INTRODUCTION

Houston, a small logging community in Northern BC, is located within Area G of the Regional District of Bulkley Nechako. The Houston Public Library has been in operation since the 1920s and was run by volunteers until incorporation under the Library Act on January 28, 1965. The association then began receiving municipal and provincial funding to operate as a public library. Our circulations, public computer/Wi-Fi use, and in person visits continue to rise each year. Our biggest challenge is that funding remains the same yet the cost of business continues to rise.

Strategic Plan: Our current Strategic Plan is now expired. For the most part, we were able to successfully complete each goal we had set for HPL. We will be meeting in March to develop a new 3 year plan.

(2015 – 2018) goals:

Rebrand HPL to reflect the future of libraries and market its potential to the wider community and meet community needs: HPL will increase awareness of available services to the community at large, with particular focus on non-card holders.

HPL staff attend many community events each year to promote the HPL’s services, programs, and events. This helps us target members of the community who may not know what we have to offer. To reduce computer wait times, we added 2 more public access computers (8 total) which are accessible to anyone with or without a library card. We were also able to increase our internet speed again to 275 mbps. Staff have attended school functions to promote library services to students. We are currently in talks with a teacher at one local school to attend her class to promote our available databases. Students who wish to sign up for a card will be issued one on location.

Renovations:

The Houston Public Library operates in a building owned by the District of Houston. In 2018 we were able to secure close to $20,000 in grant funding to replace the carpet throughout the building. We were closed to the public for 2 weeks while the work was being done. During this renovation, we were able to arrange everything differently to use the space effectively. We have received very positive reviews from
the community and visitors. In the children’s section we were able to have custom built shelving installed. This new shelving makes browsing for children’s material easier as they can see the cover of the book, not just the spine.
Increase Alternate Funding:

The board identified the need for additional funding. The Regional District was approached and requested to hold a referendum to secure tax-based funding for the Houston Public Library. This has not yet happened.

Build capacity to be inspirational, be leaders in practice, and be responsive to community needs:

Staff and Board Members are encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities. Whenever possible, costs associated with training, including travel and food will be reimbursed. Staff and Board Members are encouraged to attend conferences whenever possible. In October 2018, the Houston Public Library closed to the public for 2 days to host the Northwest Library Federation Conference.

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LIBRARY PRIORITY 1
Fostering equitable access to information and services

Our Goal: rebrand HPL to reflect the future of libraries and market its potential to the wider community and meet community needs.

The library did the following to support this goal:

- Add an additional 2 public access computers
- Add 7 opening hours per week for the winter months
- Increase internet speed to 275 mbps
- Add wireless access points to increase connectivity throughout the building and parking lot
- Offer free Wi-Fi 24 hours a day

The outcome of these services allowed us to keep members of the community and visitors connected. Additional computers, increased internet speed, and access points all help to reduce wait times for everyone. Users can create resumes, complete job applications, access social media, or even play games. We do not charge for any computer or Wi-Fi use. We choose to leave the Wi-Fi on when we are closed so the community can remain connected 24/7.

Computer Wi-Fi sessions for the last 3 years. Please note: These are only the stats from opening hours that we see. There are potentially thousands more Wi-Fi sessions that are used in the parking lot while we are closed that we have no way of counting.

2016: 9,929  2017: 10,779  2018: 11,790

- Expand free membership service area
- Partner with local organizations, businesses, and schools to increase awareness about library services and programs
- Attend community events to spread awareness on services and programs
- Let parents know they will not be reprimanded if their children make a bit of noise

The outcome of these services is increased community awareness. Attending community events is a great way to let the public know what we have to offer.
We have more and more families visiting the library after realizing their children can come play games and make a bit of noise.

In an effort to make library access more equitable, the Houston Public Library offers free memberships to people living outside District of Houston limits but holding a Houston mailing address.

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Developing skills and knowledge

**Our Goal: Build capacity to be inspirational, be leaders in practice, and be responsive to community needs:**

The library did the following to support this goal:

- Offer free exam invigilation
- Offer unlimited computer access for those working on school courses

The outcome of these activities provides students with increased support while working on course work. Since the closure of our local community college, the library is the only place in town to get exams invigilated. We offer this service for free (during designated testing hours) so students do not have to drive 40 minutes to another community to complete their education. While we do have a 30 minute time limit on our public access computers if they are busy, this limit is waived for anyone completing course work.

- Events: Scientist in the Library and Ozobots
- Program: Summer Reading Club

The outcome of these programs and events is that children get a chance to learn and have fun doing it. During the summer we had a presenter from Science World in Vancouver come up for an event. We had 25 children registered and a total of 35 attend the event. The presenter worked with the students to complete a variety of hands on science experiments. We also had a presenter from the HR Macmillan Space Centre come for an event. We had 24 people come out and learn how to use and program little robots. Summer Reading Club is a fun way to keep kids reading and learning over the summer months. We held 18 programs and 2 events during related to Summer Reading Club over the summer.

Total stats for SRC: 341 children and 163 adults.

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Working together
Our Goal: Rebrand HPL to reflect the future of libraries and market its potential to the wider community and meet community needs: One of the strategies under the rebranding goal is to create partnerships.

The library did the following to support this goal:

- Sit on the Early Childhood Education committee
- Partner with the Houston Health Centre to provide programs for mental health
- Work with local partners to increase mental health resources
- Partner with local organizations/business to provide additional programming
- Promote programs and services through the schools.

The outcome from these activities provides us with the ability to provide better services. As a member of the Early Childhood Development Committee (ECD Committee) we are able to meet with other organizations and businesses and learn what they are doing. Members of the committee include a representative from the Houston Link to Learning, Houston Community Services, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Northern Health, the Friendship Centre, and the District of Houston. Attending these meetings allows us to discuss programming/events and make sure we are not duplicating programs.

In 2018 we partnered with Northern Health to start a Mental Health Book Club and a Caregivers Support Group. These groups are held in the library monthly and are facilitated by a Mental Health and Addictions Counsellor with Northern Health. We also worked with the Counsellor to identify gaps or outdated material in the Mental Health section of our collection. With a generous funding from a local group, we were able to put $700 towards print resources for Mental Health and Addictions.

The local schools allow us to advertise and include a calendar of upcoming programs and events in report cards. This is a great way to reach new parents in the community who may not know what we have to offer.

The library attends a variety of community events including, the Literacy Brunch, Community BBQs, and the Harvest Festival to name a few. This allows us to promote the programs and services we have to community members who may not know what we have to offer.

| LIBRARY PRIORITY 4 |

Enhancing governance

The Houston Public Library has completed the Strategic Plan from 2015-2018. The Board and staff will meet in March 2019 to create a fresh Strategic Plan, goals, and strategies we would like to focus on from 2019-2021. All staff are encouraged to attend the planning session. Having input from staff is important as they are included in working toward these goals and achieving success.

In 2018 the board updated several policies that were outdated or no longer relevant. Starting in April, we will spend 20 mins at every regular meeting to review and update the manual as needed.
In conclusion, 2018 was a very successful year for the Houston Public Library. With our major renovations we were closed to the public for 2 weeks yet we still saw an increase in circulations, ILLs, and computer/Wi-Fi use for the year. We did not have a designated Program Coordinator until November so all programs and events were prepared for and facilitated by the Library Director and other staff. While we had less programs and events in 2018 we saw an increase in attendance overall for the year. Our new Program Coordinator is hard at work developing new programs for all age groups. As always, funding is our biggest challenge. The cost of operating continues to rise while funding remains the same. We are hoping to look into securing additional funding for 2019 and the future. However, nothing we do would be possible without the funding we do receive from the Ministry and we are incredibly grateful for every dime.