



STAFF REPORT

Title: Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) Resolution Libraries Act Review and Rural Library Services

Meeting Date: November 19, 2019

Executive Summary:

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) passed a resolution at its fall convention held last week, calling on the government to review the *Libraries Act* with a view to eliminating what its members feel are legislated requirements that place unnecessary stress on rural library services. The resolution received just over 87 per cent support from the RMA membership.

The RMA states that specifically, a requirement in the *Libraries Regulation* that necessitates the hiring of a professional librarian with a postgraduate qualification for municipalities or intermunicipal library boards that serve populations over 10,000 “...adds further stress to already limited rural libraries...” due to rural library systems’ budget constraints and the challenge of servicing a large area with low population densities.

The RMA thus requested a review of the act and regulation that would take into consideration the challenges faced to provide library services in a rural setting.

In addition to the above concern, the RMA also states that the Public Library Grants Program is using population figures that are outdated, resulting in a number of systems being underfunded.

Background:

In addition to municipalities and library boards, library systems are also subject to hiring regulations: For every 25,000 people the library system serves, it must hire one professional librarian with a postgraduate qualification. The systems are given credit for any municipality or board within its jurisdiction that must directly hire a professional librarian. For example, the Northern Lights Library System serves 174,000 people, but must hire based on a population of about 159,000 people because Cold Lake is within its boundaries and, with a population of over 10,000, is required to hire one professional librarian.

The RMA states that, in a rural setting where population density is very low and urban centres are relatively small, libraries are often much smaller, tend to be open for fewer hours, and often operate from several locations to provide service to large, sparsely



populated areas. They also must do so with relatively small staffs. With the unique challenges in service delivery then, the added requirement to hire a professional librarian can have a significant impact on a board's budget.

In its background information, the RMA uses the Northern Lights Library System as it example, since it is the only provincial library system that does not have a major urban centre located within its boundaries, despite the fact that it serves about 174,000 people, according to the population figures used.

Other library systems in areas with higher population densities have as much as 2/3 of their population taken out of the hiring regulations' requirements by urban centres that are within their area. Thus, in the RMA's view, the regulations as they currently exist inadvertently penalize systems that serve areas with sparse populations and are likely facing the greatest challenges to provide sufficient points of service and staff across a large area.

Alternatives:

- The committee may accept this report as information.
- The committee may direct Administration to prepare correspondence in support of the RMA resolution by lobbying the Government of Alberta to address the challenges its resolution identifies.

Recommended Action:

Administration recommends that the Committee accept the report as information.

Budget Implications (Yes or No):

No

Submitted by:

Kevin Nagoya, Chief Administrative Officer