

CUPE 1594 Presentation to City Council

Presented by Debbie Mihial, CUPE 1594 President

Staff members at the public library, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, appreciate this opportunity to talk to city council.

CUPE 1594 represents more than 180 library workers. Most of our members are long-service employees who have spent their entire careers working for the Regina Public Library. They understand all facets of our public library system and know many patrons by name.

The Regina Public Library's *Strategic Plan: A New Direction – Setting the Course, Looking Ahead 2011 and Beyond* claims: "The RPL Board makes the Library a positive place to work for its current employees and is an employer of choice for future employees."

That assertion may have been true in the past, but it does not reflect our current work experience at the library.

Our contract dispute with the library board, now entering its 29th month, is having a deleterious effect on staff and the patrons we serve.

Staff turnover is at an all time high. Since our contract expired December 31, 2009, over 21 per cent of the library's employees have left.

Some of our co-workers are pursuing new opportunities, but many more left because they no longer want to work for an employer who does not value or appreciate them.

We increasingly feel the library management and board do not know their in-scope staff or understand the needs of our diverse library community.

CUPE welcomes this opportunity to share with city council some of our recommendations to make the Regina Public Library Board more effective and accountable to the people they serve.

Expand participation on the library board

The Regina Public Library Board consists of the mayor, one city councillor, the library director and seven members of the public appointed by city council. Board members are appointed for two-year terms.

We know from the library's website that all of the current library board members were appointed in 2003 or 2004. There have been no new appointments in at least eight years – or four terms.

The Regina Public Library's strategic plan notes "the face of Regina is changing as more and more people from around the world come to our community."

We believe it's also important to see the face of change on the Regina Public Library Board.

This would create more opportunities for library patrons to participate on the library board and allow for more discussion on ways to expand and improve library services in the city.

Those are some of the reasons we would like to recommend that library board appointments be limited to two consecutive terms.

We also believe city council should publicize the names of candidates seeking to serve on the Regina Public Library Board, in the same way candidates publicly declare their interest in serving on city council and school boards.

Make the selection process transparent

We know of many library patrons interested in serving on the library board. Some with extensive experience and knowledge of our public library system submitted their application to city council in the past but were not selected.

It raises important questions about how potential board members are evaluated and selected to serve on the Regina Public Library Board. This information is not on either the city's website or the library's website. We think it should be.

When does city council appoint members to the library board? Although the term is for two years, it is hard to discern when a board member's appointment ends.

The City of Regina has an on-line application for residents interested in serving on boards and commissions. We believe it would be useful to develop an on-line application specific to the library board. The application should clearly identify the criteria used by City Council to select applicants to the board.

Identify qualifications for library board members

The public library website provides short biographies of each of the library board members. Two of the current board members – Shelley Monson and Janet Brown – describe their commitment and appreciation for our public library system. The other board members do not mention the library in their biographies.

It would be useful if each of the biographies described the qualifications and vision these people bring to the library board.

We believe one of qualification should be that all board members are active library patrons with up-to-date Regina Public Library cards.

As well, new appointments must include candidates who understand the importance of building strong, inclusive work environments and who welcome public involvement in discussions about the future of this cherished institution.

Make problem solving a priority

CUPE library workers have now waited nearly 2 ½ years to see a fair contract offer from the library board. We have not had any wage increase since 2009.

At our last negotiating meeting on April 4th, the employer presented what it called a “final offer” and cancelled conciliation talks scheduled for April 10th.

Our members do not understand why the library board has made this round of contract negotiations so difficult.

All other Regina civic employees settled contracts in a relatively short period of time. And they continue to enjoy contract provisions, such as long-service severance pay provisions, that our employer insists must be scrapped.

The library board wants our members to accept reduced health and dental benefits for new part-time employees and other changes that will make working life more difficult for the next generation of library employees.

In addition, the Regina Public Library Board continues to insist our members agree to work longer hours on Sundays, even though we see no evidence that library patrons need or even want the library to be open more hours on this one day. We also note the proposed extension to Sunday hours was not included in the 2012 library budget proposal, yet they did include the extension of library hours on Wednesdays.

The fact Regina public library employees have waited so long to see a fair contract offer demonstrates the need for change on the Regina Public Library Board.

In the meantime, we want to see a settlement to the long-standing contract dispute at the library. That can only happen at the bargaining table.

We hope City Council will encourage the Regina Public Library Board to resume contract negotiations and work to settle the outstanding issues at the table.