

LIBRARY OUTSOURCING 101

How does a city outsource its municipal library? First, it helps to know a bit about the different kinds of public libraries in B.C and how public libraries are governed. Public libraries are established according to the *Library Act*.

Kinds of Public Libraries in B.C.

As with clean water facilities, sewer and solid waste disposal systems, recycling services, public roads, zoning and other land-use services, parks and recreation and other city-funded amenities, peace officer and policing services, and the fire department, public library services are operated at the local level of government in B.C.

Most municipal services and programs are paid for through local taxes and fees (such as fees for water utilities, sewer and stormwater, and solid waste), with additional funding from provincial and federal grants. Public libraries are almost entirely funded through local taxes – regardless of the kind of public library. Public library services are provided at the local level of government in B.C.

The *Library Act* establishes several kinds of libraries in B.C. There are two kinds of libraries that are relevant to whether Prince Rupert will outsource its public library. These are: (1) municipal libraries and (2) regional library districts. ***The Prince Rupert Public Library is currently a municipal library.*** As such, the current library is governed by a city-appointed municipal library board – directly accountable to city residents and city electors. Only residents or electors of Prince Rupert may serve on the city’s municipal library board. The city funds our library directly, as it is a core city service – operating as part of the municipal government.

Outsourcing Starts with Abolishing and Dissolving

Attempting to outsource the city’s library would not be a simple or easy process for the city to do. First, the city must **consider** this as an option, because a City Council and mayor “being open to it happening” is the first planning decision for them to make.

If a municipality’s City Council isn’t “open to it” the outsourcing process will not start. Hostile takeovers of municipal libraries cannot happen. This is because the municipality itself must agree to abolish its municipal library board – before outsourcing can even start to happen (and even then, the electors must first assent – such as by approving it through a city-wide referendum). The process may happen only after City Council decides to consider it as an option. ***No consideration? Then the outsourcing of a municipal library is dead on arrival.***

To outsource a municipal library, a municipality must first abolish its own city-appointed municipal library board, dissolve its municipal library, vest its assets, and then pass another by-law that extends the regional library district to include the city. This shuts down the current library, converts and transfers its assets to a regional library district, which could then reopen it as a branch library.

That would mean that, in place of the original municipal library, a new branch library would open, perhaps located within the city but no longer directly governed or run locally. Management would be from afar. Local taxpayers would still (indirectly) fund the branch, with the city collecting taxes from residents and businesses to pay for its share of the regional library district’s budget.

Outsourcing Stops with Organizing

How does the community stop outsourcing? Get organized and get educated. With the status of the municipal library board in question, and local control of the Prince Rupert Public Library at stake, the PRDTU initiated a campaign in support of retaining the municipal library board, passed at a General Meeting. A PRDTU committee was formed to carry out the campaign to retain the local municipal library board and to keep the library local.

BACK TO THOSE RUMOURS . . . HOW’D IT ALL START?

According to minutes of a municipal library board meeting (October 2024), the City Manager addressed questions about the city’s plans for the municipal library. The City Manager told to the library board that it had started exploring options with VIRL earlier in 2024. In addition, it was later confirmed by the city that the North Coast Regional District requested that VIRL engineers assess the municipal library building. This was carried out in June 2024. This was, according to the library board meeting minutes, not intended to be shared with the public or staff.

According to city representatives and the library board, changes that would negatively affect municipal library staff will not be supported, and, again according to the minutes, a proposal is expected from VIRL in early 2025. The municipal library board minutes also confirm that the city has been planning options for outsourcing the municipal library since at least June 2024. With some level of planning and coordination having begun between the city and VIRL it’s important for friends of the library to pay attention closely. To learn more about possible negotiations between the city and VIRL, the PRDTU recently submitted a formal *Freedom of Information* request to VIRL. Hopefully, this will provide more information to help electors prepare for the next actions by City Council and the mayor. 🗣️