



## **Wollaston Public Library**

### **Final Report of the Board of Directors for the 2017-2018 term.**

*Imagine. Discover. Connect.*



## BUILDING A LIBRARY GROWING A COMMUNITY

### FOR THE RECORD

In January 2017, Wollaston Township appointed a board of directors to oversee the governance and operations of the Wollaston Public Library. This was necessary because the Wollaston Limerick Union Library had ceased to exist. The board operates in the same time frame as an elected council. As such, the term of the current board members expires at the end of 2018. The board's term was two year instead of the regular four. Despite this, we made strides in several areas. We present this report in the interest of continuity and to create as easy a transition as possible for the next board. This report includes an overview of the library's role. It also includes recommendations that we feel will help the board, the community and the township achieve a library that will serve residents, businesses and visitors, and that will help maintain a healthy and unified community.

## The Lay of the Land

When new board members were brought together two years ago at the inception of the Wollaston Public Library, we had our work cut out for us. To comply with the Libraries Act we had to review and revise each and every library policy – likely one of the most boring tasks ever! Nothing says commitment like spending Friday nights in a chilly library making sure the policy book complies with provincial legislation.

But once those technicalities were out of the way, we rolled up our sleeves to tackle some real problems:

- a decades-old issue of a crumbling building.
- devising a better way of keeping count of our catalogue and our members.
- how our small rural library could play an effective role in the community – now and in the future.

A pragmatic way to address those issues is contained in our strategic plan which was presented to council and to the community in August 2018. It is a thorough document which was developed using the results of our community survey, the strategic and administrative experience of our board members, guidance from the Friends of the Wollaston Library group and input from our librarian Temple Cameron. It has been well-received. During the recent municipal election campaign, each and every candidate unequivocally committed to supporting the plan and the library as part of the fabric of the community. As important, more than 85 per cent of residents who participated in our survey deemed our library to be an important service to the township.

### Next Steps



Board Member Colin Slade  
with young Bear Ridge  
Fundraisers

We have done the very best with the current location for a long time. But make-do only goes so far. The residents of this Township know this. Even without an official building campaign, organizations, businesses and individuals have started to raise funds for a new library. The thirst for a healthy community and knowledge-sharing is there. We encourage the new council and the new library board to build on that enthusiasm and optimism.

A new library is a project that can help heal rifts in this township and unify its people. This kind of community development would give our residents a chance to show their skills, determination and generosity to each other

and to those watching from outside our township. This is a project that has the potential to build new relationships and links. And it creates the kind of energy that attracts newcomers who are looking for a supportive and healthy community. We believe that those assets are abundant but have sometimes been overshadowed.

When our board was assembled, most of us had never met. We didn't always agree. But working towards a common goal and seeing the big picture in a transparent, professional way for the benefit of the community has taught us some great lessons and given us an insight into the skills and expertise of the people here.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From Hastings Highlands to Apsley, from Saltspring Island to Halifax - library staff and board members will tell you that the job of building a new library was not easy. There were money problems, debates over location, over design, over whether there should even be a new library at all.

But when all was said and done, guided by a group of people who were able to keep their eye on the ball, each of those libraries - and many more, say that once it was built, all those controversies were forgotten. Once it was built, usage increased, programming blossomed, and membership numbers surpassed expectations. Once it was built, the library took its place as a touchstone of the community – and a great place to be.

Moving ahead with a building plan requires leadership, brainpower and lots of work. As we wrote in our strategic plan, this is not a project for the faint of heart. But our bets are on the people of this Township. Here are our recommendations.

1. **Work with the Strategic Plan.** It was put together with input from our 2017 survey and thoughtful contributions from the community. It is streamlined and practical, addressing both the need for a new facility and the need to serve and broaden the library's reach into the community.
2. **Look for varied skill sets in a new board.** In years past, the Library Board was considered an oversight group that met once a month to look over finances and other issues of governance. Out of necessity, this board has become a working board contributing between 10 to 20 hours a month. It is impossible to operate a dynamic facility without regular contributions from a volunteer board. To spread out responsibility, the new board should be comprised of at least 7 people with at least one representative from Council.

The future board members should collectively have experience in volunteer management, administration, governance, finance, fundraising, strategic planning and communications. At the same time, they should be representative of the community with regards to seniors, families, and young adults. The board should also create a technical building committee and a fundraising committee.

- 3. Support Library Staff** A small, rural library has diverse needs. The staff should be encouraged and funded to avail themselves of the training supplied by various organizations to broaden their skill set and become familiar with trends and solutions being developed by community libraries.

## Conclusion

The library is much, much more than a place to borrow books or DVDs. It can be a safe, comfortable and stimulating space for residents to meet, share knowledge, plan initiatives and much more. In some smaller communities it plays a role in economic development – offering business owners resources such as meeting space, secure teleconferencing and other resources. It can be a meeting place for parents of young children or seniors adapting to the online world. And a well-run library, even on a frugal budget, is a selling point to families looking to relocate to a rural location. That's a great potential return for less than 3 per cent of the municipal budget.



Ultimately though, a library is about community. Supporting ours is one of the best things the future council can do for the heart and soul of Wollaston Township.

This report is submitted as our municipal government make a major transition. There have been rumours that a shutdown or amalgamation is being considered. Our board members were personally assured by several of the incoming councillors that they were committed to a good future for Wollaston Public Library. And each of the candidates at the September 2018 All-Candidates Meeting publicly expressed their support of the Library's Strategic Plan. We were cheered by that and we take them at their word.

The board believes it is a good investment in people and in our community. Keeping our municipal tax dollars here at home for the benefit of all our residents is an investment that will reap good returns just like it has in many communities just like ours.

On behalf of the board of directors, we thank you for the privilege of serving this community.