

COVID-19 Impact Report – Cobourg Public Library

To say that COVID-19 has had an impact on operations at the Cobourg Public Library would be a grave understatement. Like much of the world, @CobourgPL has had to halt, adjust, and reposition services and operations over the majority of 2020 and 2021. These changes have been made to protect the business, the employees, and our community with the information available at the time. The Cobourg Public Library has not only continued to meet its commitments to the communities it serves, but continued to expand services and supports as well.

Impact in 2020

Expenses and Associated Services

COVID-19 specific expenses topped \$17,000 in 2020. These unanticipated expenses included personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees, increased hand cleaning rituals and materials, some plexi-shield for service points, and enhanced cleaning procedures and mechanisms. While the aforementioned expenses are quite expected and relevant to the pandemic, there are a number of additional expenses that are likewise directly related to COVID-19, but perhaps less predictable.

Staff spaces were reorganized throughout the main branch of the Cobourg Public Library. These changes were necessary to protect employees so the Library could continue to serve the community. There were some expenses associated with these changes, however they were minimized by having the moving of furniture completed by the Library's custodian and leadership team.

What was the Rotary Room, once a hub of activity for community groups to hold events and meetings, became vital to the adjusted operations of the Library. The room became a hub of a different sort of activity, curbside service. Additionally the room was used for isolation of returned and donated items, storage of furniture not in use, as well as PPE for employee use.

The introduction of curbside service began on May 19, 2020. This service took the model of pick-up of materials on hold and expanded upon it greatly. For staff and patron safety the service was initiated using paper bags where patrons could collect the items they had requested from the Library. In late 2020 a window was converted in the Rotary Room for curbside service to be delivered through from staff to patrons – this has been a great addition to the service. These modifications complemented the converting of conventional processes to adapt to new service demands.

The first floor public group work room was converted into a virtual programming studio, a necessity as in-person programming was suspended, and online became increasingly popular as the pandemic continued. The studio repurposed many of the items already housed in the Library to provide a dedicated, adaptive space for staff to host and execute virtual programs. Likewise, the space allows for staff to edit their videos and programs as necessary.

Perhaps the most dramatic change to the public service space, was the relocation of the computer lab to accommodate the provision of service in July 2020. The lab was moved from the second floor to the first floor, into what was the reading room. Movers were hired to assist with this, as the furniture is heavy and unwieldy, and additional technology support was needed to ensure service in the adapted space. A total of six computers were made available, 4 conventional, one with accessible features, and one express station. During the six months that the lab was temporarily on the first floor, nearly 1500 sessions were completed. While this number may initially seem low when compared to pre-COVID-19 statistics, given that the lab was operating with greatly reduced equipment and hours, this number reflects increased usage of the service.

Along with changes to the spaces within the building, there were likewise great modifications to how employees at the Library worked both within and outside of the space.

Covid-19 Impact Report – Cobourg Public Library

The curbside service and relocated computer lab, while incredibly needed and valued, in the community, required staff to be reallocated from working as they would on a traditional public service desk to these modified services. This was not an issue while the building was closed to the public, but became problematic once the building was opened for browsing in August, 2020.

To accommodate the redeployment of staff in consideration of COVID-19 requirements, the Library opened to the public on August 24, 2020 with reduced hours, and service only on the first floor. While no additional staff were hired, more staff were working at one time within the Library than they had previously. The number of staff working on the first floor more than doubled from two to five to ensure provide service and follow COVID-19 related protocols. The five staff positions included one staff member at the circulation desk, one in the children's department, one in the lobby, one in curbside service, and one in the computer lab.

Once time had passed, and public health organizations recommended the easing of some COVID-19 restrictions, the lobby position was eliminated. This allowed for the opening of the second floor. The opening of the second floor necessitated more time to prepare for safe opening considering the Local History Room, and the community's want for study spaces. A system of cleaning and isolation was developed for these spaces, and the second floor opened safely on October 13, 2020.

Service to the public continued in this manner until December 26, when another provincial lockdown was initiated. The Library building closed, and a return to curbside service only was made. This lockdown continued into 2021.

When considering the Hamilton Township branches, the Gores Landing branch was opened during the same weeks where the Cobourg location was open. Bewdley was closed a little more often, owing to the fact that the Library branch is within a community centre, and had some additional restrictions and concerns with opening. A good partnership between the Bewdley Community Centre staff and the Library has meant that the Bewdley branch library was open as much as possible throughout the year.

Loss of Revenue

While the Library building was closed in 2020, a great loss of revenue was felt. These losses were unanticipated, and are as follows:

Unanticipated losses of revenue			
Income line	Anticipated income based on 2019	Actual income	Revenue Lost
Fines	\$16,800.00	\$4,882.00	\$11,918.00
Memberships	\$2,450.00	\$573.00	\$1,877.00
Replacement Cards	\$600.00	\$141.00	\$459.00
Book Sales	\$3,800.00	\$598.00	\$3,202.00
Meeting Room Rental	\$7,000.00	\$1,055.00	\$5,945.00
Promotional Material	\$500.00	\$157.00	\$343.00
Photocopies/Printing	\$6,200.00	\$2,037.00	\$4,163.00
TOTALS	\$37,350.00	\$9,443.00	\$27,907.00

Fortunately there are a number of factors that will be examined later in this report that allowed for these losses in revenue to be absorbed with little negative impact to the organization.

Grants and Financial Relief

The Library was fortunate to receive \$1,600 from Hamilton Township to support COVID-19 impacts at the branches within the Township. These funds paid for plexi-shield in Bewdley, cleaning supplies, PPE, and the additional expenses associated with curbside service in the municipality.

Additionally, through a fund for charities with CanadaHelps, the Library further received \$111.61 in funds to assist in offsetting COVID-19 related financial impacts.

The Town of Cobourg provided plexi-shield to fixed staff work stations within public areas, as well as PPE for the final quarter of 2020. A total of \$10,000 was allocated for these purposes, and was maintained and spent by the municipality.

The Library was in the unique and unfortunate position of not qualifying for government relief programs on the local, provincial, and federal levels. Many of these programs required a loss of core revenue far higher than the Library experienced, as the majority of the funding for the Library comes from both the Town of Cobourg and Hamilton Township. Likewise the Library did not qualify for relief for utility expenses, as the invoices were kept current, and the Library was never in a position of arrears.

The Leadership Team did investigate all available programs for revenue recovery, staffing expenses, and programs to offset any expenses related to COVID-19 impacts, but were unsuccessful in qualifying for any of these programs.

Program and Circulation Statistics During Uncertainty

The Library acted quickly to transition and expand our services to adapt to the changing landscape at each unanticipated change caused by COVID-19. Virtual programs replaced in-person programs. Curbside service replaced traditional browsing and circulation. Virtual and phone reference replaced traditional research methods. Electronic resources and databases became more widely used. In short, the community continued to be well-served during building closures and adjusted service.

Virtual programs, such as virtual author visits and readings, craft tutorials, online book chats, research groups, (and more) became an incredibly popular service in 2020. During the period of March to December (inclusive) there were 378 virtual programs held, with 12608 attendees. While the number of programs is generally doubled in a year, the number of attendees exceeds expectations. Using virtual platforms the Library has been able to reach a greater number of patrons, in a timing that suits the patron.

Much like virtual programs, curbside service has been well adopted in the community, with an average of more than 1200 patrons using the service in Cobourg per month in 2020. In Hamilton Township, an average of four people per hour were served during curbside service hours. While these numbers are roughly half of the statistics in the pre-COVID-19 periods, the impact of the service has exceeded expectations. Through the curbside service patrons were able to not only obtain entertainment during a difficult time, but also make connections to some kind of routine and normality. Many patrons who visited the service commented that the visits to curbside service were the only time where they saw another person, and saw people that have always been integral to their day-to-day lives pre-COVID-19. While this is anecdotal information, it is important to mention how the Library contributed to the community's maintained mental health during periods of lockdown. Patrons could visit, albeit briefly, and see the same friendly faces they always have in Library staff, and be served in a similar, if physically different way that they always had been. The community's connections were maintained through curbside service.

In addition to curbside service and virtual programming, the community's use of electronic resources increased greatly in 2020.

Covid-19 Impact Report – Cobourg Public Library

Of particular note, the Overdrive ebook service saw a monthly checkout average that increased by roughly 1000 more than usual. This service saw the addition of 329 new patrons from March thru December, and nearly 5500 individuals checking out materials (5474 to be exact!). These patrons checked out a combined total of 34172 items during the same timeframe, nearly 10,000 more than 2019.

Other electronic resources and databases saw a 20 per cent increase in use, with 105145 unique interactions with these services. Electronic resources include Ancestry, Flipster magazines, home improvement information, Consumer Health Complete, Merck Manuals, and World Book Online. Mango Languages and a number of others were provided at no-cost to the Library throughout 2020 for patron use as well.

In terms of the circulation of physical items, from March thru December 55524 items were circulated. This is approximately half of the circulation that is typically seen during the same period. However, as there were only 17 weeks during this time where patrons could browse the collection and select their own materials, these numbers are as expected given the circumstances.

Factors allowing the Library to remain solvent and successful

It is important to note that while the Library experienced a reduction in revenue, and many unanticipated expenses in 2020, the year would still be considered a success financially. The Library anticipates a surplus of approximately \$8,500, even when considering the above factors.

This surplus can be directly attributed to staffing, which was helped by a number of factors. These factors include:

- During the initial closure from mid-March to mid-May, unionized staff were working from home. This meant that when someone was unable to work a shift due to illness, or another reason, coverage was not required for the shift.
- An all hands on deck attitude was adopted while the Library building was closed, but curbside service was running, if a unionized staff person phoned in for a shift, often they were covered by a another unionized staff person who was already scheduled for the day, or member of the leadership team. This meant that the person would be paid for their sick time, however an additional unionized staff person was not called in to cover the shift.
- When the Library initially opened to the public on August 24, the hours of service were greatly reduced. This was done not only to accommodate the increased staffing levels required, but also to maintain a cautious stance as circumstances were prone to change.
- When working from home both unionized staff and members of the leadership team took a great deal of required training during normal work hours. This included WHMIS, customer service, crisis management, first aid, and other training specific to the individuals' role at the Library. When the Library is open fully to the public training is taken in addition to desk hours, as training cannot be completed while staff are in a public-facing public service role.
- Like training, meetings were scheduled to take place during work hours, rather than in addition to normal work hours, while staff were working from home. Otherwise meetings are budgeted for as an extra expense, as they are held outside of the Library's open hours
- While the Library building was closed, additional coverage was not necessary for vacation time, as it would be if the Library was open to the public.

Each of these points above were undertaken with great consideration by the CEO and Leadership Team. As things were so uncertain from one day to the next as to how COVID-19 would impact operations, a cautious approach was taken with the allocation of staffing, particularly as staffing is the largest expense that the Library incurs.

Covid-19 Impact Report – Cobourg Public Library

It is important to note that during any closure of the building, staffing was maintained at the base level anticipated for 2020. This allowed the Library to maintain its service level with online programs, curbside services, and for extensive training of staff.

By working diligently and with an eye to the unexpected, the Cobourg Public Library was able to honour its commitments to the community and municipalities it serves, as well as commitments to its employees.

Impact in 2021

The impact of COVID-19 on 2021 is more difficult to report – the Library is still in the midst of things. However, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and knowing what we know now, there are a number of predictions that can be made. Predictions in this portion of the report have been made using historical information (2018 & 2019 income and expense information), as well as information regarding anticipated adjustments to operations as COVID-19 related restrictions are loosened and potentially eliminated.

As more information about COVID-19 and its spread was shared, isolation periods for materials were shortened, the use of bags for curbside service was eliminated, and some of the collections that we had taken out of circulation were reintroduced. Each of these changes has a positive impact on service to the community. Likewise, incrementally positive financial impacts are generally seen with each additional change.

As of June 1, 2021, the Library building has only been open to the public for six (6) weeks, from February 17 to April 3, 2021. The current closure period is expected to continue into July, with no guarantee of opening at any point. This uncertainty will necessitate some difficult decisions for the operations of the Library moving forward.

Expenses and Associated Services

In terms of COVID-19 specific expenses, in the first quarter of 2021 \$850 had been spent. A further \$4300 is anticipated to be spent from April thru December, for a total of \$5150. A concentrated effort was made when developing the 2021 budget to ensure that expenses such as these could be absorbed. As of the writing of this report, it is likely that this \$5150 can be absorbed into the budget.

Curbside service has been offered thus far in 2021, with the addition of the Library being fully opened for a six week period.

Library service hours were extended on April 12 to include Sundays, and three evenings per week until 8:00 p.m. This change was initially made with the intention of the Library being fully open to the public, however this has not yet been realized.

The associated expenses of staffing continue to be the largest areas of concern. Steps to mitigate these concerns must be taken to ensure that the Library remains financially sound.

Loss of Revenue

The Library was fully opened, in addition to offering curbside service, for six weeks thus far, from February 17 to April 1 (inclusive). This period where the Library was opened saw the Library bring in approximately \$1000 in revenue.

The projected losses of revenue are outlined as follows:

Income line	Anticipated income based on 2019	Actual income during open (February 18 to April 2, 6 weeks in total)	Projected income loss per week while closed	Projected Income loss for 2021	Projected total income for 2021
Fines	\$16,800.00	\$526.00	\$323.08	\$7,753.85	\$9,046.15
Memberships	\$2,450.00	\$149.00	\$47.12	\$1,500.00	\$950.00
Replacement Cards	\$600.00	\$6.00	\$11.54	\$400.00	\$200.00
Book Sales	\$3,800.00	\$0.00	\$73.08	\$3,000.00	\$800.00
Meeting Room Rental	\$7,000.00	\$0.00	\$134.62	\$7,000.00	\$0.00
Promotional Material	\$500.00	\$62.00	\$9.62	\$300.00	\$200.00
Photocopies/Printing	\$6,200.00	\$294.00	\$119.23	\$2,600.00	\$3,600.00
TOTALS	\$37,350.00	\$1,037.00	\$718.27	\$22,553.85	\$14,796.15

Covid-19 Impact Report – Cobourg Public Library

With a potential loss of revenue exceeding \$22,500, it is unlikely the Library can continue to operate as intended in 2021 without taking some measures to mitigate the losses.

Grants and Financial Relief

For the majority of grants and financial relief, the Library again finds itself in a position where the organization does not qualify for much of the available funding.

This considered, however, the CEO is pursuing information from the Town of Cobourg to assist with the losses of revenue, particularly in light of the municipality receiving \$172093 from the Ontario government as part of the second phase of the Safe Restart Agreement.

Additionally, it appears that the Library will qualify for some funding through the COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit, which provides reimbursement for three paid sick days for employees who would otherwise be unpaid. The Library's agreements with its employees provides for some paid sick time for all employees, however much of this time has been used due to restrictions on working with symptoms that could be related to COVID-19. The impact of this benefit is anticipated to be less than \$1000.

Programs and Circulation Statistics During Uncertainty

Virtual programs have continued to be popular. To the end of April 32 programs were offered, with over 1100 attendees. It is anticipated that these statistics will continue to trend upwards, as the Library has a busy calendar of summer programs planned.

Overdrive has maintained a high level of use with 16 per cent more users in 2021 over the same timeframe in 2020. These statistics are anticipated to dip slightly, but remain high, as the pandemic passes.

Electronic resources and databases continue to see high usage in 2021, mainly owing to the stay-at-home order, and like Overdrive are expected to dip slightly, but remain high for the remainder of the year. From January 1 to April 30, over 73000 unique interactions were made by patrons to the resources.

Circulation of physical items has continued to be approximately 75 per cent of pre-COVID-19 levels, however with the anticipated reopening in July, these statistics are anticipated to increase to the end of the year. As of April 30, 29828 physical items have circulated.

Factors and considerations to allow the Library to remain solvent and successful

The Library has continued to be a support and source of stability to the communities it serves. In addition to the services that were adjusted in 2020, the Library has added the circulation of park passes, as well as two notable community partnerships. The partnerships include the Northumberland Eats program, coordinated by Northumberland County, and the Period Promise, coordinated by the Northumberland United Way. These new partnerships have helped to provide assistance to the community in unique and much needed ways.

With the projected losses in revenue and increased expenses directly related to COVID-19, the Library is looking at a possible shortfall of \$26900. This shortfall can be mitigated with the following factors:

- Continue to conservatively allocate staffing coverage throughout the Library. Potential impact: \$12500
- The following budget lines are likely able to accommodate the additional expenses: Healthy & Safety, Office Supplies, Technology Support, Advertising and Promotional, Building Supplies, Other Maintenance. Potential impact: \$4150
- Apply for the COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit. Potential impact: \$500

The above mitigation factors total \$17150, a further \$9750 is required to fully offset the anticipated losses and increased expenses. It is recommended that the board adopt the above factors, as well as the two scenarios below.

1) Close at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesdays. Potential impact: \$8000

During the pandemic evenings are a close second for least visited time. An average of 4 patrons per hour visited on Wednesday evenings, the lowest of the three evenings that the Library is open.

Historically when the Library is fully open to the public evenings have an average use of 20 patrons per hour between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. When compared to the rest of the open hours, evenings are the least attended.

2) Eliminate curbside service as of November 1, 2021. Potential impact: \$14000

Curbside service has been quite popular with patrons during the pandemic. This said, however, it is a costly service, and requires an increased commitment of resources from the Library.

As services become more readily available as things further open up, the need for curbside service is likely to lessen over time. Between January 2, 2021 and June 7, 2021, for instance, a drop of approximately two patron visits per hour has been observed. It is reasonable to expect the service to revert back to a traditional holds service within the next five months.

By applying both of the suggested measures, the Library should be in good shape at the end of the year if all goes according to plan.

The suggestions posed above to mitigate impacts on income and expenses are subject to change, given information changes frequently, and the Library may receive some relief funding from the Town of Cobourg to offset some of the revenue losses.