Star, 2012, p.382). Infrastructure in many ways is entrenched, with "change taking time and negotiation, and adjustment with other aspects of the systems are involved" (Star, 2012, p.382). In the case of the library, this makes changes to current operations much more difficult as expectations of what constitutes library service are in many ways based on historic practice.

These nine properties should be considered when evaluating the pressures faced by urban public libraries and potential responses.

Libraries as Public Space, Public Property, and Third Place

Libraries are also viewed in theoretical and policy literature as a form of space for the public. However, academics differ in categorization and understanding of the role of such space. Diverse concepts such as public space, public property, third spaces, contested spaces, public domain are applied to libraries; discussion below focuses on the first three concepts. Public space can be understood as space that is freely accessible for everyone (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001). However, Hajer and Reijndorp (2001) do not equate all public space as being public domain, arguing that in order for a physical space to be considered

public domain it requires additional political and philosophical considerations. To this end, they argue that the public realm is "the sphere where we encounter the proverbial 'other' and where we must relate to other behaviour, other ideas, and other preferences" (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, p.12). As the public domain is a space of exchange and reflection, there are key questions surrounding user behaviour, power relations, and compromise which must be contemplated. Within the urban public library, are all patrons treated equally? And if not, what behaviours from what users will be tolerated within these public spaces?

Freeman and Blomley (2019) sought to explore some of these questions through an analysis of the ways in which the library is conceived, managed, and regulated as public property. Using the Edmonton Public Library as a case study, the researchers analyzed the implementation of a 2011 sleeping policy and the contestations between different library users that arose. In this instance, the sleep policy was rescinded in April 2015, representing the contestation that exists in the regulation of public property (Freeman & Blomley, 2019). Their study articulates how public property is an object of interest of several (and sometimes conflicting) users, requiring the use of property rules in order to manage conflict (Freeman & Blomley, 2019, p.201). While some view the library as 'state property' and therefore accessible and inclusive within limits, others view the library as 'people's property' which seeks to remove barriers to access and view the space more as 'the city's living room' (Freeman & Blomley, 2019, p.203). These differing perspectives help to gauge the level of difference and diversity that will be tolerated within these spaces. Historically, as Canadian libraries transitioned from philanthropic initiatives (Carnegie investments) into the public sector (municipal operations with provincial oversight), they became accountable to both the government and the public. Their regulation became the responsibility of appointed library boards, with their decisions being implemented by library administrators, and staff (Freeman & Blomley, 2019, p.204). Therefore, a library systems decisions regarding their operating mandate and the extent of their openness is dictated by these bodies. But, as libraries become increasingly focused on the way their spaces are being used by the public as opposed to the collections and resources housed within them, this line is becoming increasingly blurred (Freeman & Blomley, 2019, p.205).

The concept of the 'third place' was introduced by urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1991) who sought to differentiate the spatial spheres of one's life. According to Oldenburg, the 'first place' refers to one's home, the 'second place' one's workplace, and the 'third place' is characterized by the social interactions that occur within it (Mawer & Kiddle, 2020; Banwell & Kingham, 2023). Third places can range in form from libraries and parks to cafes and streets and can be public, semi-public, or private spaces (Mawer & Kiddle, 2020). As public libraries are key landmarks attracting diverse populations and serve as important resources in the increasingly information-driven, knowledge-based economy, they meet

Oldenburg's definition of third place (Leckie & Hopkins, 2002). What is unique about public libraries is their ability to facilitate the interactions and by extension the trust – under the right conditions – necessary for social cohesion. This 'redistributive function' held by public libraries does not exist across all third places (Valentine, 2008). Rather, as public libraries are spaces intentionally designed to foster information sharing and social interaction with people from all different walks of life, they help foster social capital through the common status bestowed upon all library users (Valentine, 2008; Johnson 2010); by facilitating less formal social interactions, such authors contend libraries can use their role as a third place to encourage interaction and offer possibilities for meaningful encounters between different groups. They can further help break down societal class divides through the shared use and 'equal access' to a public space (Johnson, 2010). However, as Freeman and Blomley (2019) note, the library remains a space which serves the 'collective interest' (p.203). How can the library work to ensure that non-traditional library uses, and by extension users, are permitted alongside majority interests?

Whether or Not to Expand Social Service Delivery

What also remains a question is what factors that influence the decisions on whether and how to expand social service supports within libraries. Is it a question of funding: do libraries prioritize certain actions over others depending on operational, grant funding, or funds raised through other means? Is it a question of leadership: are these decisions only advanced when library leadership like a chief librarian or chair of the library board are championing them? Alternatively, how do libraries determine what approach and the extent to which they are going to take? The following section will explore the challenges surrounding the ways in which public libraries are funded and governed, as well as the potential expansion of their operations.

Library Funding

Historically, many North American urban library systems began as public-private partnerships. In Canada, Andrew Carnegie, an industrialist and philanthropist built 125 libraries, driven by his strong belief in free education (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). In the United States, he built another 1,689 (Nevarez, 2021, p.5). As Canadian libraries transitioned from philanthropic initiatives into core public sector operations, they became the financial responsibility of municipalities. According to a comprehensive study conducted by the Canadian Urban Institute in 2023, upwards of 90 percent of funding for Canadian public libraries comes from municipal governments. The same study noted that "Canadian libraries are funded from a tax base that does not increase proportionally with population or economic growth, and municipal support for libraries remains flat or has fallen in real dollars over several years," (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023, p.27). The same report

highlighted "for every $1 invested in Canada's urban libraries, $6 is generated in community economic impact, a return of over 600%" (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023, p.29).

Despite their strong economic return, amidst budget cuts and the lack of understanding of the growing responsibilities of these institutions, public libraries are facing very real threats to their long-term sustainability. Library systems in cities like Toronto, New York City, and Seattle have all struggled to navigate the precariousness of public funding and have had to advocate for additional funding to maintain service levels (Nevarez, 2021, p.28). With the former reliance on philanthropy no longer being readily available and neoliberal ideology encouraging the weakening of a welfare state in favour of privatization (Nevarez, 2021, p.5), how can public library systems as an essential public service continue to respond to the increasing operational pressures they face?
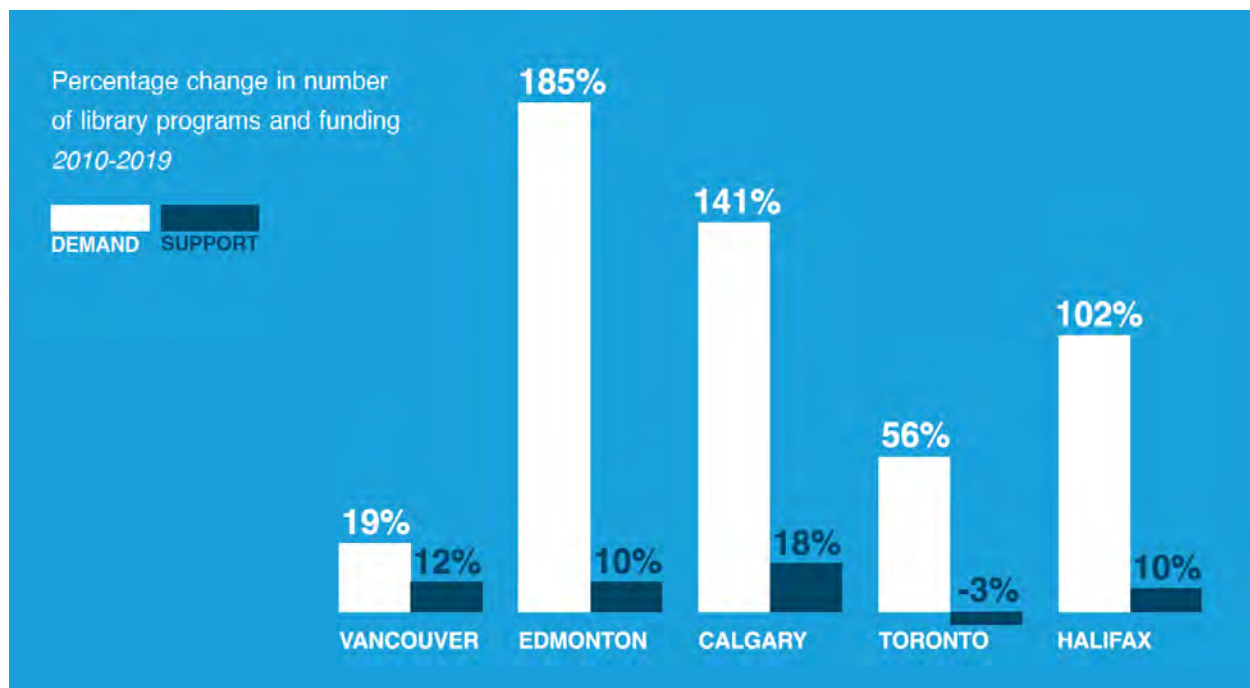
Figure 3: Funding gap between Canadian public library programming and available funding
Source: Canadian Urban Institute, 2023, p.28

Library Governance and Leadership

Despite being municipal entities, Canadian public libraries are uniquely governed. While library systems are primarily funded by municipal governments, they are legislated by provinces and are governed by a municipally appointed board of trustees (Freeman & Blomley, 2018). As a governance board, the public library board is responsible for setting the strategic policy direction for the library system. Therefore, any significant expansion of the

delivery of social services should originate at the board level. Trustees, however, may or may not have experience with librarianship and the pressures faced within local library branches (Davis Kendrick, 2020). As such, this potential disconnect between strategic policy directions and the day-to-day pressures of the public library may result in operational challenges related to programs, and service provision.

Oversight for library operations is the responsibility of the chief librarian/CEO and their staff. The chief librarian has oversight over staff, programming, and rules surrounding patron conduct and is ultimately responsible for ensuring the public library delivers a service that is "accountable to taxpayers and citizens, not only regular library patrons" (Freeman & Blomley, 2018, p.205). Therefore, the chief librarian is responsible for balancing the fiduciary duties of the library board and the expectations of the municipality, while also working to resolve staff and patron concerns (Davis Kendrick, 2020, p.28). Lo et al. (2020) sought to understand the views and perceptions of successful North American public library directors (chief librarians/CEOs) in the 21st century. As leaders of public organizations that aim to serve others, the researchers identify the natural parallels between library leadership and the servant leadership approach, emphasizing "collaboration, mutual trust, empathy, and the ethical use of power" (Lo et al., 2020, p.250). Recognizing that today's "public libraries are more complex, multi-functional, and community-oriented spaces" (Lo et al., 2020, p.251), they argue that there is a need for library leadership to be equally adaptive and innovative. The study found that successful public library directors need to be effective communicators and bridge builders with both internal and external audiences (Lo et al., 2020, p.267). Further, the study found that leaders "not only need to provide services for meeting the demands of the users for today, but must also anticipate tomorrow," (Lo et al., 2020, p.267). This raises important questions about the future of the public library and the type of leadership that may be required to take it there.

Balancing Traditional Roles and Calls for Expanded Social Service Supports

Public libraries are recognized for their central locations, public access, variety of print and digital resources, computer, Internet, and Wi-Fi access, public washrooms, and water fountains (Terrile, 2016). In addition to these baseline services, many libraries offer adult literacy and employment supports, activities for children and teens, and specific programming for newcomers and seniors (Terrile, 2016). On any given day a library serves patrons with access to education and information, support for job searches and career aspirations, assists with language learning, and provide a safe, climate-controlled space for children, parents, and vulnerable people (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). It is for these reasons that the library has begun to be recognized as a key partner in our health care system (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). Offering programs and services which directly support several of Canada's 12 Social Determinants for Health (shown in Figure 4 below),

such as education and literacy, employment, and social inclusion, libraries contribute to better health outcomes for their communities (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). But what about service needs that go beyond these more traditional offerings? How could and how should libraries adapt their services to meet these otherwise unaddressed community needs within their branches?
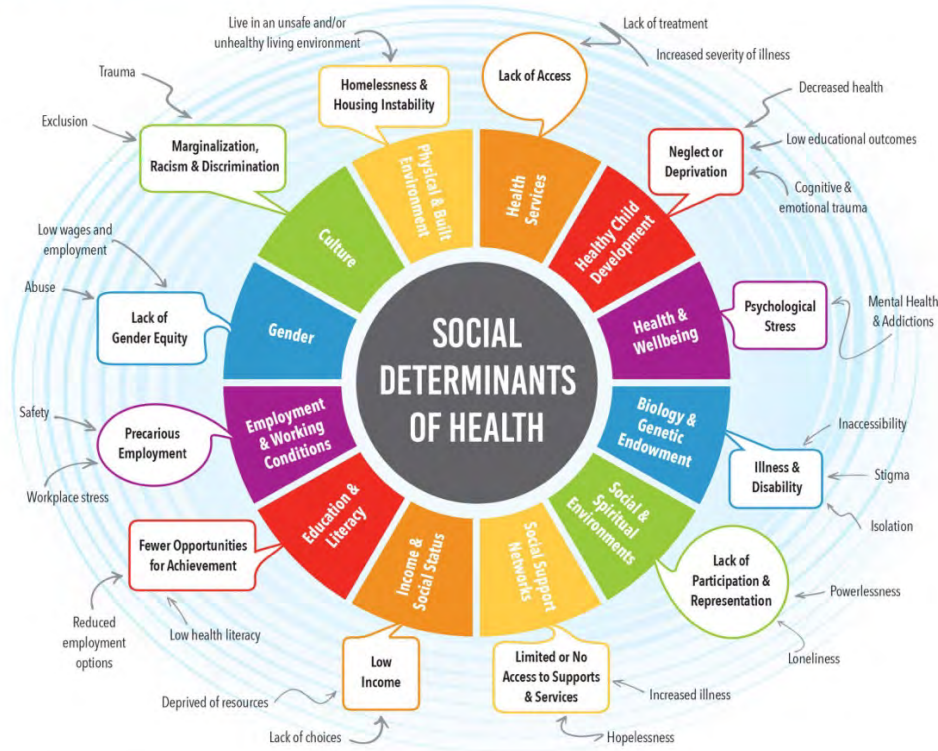
Figure 4: Canada's 12 Social Determinants of Health
Source: United Way Halifax

As libraries and their staff are increasingly confronted with challenges related to urban poverty, it is evident that North American public libraries can be viewed on a spectrum in terms of the social service supports they are willing to provide. For libraries interested in engaging in this work, they can either choose: an 'outreach approach', which situates the library as 'expert', responsible for the delivery of a select service aimed at being in the interests of the community; or a 'community development approach', which situates the library as a 'partner', responsible for collaborative efforts alongside the population the library seeks to serve (Woroniak, 2012). A prominent example of the outreach approach in practice is the introduction of social workers into urban public library systems. First launched in the San Francisco Public Library in 2009 to support patrons facing housing insecurity, this addition in staff capacity has sought to lighten the load on existing library

staff and provide a more trauma informed approach to library services (Baum et al., 2023). As similar pressures have increased in Canadian cities, library systems such as the Toronto Public Library (TPL), Edmonton Public Library (EPL), and Winnipeg Public Library (WPL) have introduced social workers on staff (Hune-Brown, 2023). While the responsibilities of social workers within libraries vary, they can include supports such as "assistance finding shelter, employment, [and] food, legal aid, mental health referrals, and immigration status help. The methods social workers employed to assist users included outreach, mentoring, coaching, connecting people to resources, and developing partnerships with organizations outside the library" (Baum et al., 2023, p.400).

Image 5: Map displaying over 330 North American libraries with social workers
Source: Whole Person Librarianship

Another key consideration surrounds the perception of staff amongst potential expansions of service. While limited in scope, initial studies have suggested that staff hold mixed perceptions suggesting the extent to which libraries should respond and address patron's psychosocial needs. Wahler et al. (2020) conducted a state-wide study of public librarians in Indiana. Amongst 191 respondents, they found that more than 90 percent of participants said the library should focus on forming partnerships with external community agencies to address these needs (Wahler et al., 2020, p.38). Meanwhile, more than 50 percent of respondents felt the library should hire its own social service professionals while nearly 30 percent sought the addition of specially trained librarians or other library staff (Wahler et al., 2020, p.38). Less than three percent of respondents stated that the library

should not be providing any services for patron's psychosocial needs (Wahler et al., 2020, p.38). Overall, these findings are insightful when considering what policy and program recommendations libraries should be prioritizing.

Gaps for Further Study

As the public library is situated at the centre of urban communities from both a physical and social standpoint, their unique vantage point has made them critical community actors in helping manage and resolve urban issues. This literature review has provided important context related to the history of public libraries, the corresponding pressures they face, and their role as critical social infrastructure. From this literature review, three primary gaps for further study have been identified. First, no specific study on the extent to which municipal planners are engaging with libraries as a form of social infrastructure has been conducted. Critical questions to be explored in subsequent chapters include: what approaches are municipal planners in Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria using to address urban social challenges; do municipal planners view the public library as a form of social infrastructure; and are municipal planners working with libraries as partners? If so, how and if not, why? Second, no research on the types of social service supports being offered at B.C. public libraries exists. Critical questions to be explored in subsequent chapters include: how do libraries select what type of social service programming to offer; who is responsible for making decisions surrounding potential expanded service offerings; and how is long-term sustainability being considered? Third, how does funding of B.C. public libraries compare to the well-documented budgetary pressures faced by public libraries across North America? Critical questions to be explored in subsequent chapter surround: how B.C. library systems funded; how library systems are advocating for improved funding; and the benefits of an appropriately funded library service. The following chapters will seek to address these three gaps through the remaining two research methods – site visits and qualitative interviews with key informants.

Chapter 3: Municipal Planning Perspective

This third chapter shares insights from municipal planning documents and planners on the practical considerations of how cities think about social infrastructure, social connection, and social problems within urban environments.

Introduction

Chapter Three delves into the municipal planning perspectives surrounding social infrastructure, social connection, and urban challenges across three distinct B.C. municipalities: Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria. By examining municipal planning documents and insights from planners from each of the three municipalities, this chapter seeks to identify how cities conceptualize and address social issues within their urban landscapes. Key research questions explore the effectiveness of municipal social plans, the role of urban public libraries, and the presence and impact of dedicated social planning teams within each municipality. By addressing these research questions, this chapter seeks to identify the diverse strategies and priorities shaping municipal responses to social issues across Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria. It underscores the importance of robust planning frameworks in enhancing urban livability and resilience, while also highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities faced by each municipality in advancing their social agendas.

Do Municipal Social Plans Exist?

A key research question for this chapter is: how do municipalities approach and municipal planners think about social infrastructure – and, by extension, urban public libraries – as a tool to address social problems in urban communities? The following section explores the role of planning documents. It highlights the difference between Vancouver as a resource rich municipality, and Surrey and Victoria as less resourced municipalities.

Vancouver

The City of Vancouver has demonstrated leadership on the topics of social connection, community resilience, and social infrastructure through the adoption of three distinct strategies over the tenure of three different Mayors and three different City Councils. Recognizing that municipal priorities shift as a result of new Councils being elected, some stated commitments have neither been tracked nor necessarily implemented. However, their existence in principle has provided the city with different benchmark goals to work towards at different points over the last decade.

In 2014, the city approved *[A Healthy City for All: Healthy City Strategy 2014-2025](#)*, which outlined goals and targets related to the health of people, communities, and environment (as shown in Figure 5 below). The strategy outlined several ambitious goals

including ending street homelessness by 2015, attaching all Vancouver residents to a family doctor, and reducing the city's poverty rate by 75%. As part of the City of Vancouver's Open Data Portal, a Healthy City Dashboard was established, providing an overview of progress towards reaching the 12 goals and 23 indicators outlined in the Strategy. The indicators demonstrate that the city continues to face challenges with inequities related to the social and economic factors that influence the well-being of residents. The dashboard also highlights operational challenges related to setting appropriate targets, data collection, and monitoring as many of the goals and indicators appear to be outdated.

Figure 5: A Healthy City for All Focus Areas and Goal Areas
Source: City of Vancouver, 2015, p.7

In 2019, the city approved the *Resilient Vancouver Strategy*. As an initiative linked with the City's involvement in the 100 Resilient City Network, the city aims to become more resilient to the physical, social, and economic challenges of the 21st century. To that end, the strategy outlined three priority areas which include: Thriving and Prepared Neighbourhoods; Proactive and Collaborative City; and Safe and Adaptive Buildings and Infrastructure (shown in Figure 6 below).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

RECONCILIATION   EQUITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY   SUSTAINABILITY   RECOVERY   RECIPROCITY

PRIORITY AREAS

THRIVING AND PREPARED NEIGHBOURHOODS	PROACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE CITY	SAFE AND ADAPTIVE BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE
OBJECTIVES:	**OBJECTIVES:**	**OBJECTIVES:**
1.1 Cultivate community connections, stewardship and pride	2.1 Elevate the voices of underrepresented groups to improve resilience outcomes	3.1 Improve building performance to protect lives, decrease displacement and accelerate recovery following earthquakes
1.2 Empower communities to support each other during crises and recover from disasters	2.2 Shape an inclusive city that can adapt to changes and turn challenges into opportunities	3.2 Plan, design and upgrade civic facilities to serve the current and future needs of our diverse communities and changing environmental conditions
1.3 Transform the way community understands risks and prepares for local hazards	2.3 Strengthen organizational capacity to manage risk and recover from shocks and stresses	3.3 Anticipate threats, and mitigate and minimize disruption to civic infrastructure and critical services
1.4 Strengthen social and cultural assets and services	2.4 Advance holistic, collaborative disaster risk reduction and recovery planning	3.4 Promote regional collaboration to assess, finance and fortify lifeline infrastructure and supply chains

Figure 6: Resilient Vancouver Strategy Guiding Principles, Priority Areas, and Objectives
Source: City of Vancouver, 2019

Most recently, in December 2021, City Council approved the first part of *Spaces to Thrive: Vancouver Social Infrastructure Strategy*. Spaces to Thrive is the city's first 10-year policy framework and implementation strategy, outlining what "strategic policies and intentional investments will be required to advance equity, reconciliation, and resilience in partnership with the non-profit sector, senior governments and other community partners" (City of Vancouver, 2021, p.5). In approving this plan, the city has recognized that "When people cannot access the social spaces and programs they need, when and where they

need most, everyone across Vancouver experiences the negative impacts," (City of Vancouver, 2021, p.7). Therefore, the plan aims to be responsive to the challenges of "rising inequities, social isolation, and climate change," (City of Vancouver, 2021, p.7) that residents across the city currently face.

Image 6: Cover Photo of *Spaces to Thrive* Policy Framework
Source: City of Vancouver, 2019

Image 7: Cover Photo of *Spaces to Thrive* Current State Databook
Source: City of Vancouver, 2019

The City of Vancouver has defined social infrastructure as the "relationship between: 1) physical buildings and gathering spaces, 2) social activities, services or programs offered within these places, and 3) the interconnected networks within and across physical and social locations where people come together and enhance overall well-being," (2021, p.5). Building off this understanding, *Spaces to Thrive* aims to address four key challenges facing Vancouver's social infrastructure ecosystem: 1) increasing inequity; 2) insufficient social and community serving spaces; 3) insufficient and unsustainable operational and capital funding; and 4) loss of community-serving spaces.

In order to address these four challenges, the city has identified four crosscutting principles and six key policy directions to guide the City's objectives and actions. The four principles are: 1) Reconciliation and Decolonization; 2) Equity and Social Impact; 3) Resilience and Adaptability; and 4) Collaboration and Stewardship. The six policy directions are: 1) Partnerships and Capacity Support: Strengthen the city's role in partnerships and capacity support for the social sector; 2) Plan to Meet Priorities and Goals: Plan a network of the right type of supply of social infrastructure that meet reconciliation, equity, and resilience goals; 3) Support What Already Exists: Enable renewal, renovation, replacement, and expansion of existing social-serving facilities; 4) Plan for the Future: Enable new social infrastructure to meet growth and equity priority needs; 5) Innovate for Efficiency: Support

transformation, adaptation, and optimization of social infrastructure; and 6) Improve Ecosystem Health: Foster resilient, adaptable, and sustainable social infrastructure.

The strategy is focused on facilities owned or supported by the city but not included in other city plans and funding programs (e.g. neighbourhood houses; seniors, youth and family centres; and food programs) as shown in Figure 7 below. This intentional limitation on scope has resulted in the exclusion of key social infrastructure, including public libraries, recreation centres, health clinics, parks, plazas, public schools, and municipally operated social and affordable housing. In discussion with a social planner previously responsible for this strategy, they shared that while there was consideration of whether this plan should encompass all municipal operations, there is "always the desire at the city to narrow the scope of everything we were doing." Further, because of the distinct governing frameworks in place relating to bodies like the Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver Park Board, or Vancouver School Board, these spaces are subject to separate city or city-affiliated plans and strategies.

WITHIN SCOPE

Neighbourhood Houses; senior, youth, & family centres; Indigenous wellness; immigrant settlement; social enterprise; food programs; informal spaces; NPO offices and others...

Collaboration, co-location, shared spaces

OUT OF SCOPE

Formal education, Park Board facilities, Libraries, Cultural facilities, Social housing, Health Clinics, Childcare

Not eligible for social infrastructure funding, outside jurisdiction

Figure 7: Graph showing scope of City of Vancouver's social infrastructure strategy
Source: Spaces to Thrive, 2019, p.19

While there are limitations to *Spaces to Thrive,* the strategy has helped to legitimize and ensure the appropriate allocation of resources to the work of the social planning department and ensure appropriate allocation of resources for policy implementation. The former head social planner noted that *Spaces to Thrive* was either the third or fourth attempt

to approve a municipal social infrastructure plan, saying "It probably took us a decade...[to get] enough momentum to bring it across the finish line." Similarly, the *Healthy City Strategy* also took four attempts to be approved. Both examples highlight the internal challenges faced by municipal planners as they try to raise social issues in municipalities that are typically focused on hard infrastructure like roads, sewers, and garbage pickup. With the plan approved by Council, members of the social planning team are now focused on implementation, which requires regular standing meetings with department heads and monitoring progress towards goals and targets.

The former social planner shared that the existence of this strategy has helped to legitimize the department as "an entity to be listened to and to be able to push from the inside some of the strategies that are needed and desired." However, as identified in both the crosscutting principles and policy directions outlined in the strategy, the social planning department remains heavily reliant on collaboration and partnerships with other municipal and community actors to meet the intended goals. As a phase one document, the strategy requires the development and approval of a subsequent 'Implementation Plan and Financial Strategy'. This document has not yet been made publicly available.

While this Vancouver section focuses on the development of three social plans relating to social connection, community resilience, and social infrastructure, these are not the only plans related to social issues approved by the city in recent years. City Council approved the [Housing Vancouver Strategy](#) in November 2018, [Making Strides: Vancouver's Childcare Strategy](#) in June 2022, and the [Vancouver Plan](#) – the City's long-range land use strategy – in July 2022. These and other plans approved by the city make up Vancouver's social impact framework as shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: City of Vancouver Social Impact Framework
Source: City of Vancouver, 2021

Surrey

Despite the challenges faced by social planners within the City of Vancouver, they have fared far better than the other two municipalities investigated. The City of Surrey's social planning team is currently in the process of developing a new Social Action Plan for the city. With the existing *Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents* dating back to 2006, the plan no longer reflects the diversity of Surrey residents today. As a result, in July 2023, City Council approved the Livability and Social Equity Committee's recommendation for staff to develop a plan to identify and address Surrey's social priorities. Once approved, this new plan will guide the work of the Housing and Social Development Division (social planning team) over the next five years. With public engagement processes already completed, the new plan is under development, with scheduled presentation to Council by the end of the 2024. As such, the planner could share only limited information. What is known is that the plan will likely address several social priorities currently challenging the city, including such topics as housing and homelessness, substance use and mental health, and social connection and belonging.

When asked more specifically about the role of social infrastructure and the ways in which the City of Surrey contemplates its future, the planner shared that "there's just never been the resources...to be able to do this kind of great work. I think we all recognize the value and importance of our social infrastructure and hopefully as time passes, we can do more." Overall, there was a genuine sense of optimism of where the city could go in the future but also acknowledgement that, competing priorities are limiting the scope of current work, leading to the exclusion of social infrastructure and public libraries in Surrey's planning.

Victoria

The lack of an active social planning strategy within a municipality appears to be one of the primary barriers related to action on social issues. This gap was apparent in the City of Victoria. While the City of Victoria lacks a dedicated social plan, they are currently working to update their [Official Community Plan](#) (OCP). The OCP is the city's long-term growth plan, and the 10-Year Official Community Plan Update seeks to better meet the needs of the city's growing population. With public engagement taking place from March 2024 until September 2024 (as shown in Figure 9 below), there was limited information that could be gleaned from the plan. However, the city has been clear in their efforts to prioritize the issues of housing and climate in this update.

Engagement Timeline

Fall 2023
Early communications and engagement preparation.

February 2024
Council check-in.

March 2024
Public engagement on proposed OCP updates.

Early Fall 2024 –Spring 2025
Reviewing public feedback to inform and draft bylaws.

Winter 2024
Council check-in.

Spring 2025
Final directions presented to Council. Public hearing to follow.
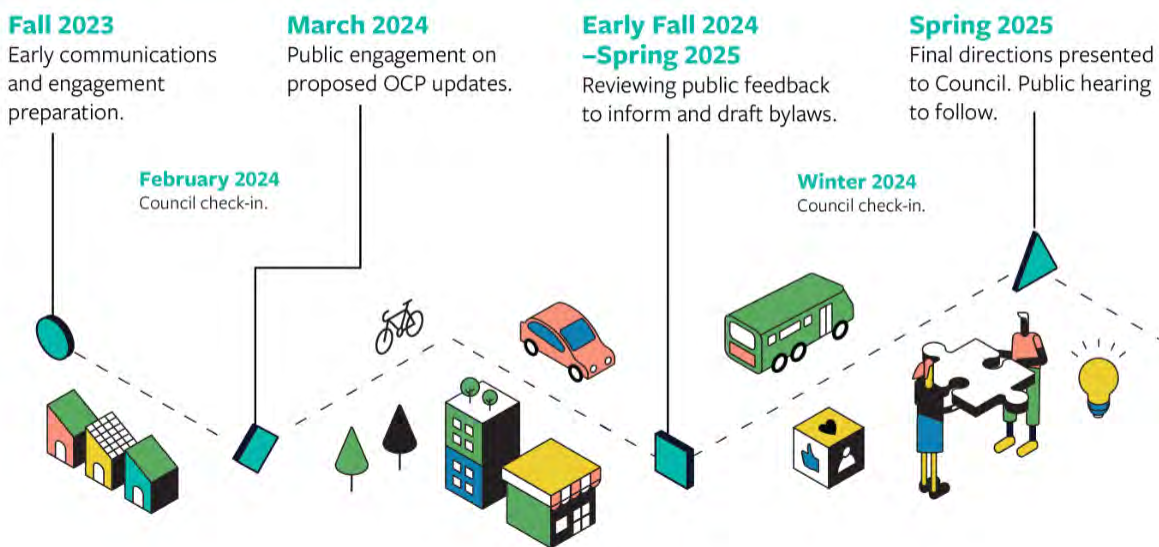
Figure 9: Engagement timeline for the 10-Year Official Community Plan Update
Source: City of Victoria, 2024

The current OCP was approved in July 2012 and has sections related to social planning such as housing and homelessness, community well-being, and food systems. While the library as a form of social infrastructure is not formally included in the OCP, the

library's contributions to the local economy, arts and culture, and local service delivery are briefly mentioned in various sections. A Victoria housing planner interviewed noted that "there's a strong kind of social planning dimension to a lot of the work that the housing team does." To that end, the planner described how the housing team is focused on "reducing risk, improving certainty, and accelerating the approvals process for those nonmarket affordable housing units that we know are so critical for our community." Recognizing the importance of planning social infrastructure alongside anticipated population growth, the planner observed that "work is probably very much in its infancy right now." The lack of action undertaken to date raises questions surrounding the extent to which the city will be able to effectively advance this work.

As local governments are often financially constrained and therefore unable to advance new infrastructure projects on their own, the importance of rezoning processes and corresponding community amenity contributions were highlighted by those interviewed. To that end, the planner acknowledged the challenges of balancing different municipal priorities:

> Is it social infrastructure that we try to secure through community amenity contributions or is it affordable housing or housing amenity contributions in terms of like cash that can then be directed to support future non-market projects. It's really challenging because both are obviously very important. But I think you know just given where we are right now in terms of a housing crisis and housing emergency, when push comes to shove, probably a lot of communities are trying to focus [on] where there are available opportunities for amenity contributions towards housing, but that may come at the cost of social infrastructure.

Given the limited resources with which to work, local governments must make choices about which priorities to advance. Amidst a severe housing crisis, and without a dedicated social plan, it seems unlikely that the city would prioritize the development of new social infrastructure like public libraries. When asked about the extent to which municipal planners engaged with the public library, respondents mentioned that responsibility for planning and operations of these spaces falls to the Greater Victoria Public Library system. Therefore, it appears that there is limited interaction between city planners in the Community Planning Department and the public library.

Where are the Social Planners?

Other key research questions are: does the municipality have a dedicated social planning team? Does the existence of a social plan prompt the creation of such a team? While the sample size was limited to the three B.C. cities of Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria, findings suggest that the existence of a social plan might necessitate hiring social planners.

Vancouver's 60+ Social Planners

Of the three B.C. municipalities interviewed, the City of Vancouver had the largest social planning team by far. Housed within the Department of Arts, Culture, and Community Services, the social planning team exists as a separate entity from the Department of Planning and Development Services. A former head social planner for the city said "When I started there were 15-20 and when I left, there were 60. So, you can sort of see how there has been growth over time. It also means there's more problems right, and more issues to have to tackle and deal with." While an organizational chart was not available, the social planning team has grown in size and scope over the last 50 years. The responsibilities of the social planning team include the Healthy City Strategy, social indicators and trends, grants, youth safety, anti-racism and equity, accessibility, childcare, social infrastructure, food systems, community and gender safety, mental health and substance use, community economic development, and Indigenous community development. Despite the growth recorded within the department, there remained a sentiment that the team was understaffed. The former planner recalled that "people from the planning department or engineering would come and work with us and they were shocked at what we did with so little." As both planning and engineering were much larger departments within the city, the staff contingency of 60 in social planning was small by comparison. When further asked about the size of the department, the former planner shared that:

> We just don't get the resources that you would get in planning or engineering because it's not the mandate of the city. And I think also sometimes the work doesn't sound as complex as it actually is – building those relationships, having the trust of relationships at the community level, working with not-for-profits. All the conflict that can happen, all of the issues, all of the skills that you have to have to navigate some of these waters probably isn't as appreciated as an engineering degree.

Therefore, despite the City of Vancouver being a clear municipal leader on working to address local social policy issues, the perception from the planner was that the city tended to "starve the department."

Surrey's Three Social Planners

Despite the City of Surrey being on track to surpass the City of Vancouver as the province's largest municipality by the year 2029 (Mackie, 2024), this growth is not reflected in the size of their social planning team. Housed within the Department of Community Services, the city's three social planners are located within the Housing and Social Development Division. This organizational siting means that like the City of Vancouver, the social planning team are a distinct entity from the Department of Planning. For several years the city only had one social planner, one whose work was contingent on grant funding. Thus,

the expansion to three social planners was viewed as being significant. One of the new social planners acknowledged that "a lot of people would think that this isn't the role of the municipality, that it's the work of the province or the federal government or the nonprofit sector. But...how people are able to live and cope and access services is very important." The challenges with blurred jurisdictional responsibility relating to social services may also explain why the City of Surrey has kept their social planning team so small. Another reason relates to the priorities of City Council. Recognizing that a new municipal social plan has yet to be finalized and adopted, the city may be waiting to complete these steps prior to hiring staff to implement the plan.

In the absence of a robust team of social planners, the city has relocated priority files to other work units. In practice, this has meant that other departments have become responsible for carrying out social planning work. The social planner highlighted, for instance, that they "have the most overlap with Parks and Recreation because within that department that's where a lot of kind of the overflow social planning stuff has fallen... they have someone looking at food and childcare, they have a specific staff person who's doing a senior's plan. Another group is doing the accessibility plans." As such, this planning-oriented work has fallen to municipal employees without planning backgrounds.

Another way in which the social planning team has worked to stretch their limited resources is through collaborative initiatives such as cross-unit committees. As noted by the social planner, "committees have been the vehicle of getting the work done in a way. The Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition [has had] a lot of grants that have gone through just this past year." Social planners in Surrey have also been involved in the development of the city's senior's strategy, the healthier community partnership, and the local immigration partnership. These examples illustrate how a small social planning team has found creative ways to carry out their work. By working collaboratively with partners across the city, the social planning team has been able to legitimize their contributions to their communities, and also leverage their limited resources to achieve a much larger impact.

Victoria's Lone Social Planner

In speaking with a housing planner for the city, they highlighted the challenges faced by smaller municipalities as follows: with "the City Victoria being more of a mid-sized city, we wouldn't have the same breadth of roles and positions and teams that maybe...[the] City of Vancouver would." The result is that the City of Victoria only has one social planner on staff (at the time of the interview the position was vacant), reporting to the Manager of Housing within the Community Planning Team. While the housing manager spoke about how the former social planner focused on issues like expanding childcare facilities through bylaw, zoning, and regulatory revisions, it is evident that there are wide social gaps left

unaddressed by planning staff. During an interview with the former head social planner in the City of Vancouver, she noted that because the City of Victoria does not traditionally hire social planners, the responsibility for advancing social issues often falls to individual city councillors. While such a provision provides an alternative approach to advancing social policy objectives, it has its limitations. Firstly, the longevity of the work is contingent on the re-election of the councillor, and secondly, the work itself becomes inherently politicized as it is being led by a politician as opposed to non-partisan municipal planners. Such an approach is therefore far less sustainable in the long-term and should not, according to the respondent, be a model followed by other municipalities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria's municipal planning perspectives underscores the critical role of social infrastructure in urban development and community well-being. Vancouver emerges as a clear leader with its comprehensive strategies like *A Healthy City for All* and *Spaces to Thrive*, which prioritize equity, resilience, and community partnerships. In contrast, Surrey navigates resource constraints with a smaller social planning team, relying on collaborative initiatives to amplify impact. The development of a new Social Action Plan indicates a forward-looking approach to address evolving community needs, albeit within resource constraints. Meanwhile, Victoria faces challenges in formalizing social planning efforts, relying on Official Community Plan updates and initiatives led by individual city councillors. This decentralized approach highlights the need for sustained commitment and institutional support to achieve long-term social goals.

The research questions explored in this chapter regarding the existence of municipal social plans and the presence of dedicated social planning teams reveal insights into the organizational structures and strategic priorities guiding urban development in these municipalities. The correlation between formal social plans and the establishment of social planning teams highlights the importance of cohesive planning frameworks in driving effective municipal responses to social issues. Ultimately, this chapter has identified the complexities and disparities inherent in municipal approaches toward social infrastructure, offering insights into how cities can better leverage planning frameworks to foster more inclusive and resilient urban communities.

Chapter 4: Urban Public Libraries

This fourth chapter shares insights from librarians and library trustees from the three B.C. library systems interviewed – Vancouver Public Library (VPL), Surrey Libraries (SL), and the Greater Victoria Public Library (GVPL) – as well as a provincial public servant on the practical considerations of how public libraries can complement the suite of planning tools to address social problems within B.C.'s urban communities.

Introduction

As identified in Chapter Two, urban public libraries find themselves in a difficult situation. On one hand, there are expectations that the public library perform routine, traditional services such as checking out books, answering questions, and stocking shelves. On the other, the public library is seen as a provider of public space that should be ready and able to meet a growing list of patron needs. Such needs – from supporting an individual in finding housing to helping them access government programs or responding to a mental health and addictions episode – impose diverse and extensive demands on library workers. These pressures raise important questions surrounding the role of the urban public library. Should the library be expanding its functions to meet the needs of its community? If so, what happens in instances where the library is not provided with the appropriate resources – be that human resource, spatial or, financial oriented – to carry out this important work? Lastly, there are questions surrounding who should be responsible for making these decisions. This chapter draws insights from librarians and library trustees from the three B.C. library systems interviewed to address these questions. Discussion below covers: role and capacity; space and operation; and government and advocacy.

Role and Capacity

As the three B.C. urban public library systems are faced with new pressures to expand library services, it is important to understand the different approaches available. It is also critical to understand how libraries interested in expanding services do so while continuing to deliver core functions expected of them. The following section reviews how library systems have contemplated: increasing staff training; adding staff resources; and boosting partnership and collaborative initiatives as means to address growing diverse needs of patrons. This section also highlights tensions relating to different approaches.

Training Staff to 'Meet People Where They Are At'

Recognizing the increasing number of incidents occurring within B.C.'s urban public libraries highlighted in Chapter Two, library systems have sought to increase training opportunities for branch staff on the front lines. The types of staff training offered have been broad and have ranged from trauma-informed and empathy-driven approaches, to de-

escalation and violence prevention, to educating branch staff on how to properly administer Naloxone. Over the course of the interviews, respondents reiterated the need to "meet people where they are at" and "respect how people are interacting with the world when they enter the library." Based on the interview data collected, VPL appeared to have the most comprehensive training framework in place.
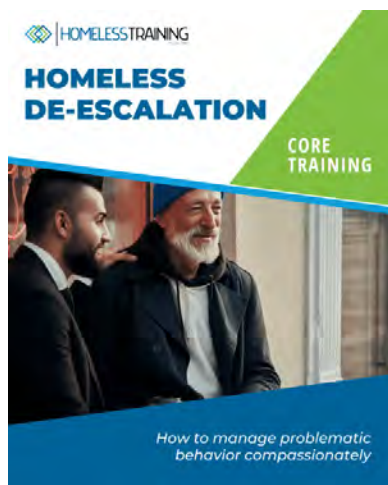

Image 8: Ryan Dowd Core Training
Source: Homeless Training
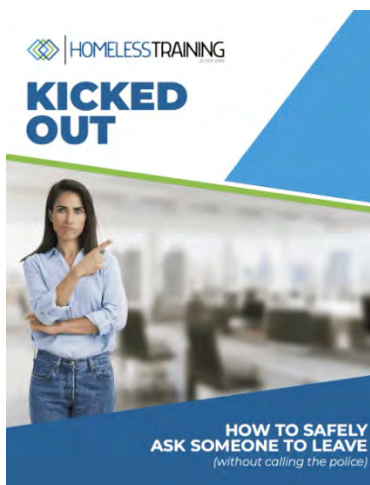
Image 9: Ryan Dowd Crisis Situation Training
Source: Homeless Training
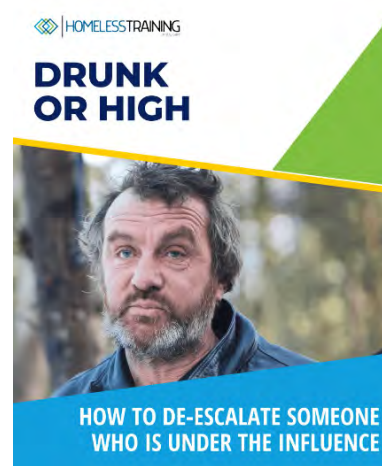
Image 10: Ryan Dowd Special Population Training
Source: Homeless Training

At VPL, every single employee, from auxiliary staff to management are responsible for participating in 'core training'. A senior VPL librarian shared that core training spans "violence prevention [and] respectful workplace things that…intersect with the services and skills we need to serve our community." In addition, staff at VPL have access to a series of web training and resources available through the [Ryan Dowd website](#) (examples shown in Images 8-10 above). Offered as a regional service through the Public Library InterLINK program, library staff can access training that is catered to supporting library staff in learning how to better work with unhoused patrons. VPL management have also struck various internal committees and hosted discussions with staff working in urban inner-city branches to discuss how best to navigate the challenges of working with vulnerable people. While vulnerable people are by no means restricted to the inner-city branches, the five Northeast branches spanning four neighbourhoods – Downtown (home to the Central Branch and Carnegie Branch), Strathcona (nə́ćaʔmat ct Strathcona Branch), Grandview-Woodlands (Britannia Branch), and Hastings-Sunrise (Hastings Branch) – as shown in Image 11 below – were identified as those facing some of the greatest challenges related to poverty, mental health, and disorder.

Image 11: Map showing five VPL Northeast Branches (L-R: Central Library, Carnegie Branch, nə́c̓aʔmat ct Strathcona Branch, Britannia Branch, and Hastings Branch)
Source: Vancouver Public Library, Google Maps

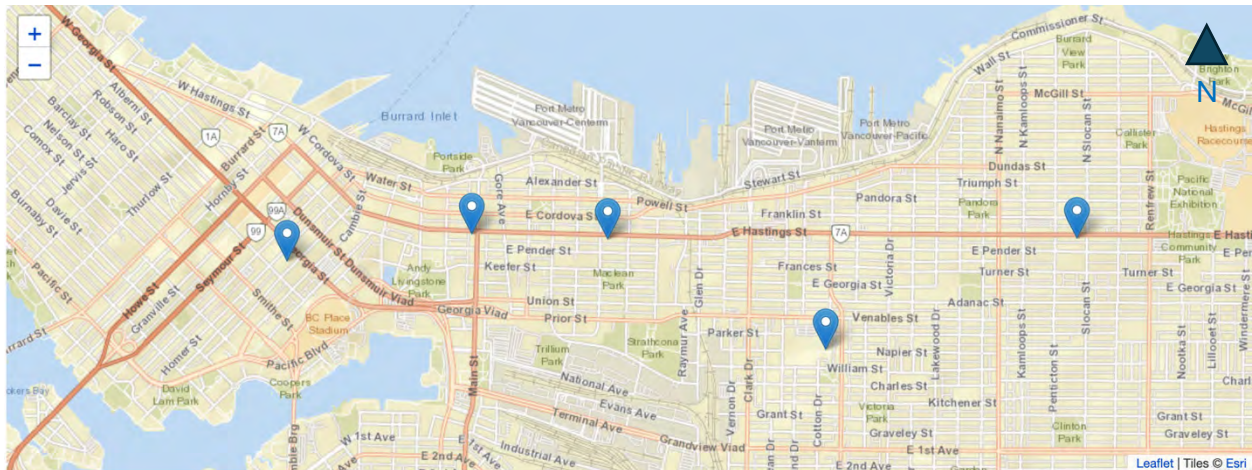Recognizing challenges that exist within inner-city library branches, libraries have started to recruit with this in mind. One librarian remarked "it's been changing drastically to the point where our sector is even looking at different job descriptions and trying to find different ways of serving the population." Another librarian remarked "we're definitely trying to emphasize the kinds of challenges that you might encounter. So that we get a good fit between applicants and the job that they're actually walking into." However, challenges remain with recruiting candidates who are prepared to work in a community-facing public setting. The same librarian noted that "many people who would have loved to work in a traditional library handing kids' books do not have the same interest in working in a library where you might get screamed at, or you might have someone overdosing in your bathroom." They later shared that, "we often see applicants who don't really understand that working in a library is working with people. We get a lot of introverts and that's not necessarily what you need when you're working on a service desk for six hours a day."

As librarianship is an accredited profession, also relevant is the extent to which accredited Master of Library Information Studies (MLIS) degree programs prepare the next generation of librarians with the skills required to navigate these ever-changing community spaces. At the University of British Columbia, which hosts the province's only library school, it was shared that the community-led libraries course was optional. Therefore, for those entering the profession without that training, they may be unprepared for the dynamics of working in a community space. Another key finding is the low percentage of staff within the library that are trained librarians; the vast majority of library staff are not accredited librarians. Rather, a librarian remarked that "in a branch with like 30 staff members, there might be four people with an MLIS degree who are hired for their MLIS degree and are working

in a librarian level." Therefore, most encounters between unhoused individuals and staff are not with professional librarians, but rather frontline staff who hold a range of professional and educational experiences. This finding highlights the importance of having all library staff appropriately trained.

Librarians Supporting Librarians

As professionals in a small sector, librarians expressed commitment to sharing best practices with one another. One librarian noted, "we love to share and we're not generally competitive generally competitive in the public library sector." Another librarian acknowledged "as you age through the library industry, you…accumulate an additional responsibility for supporting people who are coming in. So, I would say that there's a relatively decent sense of connection between different libraries, especially at the administrative level." This idea of giving back to your profession and mentoring younger colleagues was consistently raised across interviews. It has also meant that librarians are able to connect on the pressures experienced in their day-to-day operations. As one librarian remarked, "when you've been around for a while…we absolutely talk about the different kinds of issues that we're facing, but our solutions and our resources are wildly different…Vancouver has 20 branches…but Burnaby has four." This finding is critically important as library systems have differing capacities. Therefore, despite collaboration being routinely identified as one way to overcome limited resources, constraints within a library system remain a very real pressure.

One of the leading ways in which libraries have sought to educate one another is through attending and presenting their work at regional, national, and international conferences. For example, the annual Ontario Library Association (OLA) Superconference is the largest library conference in Canada. Attracting library staff from across the country, the four-day event hosted every January is an opportunity to identify key library trends, learn from leading thinkers, and network with those within the industry. The 2024 program featured Eric Klinenberg, Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University and author of *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (Image 12 below); Julie Lalonde, an internationally recognized women's rights advocate and public educator who spoke on the topic of bystander intervention (Image 13 below); and several sessions and workshops focused on the expanding social pressures faced by urban public libraries. Some of the social pressures identified in Superconference sessions included safety and security, the introduction of social workers, and exploring community food aid within the library. The inclusion of such sessions speaks to the increasing social challenges public libraries face today.

Image 12: Eric Klinenberg delivering a keynote address at the 2024 event
Source: Ontario Library Association

Image 13: Julie Lalonde delivering a keynote address at the 2024 event
Source: Ontario Library Association

At conferences like the OLA Superconference, library administrators and employees are able to share strategies and tactics on how best to address upstream pressures. Lessons learned can then be appropriately modified and applied to their own library systems. In speaking with representatives from the three urban library systems interviewed, they acknowledged that participation in forums like the OLA Superconference vary. Representatives from VPL routinely attend such events, while both library leadership and staff from GVPL will try to present and attend. In the case of SL, attendance is contingent on whether staff are presenting. Representatives from VPL also shared that other library forums, such as the Public Library Association Conference, are sometimes viewed as both more affordable and more applicable to the work of B.C. urban public libraries – covering topics such as facilities planning, data privacy, and information technology – and are therefore prioritized.

New Staff Roles

In addition to providing staff with recurring and supplemental training opportunities, many public libraries have begun to hire new staff in non-traditional library roles. While not exhaustive, the summary below highlights some innovative models being introduced across Canadian public libraries.

To better address evolving community needs, in 2009 the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) became the first library system in the world to introduce a social worker. Since then, the practice has been widely adopted by public libraries around North America. The introduction of social workers indicates how libraries are increasingly working to address holes in the broader community social safety net. Libraries and the social workers within them are helping to facilitate patron access to community social services.

Image 14: Photo of Leah Esguerra (right), SFPL's first social worker
Source: Jason Doiy, San Francisco Public Library

Image 15: Photo of Hilary Kirkpatrick, one of three full-time social workers at the Edmonton Public Library
Source: Shaughn Butts, Edmonton Journal

As highlighted in a 2024 OLA Superconference session focused on the role of social workers within five Canadian library systems, their presence seeks to support the broader mandate of the library as an accessible public space offering a diversity of services. Research conducted by Marie-Pier Rivest, Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the Université de Moncton, and Chantale Bellemare, City Librarian at the Moncton Public Library, revealed that social workers employed at Canadian public libraries fall within three different employment models. Social workers can be directly employed by the library, be employed by community organizations, or be municipal employees. In all three instances, the social workers held a physical presence within the library (Rivest & Bellemare, 2024). The researchers also identified three distinct roles held by social workers within these spaces: they could either be focused on directly supporting patron needs, internally focused on supporting library staff through debriefing and training or operate at a macro level focused on facilitating community connections and the library's role within the 'broader system of care' (Rivest & Bellemare, 2024).

Of the three B.C. library systems studied, only VPL had introduced a social worker. Titled a Health & Wellness Consultant, this role is internally focused on ensuring VPL staff develop skills in crisis prevention and intervention, harassment, mental health and related areas. By hiring someone internally focused, VPL aims to assist staff systemwide to support as many patrons as possible. In the 2021-2022 budget cycle, VPL put in a request for an external-facing social worker position, focused on supporting patron needs. However, this supplemental funding request was not approved by City Council.

VPL is also launching a new 2-year, temporary Community Access Worker position. With a focus on supporting the Northeast branches with the highest levels of need (shown in Image 11), this position is being funded through one-time funding provided to VPL from the province in 2023. While VPL management had initially envisioned this position as

occupied by an external-facing social worker or community worker, it was determined, in conversation with staff, that the best use of this new staff resource would be to focus on information services for patrons with high needs. In particular, VPL staff identified that "they just don't have enough time to do that careful work with people on a daily basis given the intensity of needs in our Northeast branches." Therefore, this position will support VPL's Community Librarian Team as well as the Welcoming Programs hosted at the Central and Downtown Eastside branches.

GVPL has been exploring the introduction of two new positions to increase internal supports within the library. The first is a Safety and Security Manager whose primary responsibility will be observing trends amongst incident reports across the 12 branches and providing training and supports to staff to help maintain safety for patrons and staff. As described by the CEO, "those are things that, again, we didn't go to library school for...some libraries have handled it by bringing in social workers that they kind of contract out." The Safety and Security Manager will be based out of the Central Branch and will help ensure that GVPL staff feel equipped with the appropriate training and supports to intervene with patrons as required. To date, GVPL has only had security personnel at its Central Branch in downtown Victoria. However, incidents relating to safety and security have taken place at all branches.

The second position is a Community Navigator, responsible for supporting all twelve branches in building stronger relations with community agencies. Also based out of the Central Branch, the Navigator's role is to facilitate community connections. While this position was still being defined at the time of interview, the position may seek to operate at the macro level and focus on the library's role within the wider community as described by Rivest and Bellemare in their OLA Superconference session. Alternatively, a similarly titled position has been implemented at the Halifax Regional Library, with responsibilities spanning support for staff in engaging with a wide range of vulnerable patrons on topics such as substance use, housing, and food security issues, as well as support for staff in recognizing overdoses and corresponding naloxone response, non-violent crisis intervention, and trauma-informed care. This position in Halifax is therefore more focused on internal operations and supports.

Other Canadian library systems have introduced new staff roles. For example, there is the Winnipeg Public Libraries Community Safety Host (WPLCSH) program. Beginning as a pilot initiative led by inner-city advocacy group, Fearless R2W, and the social enterprise Persons Community Solutions (PCS) in 2021, WPLCSH's goal was to create an alternative security professional to conventional security services, one better suited to support vulnerable community members through trauma-informed approaches (Waycik, 2021).

Supported by both the Winnipeg Public Library and the North End Community Renewal Corporation, the program prioritizes recruitment of Indigenous youth, youth aging out of care, and applicants from the North End (R2W) neighbourhood. In practice, eight Community Safety Hosts are always on shift in the library with a presence at the entrance/exit, as well as regular patrols to various floors of the expansive 4-storey space. The Community Safety Hosts also have a presence in other downtown Winnipeg locations. In addition to the Community Safety Host program, Winnipeg's library system has four externally-facing social workers, called Community Crisis Workers. They are responsible for helping community members in search of shelter and housing, social assistance, jobs, counseling, health and mental health programs and services, and tax support. The program began in 2012 with one staff person at the Millennium Branch and has since expanded.

Image 16: Two Community Safety Hosts at the Millennium Library in Winnipeg
Source: Persons Community Solutions
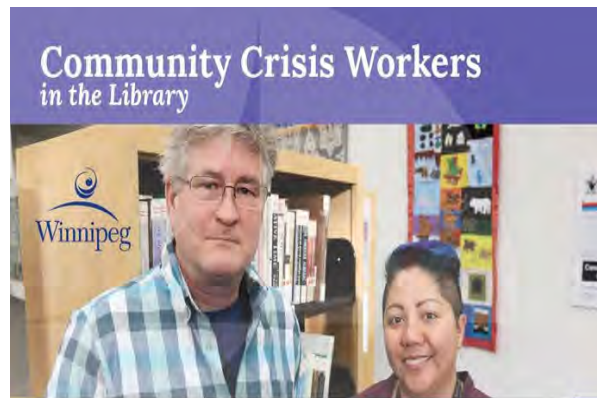
Image 17: Community Crisis Workers, Bruce Fiske (left) and Sheila Bughao (right)
Source: Winnipeg Public Library

Prioritizing Community Partnerships Within the Library

A widely held perspective amongst librarians interviewed is that "the library should not replicate what already exists in the community." Rather, the library should instead use the assets it has, such as space, good operating hours, and centralized locations to welcome community organizations into the library. To that end, many public libraries have been leveraging relationships with community organizations to better support each other's mandates. This approach has allowed both libraries and organizations to stretch their limited budgets and boost their collective impact. One library trustee noted that "libraries are a really good place for a lot of this triangulation work." Examples from Vancouver and Surrey demonstrate the ways in which B.C. library systems are formally engaging with community actors to deliver new social service programming, while an example from Winnipeg illustrates an innovative grassroots led initiative.

In the case of VPL, their Community Librarian Team works to organize events such as pop-up service provider meetings in branch locations. These coordinated events welcome community social service providers into the library. A senior librarian commented that this may include "direct service folks like social workers or housing [providers] coming into our branches and making contacts and delivering service there." Working alongside the new Community Access Worker position, these VPL staff will work to serve the Northeast area with a focus on the Downtown Eastside. This model mirrors a monthly program at the Los Angeles Public Library called [The Source](#), offering a one-stop-shop of resources and services to help unhoused and low-income residents' access free health and homeless shelter services (Los Angeles Public Library, n.d.). The VPL Carnegie Branch in the Downtown Eastside also functions as a community referral hub. Located within the Carnegie Community Centre, the Carnegie Branch distributes a comprehensive collection of paper-based resources detailing services and supports available in the neighbourhood. During a site visit in January 2024, staff provided an overview of the work they do and spoke of the unique and culturally relevant programming offered at the branch. For example, in recognition of the high frequency in which community members come across death, the Community Death Care Project was lunched in partnership with the Carnegie Community Centre. The Community Death Care Project aims to support communities made vulnerable to death and dying through a series of events and workshops, as well as access to support resources on death and dying.

Image 18: VPL information table set up at the ISSofBC Welcome Centre in July 2017
Source: ISSofBC

Image 19: Photo of City Bylaw Officer and a Surrey SMART program Peer Support Worker engaging with a Surrey resident
Source: City of Surrey

In the case of Surrey, the Chief Librarian shared "I would not use my budget to hire a social worker. I would rather leverage the resources within the community and collaborate with agencies who do that type of work to offer service in our spaces." To that end, SL has introduced Peer Support Workers through a partnership with Surrey Bylaw and Lookout

Housing and Health Society. The Street SMART program aims to directly support the unhoused by connecting them with resources and housing options. Through the program, Community Outreach Workers are available to provide daily support services on a walk-in basis at the City Centre Branch (City of Surrey, 2022). Like the Community Safety Host program in Winnipeg, the Street SMART program is not exclusive to the library and focuses on supporting people in key public areas across the City Centre neighbourhood. Described as a 'game changer' for the City Centre Branch, this partnership has helped reduce the number of incident reports while ensuring that patrons requiring supports can be referred to Peer Support Workers who have the skills to appropriately assist. The Chief Librarian noted, "our staff are librarians, and we send them to courses. But that's not what they're trained for." Having assigned one individual to be in charge of partnerships, a Surrey library trustee acknowledged that staff are working to "ensure that the various organizations know that the library is there to support them and the manner in which the library can support them." In the case of Surrey, decisions have been made to limit the expansion of social service programming within the library.

In the case of the Winnipeg Public Library Millennium Branch, the first floor Community Connections space in the library's lobby functions as an information hub (see Image 20 below). This flexible space allows community members to access support from the Library's Community Crisis Workers and Community Safety Hosts, as well as library staff and rotating community agencies and organizations. Visiting community partners host workshops there, providing access to important social services such as legal aid, employment assistance, tax assistance, and programming specific for women, youth, and seniors. As with the creation of the Community Safety Hosts program, this space was the result of years of grassroots advocacy from activists and library workers committed to creating community safety within the public space. The space itself was initially funded through a grant from Prairies Economic Development Canada. However, the issue of financial sustainability is now placing this innovative model under threat. Despite its success in offering low-barrier access to information since April 2022, the city has not budgeted for its continued operation from 2025 onward (MacLean, 2024). Instead, Winnipeg City Council has suggested that the library may not be an appropriate space to host the services and is calling on the new NDP provincial government to follow through on their commitments to enhance provincial social service support for housing, mental health, and addictions, and fund the operations (MacLean, 2024). This highlights a fundamental challenge of expanding library operations, one which will be explored further in a subsequent section.
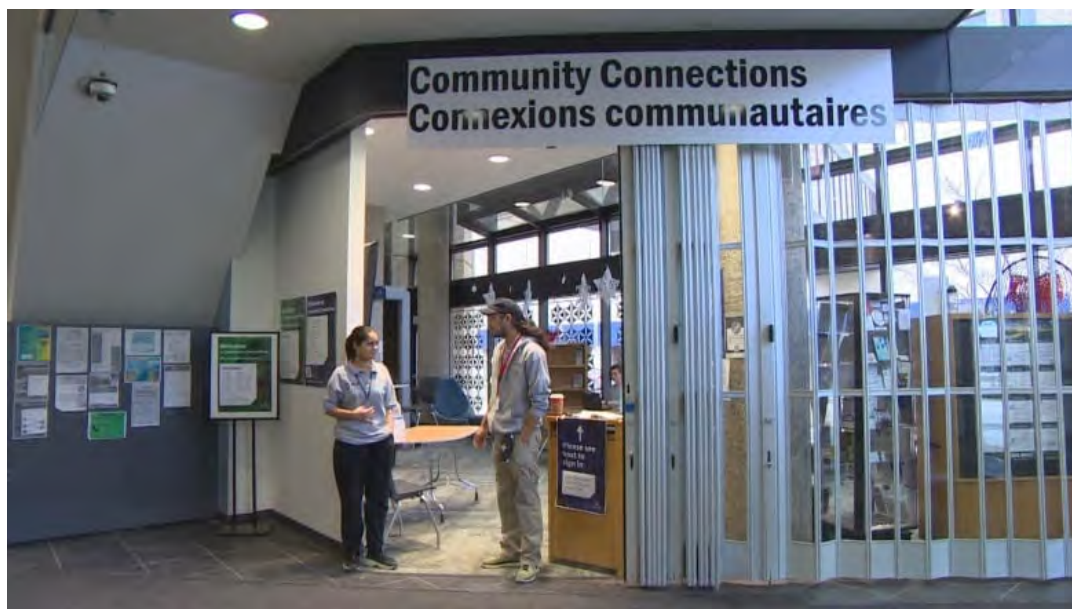
Image 20: Photo of two Community Safety Hosts outside of the Community Connections space in the lobby of the Millennium Library in downtown Winnipeg
Source: Trevor Brine, CBC News, 2024

Collaboration Within Community

The role of the library as a connector and collaborator consistently came up during interviews. In each of the three B.C. library systems, the collaborative connecting function arose with respect to working with both internal partners at the municipal level, as well as the external community. With libraries at the forefront of community building, the approach of many library systems has been to be active outside of the four walls of the library. As stated by one chief librarian, "My librarians are...all kind of out and about in the community. You can do more with more. You don't need more money, but you do need more collaboration." They went on to say, "any Chief Librarian who wants to be more influential within his or her municipality, I cannot tell you the value of just showing up to events. 80% of success is being there, and I do that as much as possible. That's my favorite part of the job, is getting out there and just pitching the library as much as I can, but also getting people connected."

In the case of VPL, staff participate on several civic committees and roundtables. This includes information support roles on municipal advisory committees focused on assisting equity seeking demographics like children and youth, seniors, and the 2SLGBTQ+ community, as well as participation from branch staff on neighbourhood committees across the City of Vancouver. In addition, VPL holds several partnerships with both municipal and community partners. These include active relationships with community

centre operators (RayCam, Carnegie Centre, Evelyn Saller, and the Gathering Place); non-profit childcare centres; Neighbourhood Houses (Frog Hollow, Mount Pleasant, etc.); seniors' organizations; settlement agencies (ISS of BC, MOSAIC, etc.); and with the three Host Nations (Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh).

In the case of SL, staff participate actively on civic committees. One of the largest undertakings in recent years related to the development of the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition's 2022 plan, Coming Together: A Collaborative Approach to Ending Poverty in Surrey. The Chief Librarian sits on the project advisory committee, demonstrating that the SL, as an institution, helps to advance the city's wider goals. More recently, members of SL administration have been involved in the development of the 2024 Age Friendly Strategy for Seniors, the Healthier Communities Partnership, as well as the work of the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), which brings together over 30 representatives from cultural, business, academic, health, and employment services (see Image 21 and 22 below). Across all four social initiatives, Aileen Murphy, Acting Manager, Housing & Social Development (who was the city's first, and up until recently the only municipal social planner) or another planner on her team have been involved. The involvement of a social planner illustrates how planning staff are also allocated to contributing to the city's social objectives.
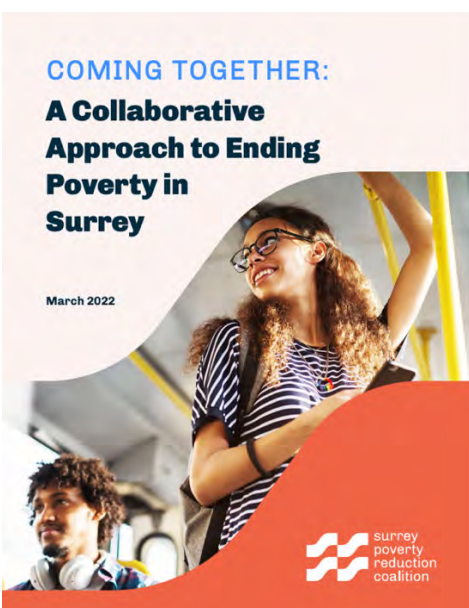
Image 21: City of Surrey's poverty reduction strategy cover photo
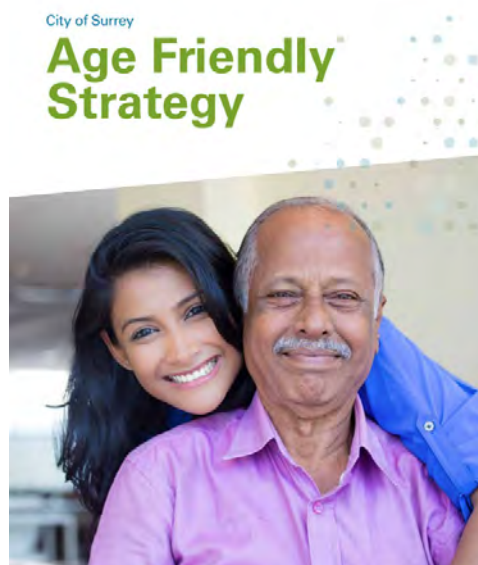Source: City of Surrey

Image 22: City of Surrey's senior's strategy cover photo
Source: City of Surrey

In the case of GVPL, staff are active in collaborating with several Victoria based organizations and agencies. Given that the GVPL Central Branch lacks large meeting rooms and flexible spaces, partnerships with neighbouring institutions, such as the Christ Church

Cathedral have allowed the library to host larger community events up the street from their Central Branch. Without this collaboration, and in part due to crowding concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, GVPL would otherwise not have been able to host community programming. A partnership with the Royal BC Museum has also made available new meeting spaces for the library to use to convene more targeted audiences. GVPL has also developed a partnership with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre to support their lending library. As the only friendship centre in Canada to offer a book lending service, this type of collaboration is a first-of-its-kind and is described as arising out of GVPL's commitment to reconciliation and relationship building with local Indigenous Peoples.

Tensions Related to Increasing Pressures and Operational Expansion

Amidst the potential expansion of library programming, tensions arise. Public libraries have been challenged by the need to operate as open and inviting public spaces while ensuring safety and security for all users. Resulting questions, as described by interviewees, include how to best manage the safety of library patrons and staff while accommodating the increasingly diverse needs of the public. High-profile incidents at public libraries have made headlines in cities like Winnipeg, leading to drastic policy changes including the introduction of walk-through metal detectors, bag checks, and increased security in all areas of the downtown Millennium Library (Bernhardt, 2023).

In response to the rising number of safety and security incidents at public libraries, in February 2023, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) released a [Safety and Security Toolkit](). As a living document co-created from library staff and management from across the country, this toolkit aims to outline safety and security best practices for Canadian urban libraries. Comprising of a collection of existing policies, procedures, practices, and templates from CULC member libraries, the toolkit covers six stages of the 'library journey' and 11 corresponding considerations that balances safety and security with the creation of a welcoming library environment (shown in Figure 10 below). The toolkit acknowledges that the needs and context of every library varies, and therefore each library system and branch need to determine what makes sense for them and the communities they serve.
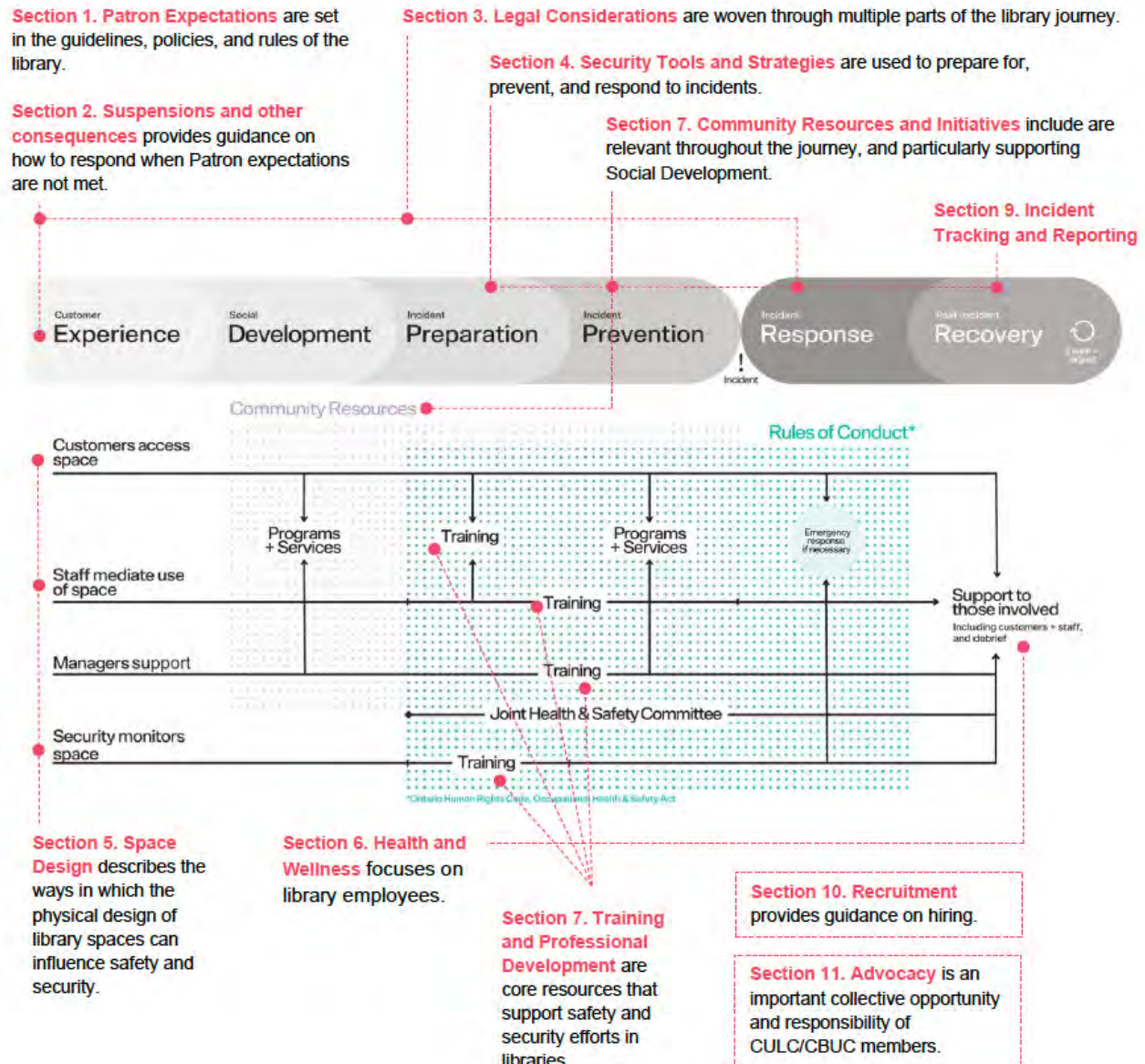
Figure 10: Library Journey Map
Source: CULC Safety and Security Toolkit, 2024, p.4

In interviews with representatives from the three B.C. library systems, many librarians and trustees mentioned their eagerness for the public release of this report. They said that related topics, such as increasing security personnel at their inner-city branches, consistently arose. Their comments make clear the tension that exists between managing internal (library staff) and external (community) expectations surrounding safety and security. For example, a senior librarian from VPL commented:

We're also seeing an increase in need for security guards. We just recently added a second security guard to our nə́ćaʔmat ct Strathcona Branch and that's really complicated because this is a very policed community, and we also have a responsibility for staff safety and feeling of safety. And so, we're balancing internal versus external needs and pressures, and they don't always align. They're not always the same.

The same librarian mentioned, "all our locations have been measured by WorkSafe as low risk locations. So, you know your chances of getting screamed at on a weekly basis [are] pretty good. But your chances of actually getting harmed in a physical way or in a threat of direct violence are very low." However, the recurrence of negative interactions with patrons, regardless of severity, has lowered staff morale – especially amongst staff with a low tolerance of risk. These safety and security concerns have prompted library management to take additional steps to support staff health and wellness. The hiring of a Health & Wellness Consultant at VPL and the hiring of a new Security Manager at GVPL are both illustrative examples of how library management at two B.C. systems are working to better support staff.

In addition, while not observed within any of the three B.C. library systems, the introduction of social workers in other Canadian library systems has created new tensions within library branches (Rivest & Bellemare, 2024). As externally focused social workers aim to directly support patron needs, their priorities will, on occasion, run into conflict with the user conduct policies and community norms upheld by the library. There is fundamental challenge in trying to balance the need to ensure the library is inclusive and equitable – particularly toward vulnerable community members – while also ensuring the library remains a safe space for patrons and staff. Despite the tensions between libraries and social work as two distinct disciplines, Rivest & Bellemare (2024) identify points of convergence and opportunities for cross-discipline knowledge production. The role of user conduct policies and the concept of the library as a high-barrier space will be explored further in the following section.

Space and Operation

As essential community gathering places, public libraries are one of the few remaining free indoor public spaces available in urban communities. Whether considered a palace for the people, the people's university, or a place of refuge, a librarian noted that public libraries are "the one place where everyone belongs, and everyone is treated equally." Libraries offer social space and dedicated programming for building stronger, more resilient communities. However, due to their accessibility, the library needs to contend with competing pressures. There are differing opinions on how the library as a public space

should support vulnerable people. The following section explores how library systems seek to balance these various pressures through the operation of their spaces.

Everything That Shows Up in Society, Shows Up in the Library

During interviews, representatives from the three B.C. library systems repeatedly observed that libraries are a natural destination for so many different reasons. Reasons mentioned include: their central locations within communities and neighbourhoods, their flexible hours of operation, a perception of them as safe and welcoming spaces; and the variety of their low or no-cost programming. As one planner said, public libraries serve as a natural meeting place for different groups of people "whether it be the group of new immigrant moms with their babies...an LGBTQ group of kids or youth that just wanted to hang out...or new immigrants learning English without judgment." Another planner shared the following story recounted by a resident during a public consultation: 'I'm a senior and I come to the library every day. I see people that I know, and I don't have to be around a group of people talking, I could just say hello. And someone knows me. It's familiar. I could sit and I could be in the books and just read and this is my lifeline.' The planner acknowledged that this story is likely applicable to a much wider range of people who rely on the library as a meeting place and facilitator of connection (see Images 23 and 24 below).

Image 23: A conversation circle supporting adult English language learning
Source: Surrey Libraries

Image 24: Ribbon cutting celebrating the opening of a new VPL Early Learning Space
Source: Vancouver Public Library

A widely held perspective that emerged from the conversations with library staff from all three systems is that "everything that shows up in society, shows up in the library." As stated by one librarian, "when people access our spaces, they bring everything they're dealing with in their lives into our spaces, and that influences the services they need, the ways they feel they need to use our public space, the way they interact with staff, and how they react to staff."

Increasingly, public libraries are a sought-after destination for the unhoused. With very few day shelters available in Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria, people staying in evening

shelters are temporarily displaced daily and in search of spaces to spend their daytime hours. However, interviewees emphasized that libraries allow the influx of unhoused patrons routinely received to spend their day with dignity. As one librarian remarked, "you're not just sitting there being warehoused. You can use computers. You can borrow books. You can do all the things that everyone else is doing in the library and your situation doesn't matter because you don't need to pay for it." However, a tension exists between the library's goals of balancing accessibility and inclusion for all, and permissible user conduct.

Maintaining a High-Barrier Approach

While the public library exists as an accessible indoor space, there are expectations for user conduct. Often outlined in the form of a 'Code of Conduct', each library system has developed a similar set of guidelines outlining what is expected of all library users. These codes often include being courteous and respectful to other patrons, staff, and library property being mindful of personal hygiene and wearing appropriate attire; using library resources for their intended purposes; and being responsible for those in your care, such as children (Canadian Urban Libraries Council, 2024, p.5). Codes of conduct are important tools in ensuring library staff and patrons clearly understand what is and what is not acceptable behaviour. Recognizing that a code of conduct serves to regulate behaviour, public libraries can be understood as 'high-barrier spaces'. However, as public spaces that aim to serve everyone, it is important that each library system communicate and enforce these expectations as equitably as possible. In conversation with one librarian, they noted that:

> We are high barrier and unlike some other libraries we're not looking at changing...and we feel that maintaining the distinction of our space as opposed to some other lower barrier spaces is really important in terms of balancing the interests and needs of different members of our community who all need to feel safe and welcomed in our spaces. So, this isn't an accident that we've maintained a high barrier approach. It's very intentional.

In effort to balance the behaviours and expectations of all community members, VPL strives to have the library remain a 'safe space' with conditions. In practice, this means that unlike a day shelter, patrons are unable to sleep within branches. Sleep policies were one of the few instances where the Codes of Conduct at VPL, SL, and GPVL differed, with SL not precluding this as a library use.

Another key consideration surrounds the ways in which these Codes of Conducts are enforced. During a site visit to the VPL Central Branch in January 2024, over a dozen patrons were observed to be contravening the sleep policy, with others observed to be contravening policies relating to eating and placing feet on furniture. Therefore, while a library may have

an approved policy, it may not be regularly enforced, or, alternatively, could be enforced differently depending on the contravener's demographics. The need to balance compassion and response to behaviours that contravene the code of conduct is a challenge for library staff. One librarian underscored the importance of ensuring "behaviour is acceptable for that public space when you're sharing it with other people, including parents and young children." This position, however, is not universally accepted.

Libraries Are for Anyone and Everyone

In response to an October 2023 public debate in the City of Victoria surrounding public drug use, city councillor and GVPL trustee Susan Kim expressed support for open consumption of drugs in public places, including near the Central Branch in downtown Victoria. When asked to elaborate during an interview, Councillor Kim noted that "libraries are for anyone and everyone." While the GVPL code of conduct policy notes that patrons must "abstain from trafficking, consuming, or being under the obvious influence of controlled drugs and substances or alcohol while on Library property," Councillor Kim spoke to how there are demographics, such as the unhoused, who remain stigmatized from accessing the library. The councillor elaborated on how "the outside world is creating a population of folks who are sick and struggling with addiction, and they need libraries for very different reasons now." This once again raises the question of the extent to which libraries should be prioritizing equity, compassion, or accommodation of diverse community needs. From the perspective of one librarian, "having accessible public space that is open long hours, that has clear expectations because we are high barrier, but we share expectations really clearly is the most important thing we can do for equity."

Image 25: GVPL "Change Your Mind" marketing campaign
Source: The Martlet

Image 26: Patrons awaiting the opening of the Central Branch in downtown Vancouver
Source: Ryan Patrick Jones, The Thunderbird

Government and Advocacy

The unique nature of the library as a separate, independent organization poses challenges related to their governance and operations. As described by a provincial public servant, "[libraries] fit in this weird space where they're not non-profit organizations, but then they might have charitable status, and Canada doesn't know what to call them and how to provide funding as a provincial/territorial responsibility." Due to their unique legal status, public libraries are ineligible to access public grant funding streams. Constrained in their ability to access diversified revenue sources, public libraries remain heavily reliant on municipalities to fund their operations. Local governments are the most financially constrained level of government and in B.C. are unable to operate at a deficit. As such, libraries are compromised in their ability to live up to their potential as thriving social infrastructure. A further complexity surrounds the fact that the province is responsible for legislating libraries. The following section explores this unique governance model and the ways in which it impacts a library system's ability to respond to increasing social pressures within their branches.

Internal Library Governance

As outlined in the B.C. *Library Act* (1996), a municipality may establish a municipal library by bylaw. The public library is to be governed by a municipal public library board, with its members comprising of one member from council and the remainder made up of residents of the municipality appointed by the municipal council (Library Act, 1996). The Act mandates that the library board must meet at least six times a year and outlines a range of responsibilities of the board (Library Act, 1996). Three key responsibilities include: appointing a chief librarian; making rules for regulating the public use of library facilities and services; and producing an annual report to be shared with the minister responsible for libraries (Library Act, 1996). The library board must also prepare and submit to the municipal council its annual budget for providing library service within the municipality (Library Act, 1996). While it is up to the municipal council to determine if the amount requested is appropriate, once approved, the library board holds exclusive control over the expenditure of all money given to the library board from any source. The Act also provides direction on how a group of municipalities or electoral areas may enter into an agreement by bylaw to request the Lieutenant Governor in Council to establish a regional library district (Library Act, 1996). The regional library is to be governed by a regional public library board, with one member of council and one alternative appointed by each of the participating municipal councils (Library Act, 1996). The role of the regional library board mirrors that of its municipal counterpart, with key differences related to budget and financing to reflect their regional nature (Library Act, 1996).

As governance boards, the public library board is responsible for setting the strategic policy direction for the library system. Therefore, any significant expansion of the delivery of social services should originate at the board level. However, based on interviews with library trustees from each of the three B.C. systems, representatives did not convey a strong sense of empowerment to take this work on. There are many reasons why this may be the case, such as: strong leadership exercised through the chief librarian; a lack of operational knowledge amongst volunteer trustees; and/or caution surrounding the expansion of non-traditional library services. One trustee commented on the privileged nature of their role, noting "we come in three or four hours every month or so and get reports and have these discussions, and then we exit the space and staff are left to deal with all the ideas and aspirations or whatever we give." Therefore, there may be a disconnect between the day-to-day pressures of the public library and the strategic policy directions being considered by the board. A provincial public servant shared that the province does "work closely with the BC Library Association, BC Library Trustees Association, and library federations to make sure that there's some training opportunities for libraries as they grow and change," however, it was not apparent that library trustees felt empowered as a result of this work. Rather, one trustee spoke of how many library boards "are probably dealing with lots of the same issues, but we deal with them in isolation generally, like there's not really a collective forum. I think the CEOs talk about it, but like for the actual boards, we don't really have that."

The Act also speaks to the role of the chief librarian (also referred to as the CEO depending on the library system), who holds responsibility over general supervision and direction of the municipal library and its staff, serves as the secretary to the library board, and has the powers and duties assigned by the public library board (Library Act, 1996). As the board's primary employee, the chief librarian is responsible for implementing board direction. Based on interviews with representatives from the three B.C. library systems, it was evident that the relationship between the chief librarian and the board is incredibly important and that across all three systems, a strong level of trust and respect existed. Chief librarians spoke of the importance of supporting their boards and the need to work together to advocate for a strengthened local library system. This strong level of trust placed in library leadership may be a reason why the library boards seem to play less of an advocacy-oriented role.

Image 27: Cristina de Castell, Chief Librarian & CEO, Vancouver Public Library
Source: Vancouver Public Library

Image 28: Surinder Bhogal, Chief Librarian, Surrey Libraries
Source: Cloverdale Reporter

Image 29: Maureen Sawa, CEO, GVPL
Source: Greater Victoria Public Library

The Act also speaks to the general provisions of public library service in B.C. Namely, that a library board must not charge for admission to any part of a building used for public library purposes or to use library materials (Library Act, 1996). Therefore, residents must be able to borrow library materials and "use reference and information services as the library board considers practicable" (Library Act, 1996). This enabling language allows for public library boards to consider the expansion of traditional services focused on information sharing. The introduction of a social worker or a peer support worker within their branches would seemingly fall in line with this provision. Additionally, the Act also outlines how a library board may impose fines and suspend library privileges for breaches of the library rules and goes further to "exclude from the library anyone who behaves in a disruptive manner or damages library property" (Library Act, 1996). This provision outlines the framework public libraries have built their user codes of conduct from and counters the perspective that the library should tolerate all behaviours.

Siloed Amongst Municipal Operations

As the public library exists as a separate, independent organization under the Act, it operates at arm's length from central city operations. This degree of separation provides the public library with greater autonomy than a direct municipal service, while also potentially contributing to them being a siloed municipal entity. An interviewed trustee said that "Vancouver City Council just released its own strategic plan and there's five bullet points on the library." While there was a sense of surprise and delight amongst the board and library leadership surrounding the libraries inclusion, this raises an important question surrounding why the library does not play a more prominent role in the priorities and agenda

setting of the city. Perhaps it is because the library is responsible for developing its own distinct strategic plan – a collaborative effort of both the library board and management – and therefore does not involve other municipal stakeholders such as planners or City Council. Alternatively, perhaps the current governance model calling for only one representative from council to serve on the library board is not providing libraries with an ideal level of attention.
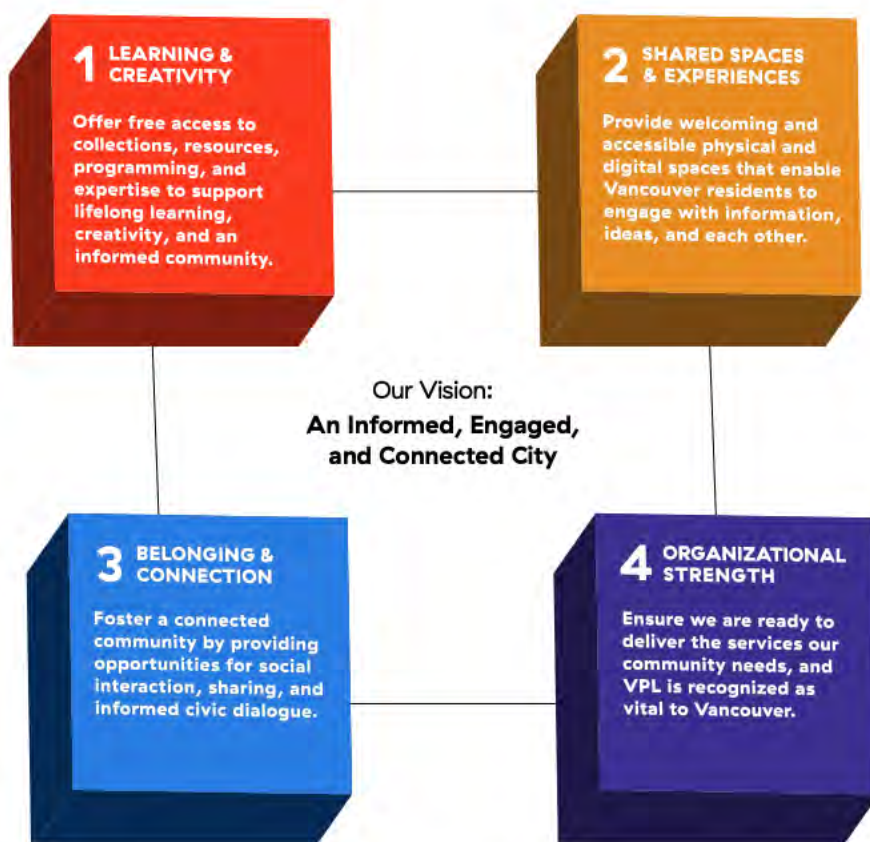
Figure 11: VPL's vision and four strategic priorities
Source: VPL Strategic Plan, 2020-2023, p.5

In interviews with both municipal planners and librarians about their interactions with one another, there were three distinct examples of collaboration provided. The first surrounded facilities planning and the creation of new capital projects – an example that was identified across all three library systems. The second surrounded the use of the library as a physical space to conduct public engagement (Surrey) and collect data (Vancouver) on the development of new planning initiatives. The third surrounded broader involvement on large civic committees and city-wide initiatives (Vancouver and Surrey). During an interview, one social planner shared, "I think the library, as I've always seen them, they're kind of an extension of our department in a way." However, despite overlaps between the work of

social planners and library staff, direct collaboration between the two on advancing social initiatives appears uncommon. This raises questions about what type of interventions are appropriate and may be required to facilitate increased collaboration.

Advocating for Fair Funding

During interviews, the topic of advocacy and lobbying routinely came up as a means to address funding pressures faced by the library. While there was broad awareness of the funding pressures faced by all municipalities and the various approaches taken by other municipal agencies to push for greater funding – such as the Vancouver Police Department publicizing their budget asks and highlighting risks associated with lower funding levels, public libraries have taken several different lobbying approaches. In speaking with one chief librarian, they commented "my board is constantly advocating for funding for the library, but the city has a limited amount of money and many pressures." This section discusses ways in which the three B.C. library systems carry out advocacy, with a highlight on the unique approach taken by the Thunder Bay Public Library.

In the case of the VPL board, a trustee said that they send "emails from our board members to city councillors to remind them of the importance of libraries during the budget cycles." The board has contemplated, but not yet taken, a more proactive approach to lobbying. During municipal election cycles, board members attend events to meet with candidates and speak about the library; interviewees noted that though the response is always positive initially, goodwill felt towards the library as a trusted public institution has not translated into increased operational funding post-election.

Image 30: Group photo of current VPL Library Board Trustees
Source: Vancouver Public Library

Image 31: Surrey Library Board members (right) alongside Mike Starchuk, MLA Surrey-Cloverdale (left) and Hon. Anne Kang, Minister responsible for libraries
Source: Surrey Libraries 2023 Annual Report, p.16

In the case of SL, the board has an active and organized lobbying approach. With actions coordinated through a planning and advocacy committee, the board works to lobby policy makers at all levels of government to increase library funding. A trustee remarked that, at a municipal level, the board has largely relied on their appointed city councillor "to advocate for the library system within the budgetary setting and with the City Council." At the provincial level, the focus has been on meeting and building relationships with Surrey's nine MLAs to increase the province's baseline funding amount, which has been capped at the same level for 15 years. The trustee said that the committee works to ensure these meetings are "strategically timed so that we are consciously part (in advance) of the budgetary process." At the federal level, meetings with MPs also took place, with the board seeking to secure federal contributions to municipal library services.

In the case of GVPL, the board composition differs as the 19-member board includes one council representative from each of the 10 contributing municipalities. As such, the role of the library board, and particularly the responsibilities of the CEO in supporting the board differ. The CEO commented that "I learned a lot from excellent chief librarians that I worked with on the importance of really maintaining and supporting your board. That is critical as a CEO of a Public Library, and it's also critical for the relationship building with your municipalities." Recognizing that GVPL must maintain strong working relationships with 10 municipalities, the role of the appointed city councillors on the regional library board are incredibly important. It was mentioned that there is a need to ensure trustees felt empowered to serve as strong advocates for the public library system. The CEO noted that this includes being equipped with their "elevator speeches so that when they have opportunities...they can insert themselves into a conversation." There is also a need to ensure all parties are moving in the same direction. The CEO also shared how relationship building with municipalities is time intensive and how "it is an effort to kind of keep us in sync." Therefore, the approach to lobbying, advocacy, and awareness building is slightly different within a regional library system.

A 2024 OLA Superconference session led by Thunder Bay Public Library CEO, Richard Togman, underscored the importance of advocacy. Faced with a proposed capital budget cut of 15 percent due to budgetary pressures elsewhere in the city in 2022, the library conducted a public survey on citizen's opinions on the proposed budget cut (Togman, 2024). The survey aimed to educate the public on how the reduction would impact library service and demonstrate public support for this community service. Asking targeted questions, including how respondents felt about the proposed cuts, whether respondents would be willing to attend a protest to protect the library from big budget cuts, and whether changes to library funding would influence electors voting preferences, the library was able to collect more than 1,500 responses (Togman 2024). The data showed that the library was a valued community asset and when shared with Council, resulted in a net increase of 3 per cent in

the final budget (Togman, 2024). This example demonstrates how public libraries can influence municipal decision making to secure funding and deliver on their public mission.
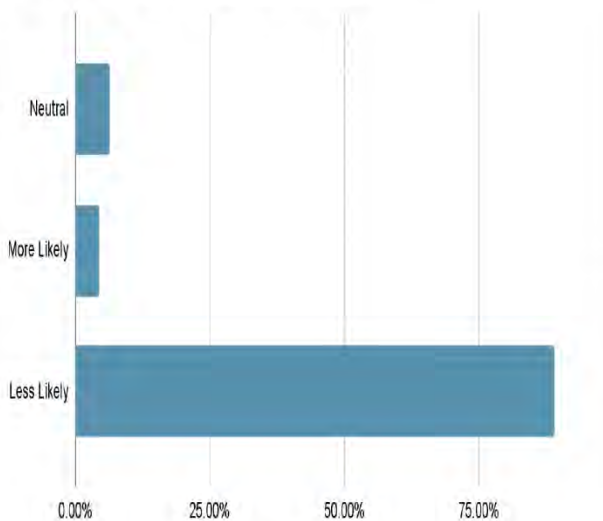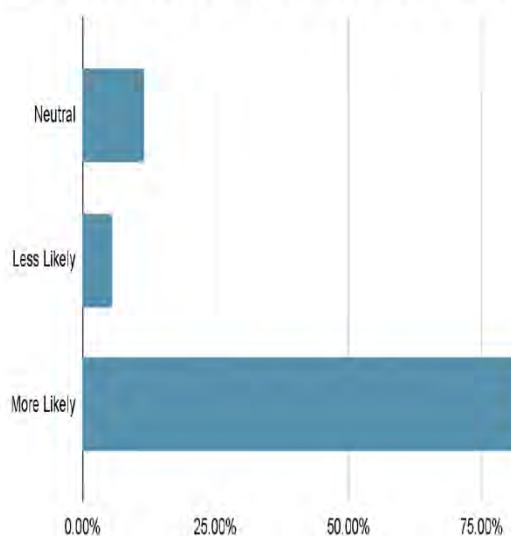
Figure 12: Survey results from two questions in the 2022 Thunder Bay Public Library Survey
Source: Thunder Bay Public Library

In addition to the efforts of individual library system, there are several umbrella groups operating at the provincial and federal level which seek to support coordinated public library advocacy and awareness. The BC Public Library Partners is an alliance of four provincial library organizations. Formed in 2018 to ensure the priorities of public libraries are unified, its four member organizations include the Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD); the BC Library Association (BCLA); the BC Libraries Cooperative (BCLC); and the BC Library Trustees Association (BCLTA). While each organization serves its own distinct purpose and represents a different demographic within the library community, as an alliance they come together to "increase awareness of the positive impact of BC public libraries" and "influence provincial public policy and funding impacting libraries and their communities" (Association of BC Public Library Directors, n.d.). The alliance regularly meets with the minister responsible for public libraries, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and senior bureaucrats. The alliance has also presented at forums such as the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Convention and has participated in formal pre-Budget processes like the Select Standing Committee on Finance & Government Services' annual public consultation.

Image 32: Representatives from the BC Public Library Partners with former Minister responsible for libraries, Rob Fleming
Source: Association of British Columbia Public Library Directors

In 2022, their primary request to the province surrounded an increase to the $14 million base grant funding, which has been frozen since 2009. Under the previous B.C. Liberal government, library funding was drastically cut by 25 percent (British Columbia Library Association, 2022). To that end, the alliance asked for a funding lift to $23 million in 2023 and ongoing incremental increases to ensure public libraries are able to meet the needs of their communities (British Columbia Library Association, 2022). While base funding has not yet been increased, the NDP government has provided public libraries with various one-time funding lifts. These include $3 million in 2020 to expand access to digital library services (Ministry of Education, 2020), $8 million in 2022 to support COVID-19 relief and recovery (Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2022), and a historic $45 million in 2023, to support the expansion of program, resource, and technology infrastructure (Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2023). As shown in Figure 13 below, provincial contributions to VPL in 2022 (including VPL's portion of the one-time funding of $8 million) made up less than 2.5 percent of total revenue. Meanwhile, no direct federal contributions were made.

REVENUES	2021	%	2022	%
City of Vancouver	$50,336,200	91.6%	$52,865,900	90.3%
Provincial Government*	1,306,700	2.4%	1,292,900	2.2%
Grants and Donations	642,300	1.2%	1,635,700	2.8%
Program Fees	507,600	0.9%	375,400	0.6%
Other	2,146,300	3.9%	2,392,600	4.1%
Total Revenues:	$54,939,100	100.0%	$58,562,500	100.0%

EXPENDITURES	2021	%	2022	%
Salaries and Benefits	$41,143,800	74.9%	$42,455,400	72.5%
Books and Materials	5,135,700	9.3%	5,236,400	8.9%
Building Occupancy	5,690,400	10.4%	6,166,900	10.5%
Other	2,822,900	5.1%	2,644,200	4.5%
Transfers	146,300	0.3%	2,059,600	3.5%
Total Expenses:	$54,939,100	100.0%	$58,562,500	100.0%

Figure 13: Vancouver Public Library 2022 Financial Highlights
Source: VPL Annual Report 2022

All new and additional library funding is welcomed by the BC Public Library Partners and the 71 public library systems across the province. However, there are challenges with one-time funding. Due to their sporadic nature and the obligation to use the funding within a fixed time frame, public libraries are unable to use these funds as strategically as they would recurring base funding. As such, the lobbying and advocacy work of the BC Public Library Partners and public library systems remains focused on increasing the annual base grant funding, which would provide library systems with greater certainty and support their ability to plan in the mid to long term.

At the federal level, the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CBUC) serves as the representative body of the 54 largest public library systems in Canada. This includes seven urban library systems in B.C. With a mission to "facilitate advocacy, collaboration, and research that strengthens and promotes the value of Canada's urban libraries as integral to a vibrant democracy, a strong economy, and thriving communities" (Canadian Urban Library Council), CULC member libraries serve over three-quarters of the Canadian population. To that end, CULC makes submissions to the federal government on behalf of urban library community. To inform the 2024 federal budget, CULC submitted three recommendations based on the work of the Safety & Security Working Group to inform the 2024 federal budget. These include that the Government of Canada recognize the role of public libraries in delivering on federal priorities and provide commensurate funding; that the Government of Canada establish a National Task Force on the Future of Public Libraries as outlined in the CUI report, "Overdue: the Case for Canada's Public Libraries"; and that the Government of Canada work with provinces to

develop a pan-Canadian strategy on mental health and addiction that would include input from library leaders (Canadian Urban Library Council, 2024). While none of these initiatives received funding in the 2024 Federal Budget, they are all worthy of further consideration.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted role that urban public libraries play within B.C.'s communities, drawing on the experiences and perspectives of librarians and trustees from Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria. Through their testimonies, it is evident that public libraries are increasingly expected to serve as more than just repositories of books and information; rather, they are pivotal community hubs that address a myriad of social issues. By exploring three key themes: role and capacity; space and operation; and government and advocacy, Chapter Four has highlighted several of the tensions that exist between the expectations and realities of urban public library service. Today, urban public libraries are increasingly being called upon to extend their traditional functions to address broader social needs. This expansion raises questions about the libraries' capacity to meet these demands, especially in the absence of adequate resources. By nature of the library's flexible hours of operation, accessible urban locations, and perception as a welcoming, community-space, they have become a natural destination for people seeking supports. However, the library's ability to respond to the traditional and expanded service needs of urban populations are heavily influenced by decisions made by various levels of government. Decisions about funding, resource allocation, and policy must reflect the realities faced by urban public libraries and involve input from the library professionals and community stakeholders directly impacted by these decisions.

As urban public libraries work to navigate these challenges, it is essential to recognize their potential as vital community assets. While differences of opinion exist surrounding the extent to which libraries should fulfill increasing social service needs, there must be a concerted effort to provide them with the necessary resources and supports to keep up with increasing demands. This includes not only sustainable financial investment, but also strategic planning and coordinated advocacy to ensure that libraries can respond to the evolving needs of their communities. The insights gathered in this chapter underscore the importance of a holistic approach to public library services, one that acknowledges and supports the diverse roles that libraries play in addressing social issues. By fostering a supportive environment that prioritizes the needs of both library staff and patrons, urban public libraries can continue to serve as critically important social infrastructure within B.C.'s urban landscapes.

Chapter 5: Synthesis and Conclusion

The fifth and final chapter outlines five key findings relating to the challenges facing urban public libraries. It also provides corresponding recommendations identifying the ways in which critical actors and collaborative approaches can help strengthen these important civic institutions.

The purpose of this research project was threefold: it sought to 1) understand the role of the urban public library, 2) explore how public libraries can better support vulnerable patrons through the introduction of new social programming, and 3) assess the contributions and perceptions of municipal planners, library staff, library governing bodies, and provincial public servants in the potential expansion of library operations in Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria. The three subsequent chapters sought to address these questions. Chapter Two presented a comprehensive overview of the literature, highlighting the pressures faced by public libraries, the role of social planning and social infrastructure, and operational questions surrounding current and future library conditions. Chapter Three shared insights from municipal planning documents and interviews with municipal planners from Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria on the practical considerations of how cities think about social infrastructure, social connection, and social problems within urban environments. Finally, Chapter Four acknowledged insights from interviews with librarians and library trustees from the Vancouver Public Library, Surrey Libraries, and Greater Victoria Library, as well as the Provincial Librarian on how libraries are carrying out their work in practice. This fifth and final chapter will highlight five key findings and associated recommendations from the research.

Five Key Findings

From this research, five key findings emerged. These five findings emphasize some of the largest challenges facing urban public libraries and the opportunities that exist to strengthen these important civic institutions, while also highlighting the critical actors that can help support their future development.

1. Importance of telling the story of the urban public library

There is a clear need to educate a wider range of community actors on the role and contributions of the urban public library. During interviews, the library was often described as 'invisible', 'taken for granted', 'forgotten', 'undervalued', and 'not recognized'. Too often, the library is viewed as a siloed municipal institution offering only a small scope of programming related to literacy and culture. Instead, the urban public library needs to be understood as a bustling community space offering diverse programming and services to people of all ages and backgrounds. A key research question raised in Chapter Two was the

extent to which municipal planners were partnering with the public library. Chapter Three and Chapter Four highlighted the limited examples in which municipal planners and public libraries have worked together. In response to this, a key recommendation surrounds the need to educate municipal planners on the range of programming offered by the library, as well as their priorities as local public institutions. Sharing information among staff on the ground may create new opportunities for future collaboration and partnership between the two municipal entities.

In addition, there is a need to ensure policy makers at all levels of government understand the daily pressures felt by urban public libraries. The interviews made it clear that elected officials are supportive of libraries, but do not fully understand the depth of service they provide to communities. As an incredibly diverse social service provider facing several competing demands on their limited resources, the urban public library needs to appropriately investment. Failure to do so will result in diminished community services and a weakened social safety net.

> *"There's a real lack of understanding of what the role of the library actually is. Many…still believe that all the library does is lend books. They have no concept of what the library truly does on a day-to-day basis."*
>
> – John Gillies, Trustee, Surrey Public Library Board

2. *Social planning as a municipal after thought*

Amongst the three B.C. urban municipalities studied, it is evident that physical planning takes precedence over social planning. This has been reflected in many ways, including the development and approval of municipal social plans, the size of social planning staff teams compared to central planning departments, and the location of social planning units within larger municipal hierarchies. As the maintenance of hard infrastructure such as roads, sewers, and parks are a clearly defined core mandate of local governments, social issues related to poverty reduction, social development, and social inclusion face difficulties in competing for limited local government resources. Therefore, municipal planners are often limited in their ability to consider approaches and tactics to address urban social challenges within their communities.

One key research question stemming from Chapter Two surrounded the approaches municipal planners in Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria were using to address urban social challenges. Chapter Three revealed that in the absence of municipal social plans in Surrey and Victoria, municipal planners lacked the central direction and corresponding resources to carry out a range of social planning objectives. As such, the social planning work in Surrey

and Victoria was limited in scope. Further, despite having the greatest allocation of social planning resources by far, social planning staff in the City of Vancouver expressed that they feel stretched in their ability to deliver upon the bold mandates approved by current and past Councils. Therefore, a key recommendation surrounds the need for all three municipalities investigated to allocate greater resources towards social planning staff components and initiatives.

During interviews with municipal planners, librarians, and library trustees, additional challenges were raised about the perception that issues related to social service delivery were not the responsibility of local government. Rather, social service delivery should fall to either higher levels of government or the non-profit sector. However, in the absence of action from higher levels of government, municipal service providers, such as public libraries, face pressures in responding to these unmet needs, regardless of local government action. Therefore, a priority is to ensure local policy makers understand the breadth of social needs in their communities and the risks associated with failure to appropriately invest in social initiatives.

> *"So, a lot of people would think that this isn't the role of the municipality, that it's the work of the province or the federal government or the nonprofit sector. But really like how people are able to live and cope and access services is very important,"*
>
> – Cristina Rucci, Social Development Program Lead, City of Surrey

3. *Thriving social infrastructure requires ongoing investment*

While the urban public library is a strong example of social infrastructure, its ability to operate as such is contingent on both financial investment and the contributions of staff and community members. Libraries carry significant operating costs related to human resources. Limited budgets for staff translate into limited operating hours for library branches, effectively closing off access for those seeking knowledge and support. In addition, libraries as a form of social infrastructure rely on the contributions of library staff and patrons. This confluence of actors is essential for libraries to flourish as thriving community spaces.

Investment is needed in other forms of community social infrastructure as well. While not a primary focus of this research project, there is a clear need for higher levels of government to invest in public services related to affordable housing, accessible and comprehensive health care, as well as the civic associations and non-profits which reinforce the resiliency of our communities. By investing in a variety of community services

and spaces, people will have improved access to the social services they so desperately need. This will reduce pressures currently placed on the urban public library.

On the topic of social infrastructure, one key research question stemming from Chapter Two surrounded whether municipal planners viewed the public library as a form of social infrastructure. Chapter Three revealed that two key challenges exist. The first surrounds the serious resource limitations faced by social planning departments, while the second surrounds the siloing of municipal entities, like the public library. As a result, even in instances where the City of Vancouver has developed a social infrastructure plan, it intentionally excludes the public library. Therefore, while municipal planners recognize the important contributions of the public library, they do not currently engage with the public library as a form of social infrastructure.

> *"Feels like the social infrastructure is either libraries or police – the middle of the social welfare state has been gutted"*
>
> – Kevin Lowe, Board Chair, Vancouver Public Library

4. *Public libraries should focus on collaborative service delivery*

Several key research questions related to the social service supports being offered at B.C. public libraries were raised in Chapter Two, specifically the type of supports, the responsibility for decision making, and the consideration of long-term sustainability. Chapter Four has highlighted how in addition to a broad range of programming to support all patrons, select curated programming is offered to support specific library patron demographics. The expansion of new programming is often led by Chief Librarians and their staff, in line with the broader goals and objectives of the library boards. Chapter Four has acknowledged how library leadership has been deliberate in their decision making, weighing the needs of their communities alongside available resources. As such, Chief Librarians have remained mindful of the library's role as just one of several community actors.

A key recommendation emerges from the recognition that no single actor can solve urban social problems alone and that libraries face very real resource constraints: public libraries should seek to adopt collaborative social service delivery models as opposed to unitary approaches. The library has an opportunity to increase collaboration with community partners and government agencies to better coordinate streamlined supports for people under one roof. Through greater collaboration, the library as a downstream service provider, will be able to best leverage the resources they have – such as space, generous operating hours, and central locations – while community actors will be able to

bring in social service providers the library cannot and should not be required to employ internally. By bridging connections with community actors, public libraries will be better able to provide services and resources to vulnerable patrons without compromising the traditional services they do so well. In addition, as a partner in community social service delivery, libraries will become more deeply embedded within their communities as they work to bridge existing gaps in the system.

There is also an opportunity for municipal planners to support this work. The relationships between diverse municipal and community actors are a cornerstone of social planning. Municipal planners can and should leverage their own existing networks to support the efforts of the urban public library, while also working to increase knowledge of the library's operations within City Hall and beyond. As catalysts for connection, the library is an important actor working to build stronger, more resilient communities. However, it must be emphasized that the library should not hold sole responsibility for carrying out this important social service work.

> *"Libraries could be open 24/7, 365 days a year and they would still not be able to reach all the people that could benefit from services, information, and staff expertise. So, library leaders and community officials need to be selective – looking locally, regionally and externally to make small significant efforts over time that are sustainable."*
>
> – Mari Martin, Director of Public Libraries Branch, B.C. Ministry of Municipal Affairs

5. *Higher levels of government need to be brought back to the table*

Finally, key research questions related to public library funding were raised in Chapter Two, with findings in Chapter Four pointing to gaps and governance complexities. A key recommendation is the need for higher levels of government, starting with the province, to be brought back to the table to fund a responsive B.C. public library service. As highlighted in Chapter Four, while the province contributes $14 million annually to B.C.'s 71 public library systems, this funding amount has been frozen since 2009/2010. Recognizing that operating costs for library systems continue to rise as a result of increasing labour and materials costs, municipalities like Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria have been responsible for funding the increasing void left by higher levels of government. As such, the proposed budget increase put forward by the BC Public Library Partners in 2023 to increase public library grant funding to $23M, with the additional commitment of ongoing annual increases, should be implemented. In addition, the recommendation put forward by CULC for the federal government to provide commensurate funding to public libraries in 2024 needs to be seriously considered. An appropriately funded public library system will be better equipped

to hire more staff, provide more training and supports for existing staff, and build stronger community partnerships both within and beyond the four walls of the library.

More systematically however, there is a need to address the stagnating higher-level government funding for municipalities. Local governments continue to face increasing challenges in addressing local needs, whether they be social service, infrastructure, or human resource oriented. There is a need for the provincial and federal governments to increase funding streams to ensure municipalities can carry out the important work of community building in our downtown and surrounding urban neighbourhoods. Failure to do so will increase pressures on urban public libraries, compromising the library's ability to exist as thriving social infrastructure.

> *"The province has frozen the level of operational funding for public libraries in B.C. since 2010. But addressing social issues that fall under the provincial mandate is growing in public libraries."*
>
> – Surinder Bhogal, Chief Librarian, Surrey Libraries

Conclusion

Amidst persistent affordability challenges in B.C. and an overburdened social service system, this research has highlighted the challenges faced by urban libraries as well as their contributions in delivering social services to vulnerable populations. This research has also identified how different actors, including municipal planners, policy makers, and the library community, can better work together to ensure the urban public library remains an important and responsive civic institution to changing urban needs. While questions of long-term sustainability remain unresolved, libraries will remain critical links in connecting people with resources. Once equipped with the appropriate resources, a broader reimagining of the urban public library is possible.

When asked about the future of library service, one librarian noted, "I would see us busier than ever. I honestly do. I think that I would just like us to have more usable public space that we could provide more opportunity for people to come together to learn and to share actively." Another library trustee commented on the potential to "build the library with the Community Center, so the next extension would be, well, why not add in the social services component as well, and then you'd have that three-legged stool...[offering] natural services that people require...all in one place." Regardless of whether the library of the future calls for increased community engagement and partnership opportunities, more programming beyond the four walls of the public library, or a greater role in strategic

community planning, the urban public library will continue its work in serving a broad range of community needs.

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Appendix

Table of Interview Participants

Name	Position	Employer	Municipality	Category
Mary Clare Zak	Director of Social Policy and Projects Division (*retired*)	City of Vancouver	Vancouver	Planner
Maryn Ashdown	Director of Neighbourhood and Youth Services	Vancouver Public Library	Vancouver	Librarian
Kevin Lowe	Board Chair	Vancouver Public Library	Vancouver	Trustee
Cristina Rucci	Social Development Program Lead	City of Surrey	Surrey	Planner
Surinder Bhogal	Chief Librarian	Surrey Libraries	Surrey	Librarian
John Gillies	Library Trustee	Surrey Libraries	Surrey	Trustee
Ross Soward	Manager of Housing	City of Victoria	Victoria	Planner
Maureen Sawa	Chief Executive Officer	Greater Victoria Public Library	Victoria	Librarian
Susan Kim	Library Trustee – Victoria; City Councillor	Greater Victoria Public Library	Victoria	Trustee
Mari Martin	Director of Public Libraries Branch	Ministry of Municipal Affairs	N/A	Public Servant/ Librarian

Table of Professional Reports and Policy Documents Reviewed

Document Title	Document Author	Type of Document
Healthy City Strategy 2014-2025	City of Vancouver	Municipal Report
Resilient City Strategy	City of Vancouver	Municipal Report
Spaces to Thrive Phase I: Vancouver Social Infrastructure Strategy Policy Framework	City of Vancouver	Municipal Report
Social Planning Fact Sheet	City of Vancouver	Municipal Report
Vancouver Strategic Plan 2020-2023	City of Vancouver	Municipal Report
Facilities Master Plan June 2018	Vancouver Public Library	Library Report
Vancouver Public Library Expectations of Behaviour	Vancouver Public Library	Library Code of Conduct
Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents 2006	City of Surrey	Municipal Report
Report to Our Community 2022	Surrey Libraries	Library Report
Strategic Plan 2024-2028	Surrey Libraries	Library Report
Surrey Public Library Policy 1.3 Acceptable Conduct	Surrey Libraries	Library Code of Conduct
2023-2026 Strategic Plan	City of Victoria	Municipal Report
Official Community Plan	City of Victoria	Municipal Report
2022 Annual Report	Greater Victoria Public Library	Library Report
Library Operating Agreement 2017-2020	Greater Victoria Public Library	Library Report
Greater Victoria Public Library Policy 1.8 Responsibilities and Conduct of Library Users	Greater Victoria Public Library	Library Code of Conduct
Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2023 Federal Budget	Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC)	Library Report
Community-Led Libraries Toolkit	Working Together Project	Library Report
Overdue The Case for Canada's Public Libraries	Canadian Urban Institute	Library Report
Safety and Security Toolkit	Canadian Urban Libraries Council	Library Report
The Role of Public Libraries as Partners in Serving Vulnerable Populations	Toronto Public Library and Edmonton Public Library	Library Presentation

Food for Thought: Culinary Programming for Community	Edmonton Public Library	Library Presentation
Community Fridge: Big Success or Just a Big Hassle	Cobourg Public Library	Library Presentation
At the Crossroads of Two Disciplines: Collaboration Between a Public Library and Social Work Researchers	Moncton Public Library and Université de Moncton	Library Presentation
The Business of Being a Library – 3 Critical Concepts for Public Library Success	Thunder Bay Public Library	Library Presentation
Meeting the Moment: Bystander Intervention to Create Safer Spaces	Julie Lalonde	Library Presentation
Homes for People	Government of BC	Provincial Report
Belonging in BC: A collaborative plan to prevent and reduce homelessness 2022-2025	Government of BC	Provincial Report

Interview Recruitment Script

Hi **[insert name]**,

My name is Brady Yano, and I am a second-year master's student in Urban Planning at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. I am currently working on my final graduate project examining how municipal planners can partner with public libraries to best address rising inequality and increasing social service needs within select British Columbia cities. As a final output, I am hoping to produce a toolkit that explores the ways in which municipal planners, librarians, and policy makers use public libraries to address these needs through community programming.

For this project I will be interviewing municipal planners, public library staff, representatives from library governing bodies, and public servants to get a better understanding of potential challenges and future opportunities.

As part of my research, I am interested in interviewing you in your role as **[position title]** at **[organization]**. Please note that all interviewees will be ensured confidentiality unless they indicate otherwise.

If you have any questions or comments about this project, you can contact me at brady.yano@mail.mcgill.ca or by phone at 604-345-6826. You can also contact my project supervisor, Dr. Lisa Bornstein, at Lisa.Bornstein@mcgill.ca or 514-398-4077.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Brady Yano
Master of Urban Planning Candidate (2024)
McGill University, School of Urban Planning

Participant Consent Form

Beyond Books: How Public Libraries are Redefining Municipal Social Service Delivery

Student Researcher: Brady Yano, Master of Urban Planning Candidate, School of Urban Planning, McGill University, brady.yano@mail.mcgill.ca, 604-345-6826
Research Supervisor: Dr. Lisa Bornstein, Director and Associate Professor, School of Urban Planning, McGill University, lisa.bornstein@mcgill.ca, 514-398-4077

Purpose of the Study

Thank you for expressing interest in this research project. The purpose of this study is to understand how municipal planners can partner with public libraries to best address rising inequality and increasing social service needs within select British Columbia cities. Your participation will help inform how various actors can better work together to achieve this goal.

From this research, I intend on producing a supervised research report and a practical toolkit that explore the ways in which municipal planners, librarians, and policy makers can use public libraries to address these needs.

Study Procedures

Recognizing that participants and researchers are in different geographical locations, interviews will take place virtually over Microsoft Teams. Interviews will take between 30 and 45-minutes and will involve a series of open-ended questions.

With your consent, interviews will be recorded on Microsoft Teams. Video and audio recordings will be used for transcription purposes only. If you prefer not to be video and audio recorded, I will take written notes only. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the notes and recordings. They will be stored on a password protected computer within a password-protected folder for a period of seven years.

Voluntary Participation

You are under no obligation to participate, and you are free to not answer any question, or to end the interview completely, at any time without giving a reason. In addition, you may withdraw your consent from this study at any time and withdraw all or part of your response if you wish.

All interview transcripts will be coded and stored on a password protected computer within a password-protected folder.

Potential Risks

There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. However, recognizing that conversation will surround services and programming aimed at supporting vulnerable demographics, you may experience emotional or psychological distress. You are in control of the information you wish to share. Should you at any point during the interview experience emotional or psychological distress, referrals for counseling and other services will be provided.

Potential Benefits

This interview will support the development of a research report and toolkit that explores the ways in which municipal planners, librarians, and policy makers can utilize public libraries to address rising inequality and increasing social service needs. These research outputs will seek to inform practitioners interested in this evolving field.

Confidentiality

Responses will be kept confidential unless you indicate otherwise on this consent form. If you choose to maintain confidentiality, your responses will be stored and presented in a manner that protects your identity. Only the student researcher and supervisor will have access to identifiable data for a period of seven years following publication. This data will be stored on the student researcher's McGill University SharePoint account, which the research supervisor will also have access to. Microsoft Teams live transcription will be used to help transcribe interviews.

Yes: _____ No: _____ You consent to have your name and position be associated with your

comments in final research outputs.

Yes: _____ No: _____ You consent to have your organization's name used.

Yes: _____ No: _____ You consent to be audio and video recorded.

Dissemination of Results

The toolkit will be shared with all project participants. Copies will also be shared with relevant organizations including municipalities, public libraries, and library governing bodies.

A copy of the final research report will be deposited in the McGill University Library and content will be used in a final presentation to satisfy the Master of Urban Planning program requirements. Content may also be re-used in future reports and presentations.

Questions

We thank you for your collaboration and welcome any thought you have that might improve our research. For any questions or comments you have about this project, please reach out to the student researcher at brady.yano@mail.mcgill.ca, or contact the project supervisor, Dr. Lisa Bornstein at lisa.bornstein@mcgill.ca.

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca citing REB file number 23-11-070.

Written Consent

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. Please retain a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____   Date: _____

Interview Guide

Introduction

I am researching the ways in which municipal planners can partner with public libraries to best address rising inequality and increasing social service needs within select British Columbia cities. With this information, I intend on producing a toolkit that explores the ways in which municipal planners, librarians, and policy makers can utilize public libraries to address these needs.

My questions are framed by my own research experience. If you think I have missed something important in my questions, I would appreciate if you would suggest other topics we should discuss.

General questions

- What drew you to the public library? (if applicable)
- What drew you to your current role?

Questions for municipal planners

- What are the most successful programs for planning initiatives for the unhoused in the city?
- To what extent have you worked with public libraries as municipal partners?
- What do you see as barriers to expanding supports through libraries or other municipal avenues?
- To what extent should public libraries host social service supports for vulnerable people?
- Can you speak to [relevant municipal plan]?

Questions for library staff

- What is your relationship with other municipal library systems/umbrella organizations (like the Canadian Urban Libraries Council and BC Library Association)?
- To what extent do you work with government agencies?
- How about community actors?
- What pressures does work with these populations place on you?
- Some jurisdictions have begun to expand the role of the library – both in terms of programming and in terms of the ways in which the library can be used. Has this been your experience?
- If funding were not a limitation, how could libraries best-support at-risk or vulnerable people?

If you have specific programs and policies, please describe them.

- What is the role of different actors in the specified project?
- What policies and or processes enabled or hindered the project?
- What is the level of risk tolerated amongst library staff in executing these types of projects?
- What is the role municipal planners (or other local officials) played/should play with respect to these projects?
- What is the role community partners and library patrons should play with respect to these projects?

Questions for library governing body representatives

- Can you explain the role of Trustee of the Public Library Board?
- How has the pandemic impacted the governance decisions of the Board?
- What was the Board's role in shaping [relevant library plan]?
- To what extent do you work with government agencies and community actors?
- Some jurisdictions have begun to expand the service delivery role of public libraries – both in terms of programming and in terms of the ways in which public libraries can be used. What is your perspective on this?
- What are the most successful programs for planning initiatives for the unhoused in the city?

Questions for public servants

- How do you support public libraries across the province?
- How are the municipal budgetary allocations determined?
- Is there interest in reworking this formula?
- Are there pressures unique to urban central library branches?
- Is B.C.'s funding formula consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions?

Certificate of Ethics Approval

McGill University
Research Ethics Board Office
www.mcgill.ca/research/research/human

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

REB File Number:	23-11-070
Project Title:	Beyond Books: How Public Libraries are Redefining Municipal Social Service Delivery
Student Principal Investigator:	Brady Yano
Department:	Urban Planning, School of
Supervisor Name:	Professor Lisa Bornstein
Sponsor/Funding Agency (if applicable):	
Research Team (if applicable):	

Name	Affiliation

Approval Period:

FROM	TO
15-Dec-2023	14-Dec-2024

The *REB-1* reviewed and approved this project by Delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans.

* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.
* The PI must inform the REB if there is a termination or interruption of their affiliation with the University. The McGill REB approval is no longer valid once the PI is no longer a student or employee.
* An **Amendment** form must be used to submit any proposed modifications to the approved research. Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented. Changes to funding or adding new funding to a previously unfunded study must be submitted as an Amendment.
* A **Continuing Review** form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.
A total of 5 renewals are permitted after which time a new application will need to be submitted.
* A **Termination** form must be submitted to inform the REB when a project has been completed or terminated.
* A **Reportable New Information** form must be submitted to report any unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications or to report any protocol deviations that did not receive prior REB approval.
* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.
* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.