The City of New Westminster
New Westminster is a community of 71,000 people, built along the Fraser River, and bordering Burnaby, Coquitlam and Richmond. As BC’s oldest city, New Westminster is home to a variety of neighbourhoods that range from Queens Park with its large stock of heritage homes, to semi-rural Queensborough, and the rapidly densifying Downtown that features an ever-expanding range of multi-family housing.

New Westminster is a hub for new Canadians. Our high number of rental units, excellent schools and recreational facilities and easy access to public transportation makes our community popular with new immigrants and refugee families.

The traditional industrial base that built New Westminster has changed dramatically in the past decade, and much of the heavy industry has transitioned into employers that support health care, social services, and post-secondary education. Royal Columbian Hospital is the largest employer, and the Province and the City are currently working with Royal Columbian to create a Health Care cluster around the hospital that will support expanded patient care, provider education, and research.

New Westminster Public Library
The New Westminster Public Library provides service in two locations; our main branch in a busy business and residential neighbourhood, and our smaller Queensborough Branch in an area of the City that features light industry, farming, and recent densification. Our main branch is close to the only public secondary school in New Westminster, an elementary school, and a very busy Senior’s Center. Our Queensborough branch is only 6 years old, and offers collections and services curated to its family-centered growth, and the middle and elementary schools that are just steps from the branch.

Both NWPL locations are busy facilities that provide local and regional residents a welcoming and vibrant Third Space. Our extensive collections, fast and unlimited Wi-Fi, and our range of computer services make our branches a landing place for students, families, teens, researchers and readers. In recent years we have seen a small decline in transactional activities, but an increase in the uses residents make of our space. New Westminster’s large number of immigrants and the City’s humane approach to people with housing challenges ensures that many traditional services are still very important to our users.
2018 INTRODUCTION

2018 was one of the most unusual and eventful years that the New Westminster Public Library has experienced in decades. During all of 2018 the library’s Main Branch was a construction site, as we renovated facility infrastructure systems, and upgraded public spaces. This facility was built in 1958 and expanded in 1978. Since that time only small-scale renovations have been undertaken. New Westminster City Council approved a $5.5 million renovation that started in December of 2017, and was completed in the spring of 2019.

Some of the most significant elements of the renovation included:

- Replacement of the electrical transformer and upgrades to the interior electrical system
- Replacement of all windows, ceilings and lighting
- Upgrading public washrooms
- Adding accessibility features
- Creation of a new meeting room and a new technology learning lab
- Upgrading all public service desks and the entryway to the library

The renovations created significant challenges for library customers and library staff. The facility was open during all of the construction, and we moved our public areas to different floors three times. We also significantly reduced the available public floor space during each of these moves. Library staff worked very creatively to ensure that a full suite of collections and services was available for the community, both in the building and in the wider community.

The activities undertaken by the library in 2018 were greatly influenced by the renovation, and most of the initiatives contained in this report have a renovation lens.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

1. Building Capacity: Enabling Inspiration and Innovations

While a large part of our renovation focused on infrastructure improvements, the project also featured a number of significant improvements to the public areas of the Main branch, and details of these improvements will be featured in future reports. The new features that were created during the 2018 construction process were designed specifically in terms of allowing the library to build capacity in a number of areas, including:

iConnect Digital Learning Lab and Technology Services

- Increasing digital access and learning opportunities
- Job readiness through software skills training
- STEAM programming for children and teens
- Digital creation opportunities through our Creation Stations
- Meeting and study rooms with full AV technology for study groups and local businesses
New public meeting room
  • Due to the significant shortage of meeting room space in New Westminster, the library’s meeting rooms are in high demand. During planning for the renovation we were able to carve out some space for a new 12-seat meeting room. The room has lots of natural light, and we expect it to be very popular.

Improved public service desks
  • The move to more reliance on self-service check-out and automated check-in will allow us to focus more staff time on programs, outreach, community development and special projects.

2. **Fostering connected communities: Advancing access to information and resources**

During the construction period we had to put a significant portion of our adult and youth print and non-print collections into storage, reduce the number of public internet stations available for use, and reduce study space. The planning for this took all of 2017, and in order to balance the reduction in physical collections and technology, we took the following actions:

We made changes to a number of service elements at our Queensborough Branch so it could assist more library users from the Main branch. These included:
  • Increasing the number of open hours each week
  • Adding additional print and non-print collections, and increasing the number of times each week deliveries of materials are made to the branch
  • Locating one of our Children’s librarians at the branch, and expanding the number of programs and outreach events held in Queensborough during the construction period.

We made temporary circulation and technology policy changes to reduce the impact of the renovations. These included;
  • Reducing the length of time library users could log onto our networked computer stations to maximize access opportunities
  • Increasing the loan period for print and non-print collections so users could avoid the construction chaos if they chose to

We initiated a lap-top loaning program. These Chromebooks could be used in-house to compensate for our reduced computer stations, or could be taken home for students and learners who could not find a quiet space in the library to study.

We increased the resources put into our eBook collection. This allowed us to provide access to titles that we were forced to put into storage during the construction. It also allowed library users who were concerned about coming to the building during construction to borrow a wider range of resources electronically.
3. *Working together: creating lasting and sustainable partnerships*

**Library Programming**
Due to our restricted space and the loss of our meeting rooms during the construction, a decision was made to move all critical library programs to other community locations. This involved calling on existing partners and creating new partnerships. New Westminster is critically short of meeting room space, and our community centers, churches and schools are always overbooked. Library staff started working on this issue early in 2017, and by December of that year we had been able to find homes for all of our Children’s programs and for our critical adult programs.

We found space in a number of venues, including at NW Community Centers, local art galleries, and commercial spaces.

We are lucky to have always had our own meeting rooms for programs, so finding other spaces for ongoing library activities was a significant challenge. We learned many lessons from this process, including:

- Normally we are the organization offering up facility space, and in this case we were the partner who needed space. Each organization, while eager to work with us, had to consider their own needs first, and we learned to be flexible and gracious, even when the outcome was not exactly what we were hoping for.
- We learned to balance the needs of library users with our much-reduced resources. This often flew in the face of traditional library wisdom, but we were often surprised at how willing our users were to be flexible. We had to change the day, time and location of Babytime, for example, and contrary to what we expected, attendance was almost as high as when it is in the library at its traditional time and day.
- We learned to expect the unexpected. On more than a few occasions partnership agreements fell apart at the last minute, usually for reasons that were beyond anyone’s control. These things rarely happen in the library, where we control our own space, but we learned they can happen when using someone else’s space.
- Most importantly, perhaps, we learned what it is like to have to find space, and we have changed some of our in-house practices to ensure that we are as fair and accommodating to new partners as we can be.

**Community Meeting Room Users**
In addition to finding space for library programs, our staff also worked with the many community groups that use our meeting space to help them find new locations during the renovation. We were not able to assist each group, and we discovered that many groups were not interested in meeting at the locations we were able to find for them. This confirmed for us just how centrally located we are, and how critical our space is to the community.
Partnerships with City of New Westminster Departments

The other significant partnership-building we did in 2017 was with other city departments. While the library has very close relationships with staff in many departments, there are also a number of departments and staff we don’t ordinarily work with. Building these relationships was an interesting process. We made assumptions about those departments, and in turn, discovered that they had a lot of assumptions about public libraries. In some cases it was a steep learning curve, but in each instance we were able to get past these early barriers.

These new partnerships were an excellent opportunity for us to both benefit from the assistance of our City colleagues, to understand the role of other city staff more fully and for library staff to better understand our place in the city’s infrastructure. The outcome of this has been better relationship with some departments, fewer silos, and in some cases, unexpected work synergies that we would never have developed.

Some of the departments we worked in new ways with included:

- **Fire and Rescue Services**: Fire Prevention staff were closely involved with our construction fire safety plans, our occupation permits at each stage of the construction, and our new fire safety and electrical infrastructure.
- **Engineering Operations**: staff in Eng Ops worked closely with library staff to deal with many elements of construction, including large removal projects.
- **By Law Enforcement**: we worked with these staff members to make large-scale changes to parking regulations around the facility. These changes were required to accommodate a loss of public parking during construction, and a loss of our loading bays and delivery entrance during most of the project.

**Outcomes**

The outcomes of this partnership-building have been very positive, and include:

- An increase in the number of, and variety of, local organizations and businesses we have relationships with
- A greater understanding of what it means to partner with other organizations, and how to do it effectively
- The development of skills that make us a better, more understanding community partner
- Helping a wider variety of local organizations and businesses to see the value of partnering with the library, and a greater sense of the value the library can bring to them and their own users and customers
- Understanding more about the work and needs of other City departments, other local organizations, and businesses across the city.
4. Sustaining our Success: Enhancing Governance and Demonstrating Impact

Working with City Council
Throughout the renovation planning phases and the construction period, the New Westminster Public Library Board experienced its busiest and most challenging period in over 25 years. New Westminster is a small city, with limited capital reserves, and an ever-increasing need to address aging facilities and infrastructure. Demonstrating to City Council that making improvements to the library above other capital projects was a challenge, and one that had to be addressed on a variety of occasions.

During this process it became clear to the Board that more work needs to be done to ensure that Mayor and Council are better informed about library issues and needs, and better informed about the vital role the library plays in the community. The renovation project itself, and the opportunities brought about by the completion of the project will give the Board the necessary chance to do this in a focused manner.

Decision making
During all phases of this project the Board was required to deal with many issues, challenges and emergencies that are not normally part of their work. These included situations where there was internal Board disagreements regarding the best course of action, serious emergencies like a ceiling collapse during construction, and dealing with library users who felt that some of the restrictions and changes imposed during construction were unnecessary or unfair. The New Westminster Public Library Board has always been a very effective Board, but providing leadership during a construction project provided Trustees with an opportunity to not only expand their knowledge of Capital projects, but to work more closely and even more effectively on behalf of the community.

Outcomes
- Trustees enjoyed the learning opportunities provided by this experience, and look forward to using their new knowledge on future capital projects
- Trustees realized that they are interested in spending more time advocating about the library to Mayor and Council, and are creating a plan to do this post-renovation.

SUMMARY

During 2018 it is fair to say that our library was in a state of chaos! Trying to provide excellent service to library users within a construction site was challenging to say the least. We had to limit what collections and services we could offer, and reach further into our community for support than ever before.
We were also limited by the fact that so many of our staffing resources were being funneled into the construction project itself. Moving collections, offices, staff and public technology, and service desks multiple times was something we planned for, but discovered that the amount of time and energy required to do this just couldn’t be anticipated. This meant that new offerings for the public were limited, as we focused on creating opportunities for the future. We think that the users of our library, and our wider community will appreciate the work we’ve done, and will consider the sacrifices of 2018 well worth the inconvenience.