



# City of Richmond

## Report to Committee

**To:** Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee

**From:** Susan Walters  
Chief Librarian, Richmond Public Library

**Date:** January 5, 2022

**File:** 97-RPL  
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01

**Re:** 2021 Library Year in Review

### Staff Recommendation

That the staff report titled, “2021 Library Year in Review”, dated January 5, 2022, from the Chief Librarian of Richmond Public Library, be received for information.

*S. Walters*

Susan Walters  
Chief Librarian, Richmond Public Library  
(604-231-6466)

| REPORT CONCURRENCE   |  |  |
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| <b>ROUTED TO:</b>  | <b>CONCURRENCE</b>   | <b>CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER</b>        |
| Recreation and Sport Services<br>Arts, Culture & Heritage Services | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <i>Sevenson</i>                              |
| <b>REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT /<br/>AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE</b>   | <b>INITIALS:</b><br><i>SW</i>  | <b>APPROVED BY CAO</b><br><i>[Signature]</i> |

## Staff Report

### Origin

This report provides an overview of library program and service highlights for 2021 that meet multiple objectives outlined in the library's strategic plan. The Richmond Public Library's (RPL) Strategic Plan 2019-2021, was approved by the Library Board in November 2018. The Strategic Plan identifies five broad goals that will create opportunities for our community to learn, connect and belong:

*Strategic Goal #1: Community: Build and Grow Our Community*

*Strategic Goal #2: Resources: Develop and Leverage Our Resources*

*Strategic Goal #3: Core Services: Expand Access to Programs, Services and Collections*

*Strategic Goal #4: Marketing: Communicate Who We Are and What We Do*

*Strategic Goal #5: Space: Reimagine Space for Our Community*

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #3 One Community Together:

*Vibrant and diverse arts and cultural activities and opportunities for community engagement and connection.*

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #4 An Active and Thriving Richmond:

*An active and thriving community characterized by diverse social and wellness programs, services and spaces that foster health and well-being for all.*

### Analysis

The delivery of public library service during the pandemic has posed numerous challenges, while also resulting in the design and delivery of library services in new and innovative ways.

Early on in the pandemic residents identified a need for both physical and virtual library service. Acknowledging the importance of human connection, the library focussed on improving in-person access to programs and services by steadily increasing operational hours and returning to full weekday and weekend service levels in September 2021. Of equal importance has been the convenience of virtual services and to meet this community need, staff continued to strengthen digital collections and innovative online programs.

Recognizing the continued financial impact of the pandemic on our community, Richmond Public Library went Fine Free on February 14, 2021, to support vulnerable residents of all ages and ensure equitable access to library collections. This initiative has resulted in over 10,000 hours of staff time being redirected to frontline public service; redirecting staff resources to welcoming and connecting with community when and where they access library services. A staff survey is underway and a public survey will launch later this month to assess the impact and benefits of being a fine free library for our community one year later.

Richmond Public Library has a long history of introducing technology that supports self-service options for our community. In October, new self-checkin technology was launched at the Brighthouse branch and new and accessible self-checkout technology was introduced across all four library branches. The new equipment improves the user experience by supporting the rapid processing of returned materials and allowing for stacks of materials to be checked out at once. Borrowing and returning physical library materials has never been easier.

With 2021 being the third and final year of the library's Strategic Plan 2019-2021, numerous initiatives were launched to enhance services to Richmond residents and a number of strategic priorities reached completion. Some of the key service highlights follow.

### Library Cards

One of the first cards you sign up for as a child or new resident is your local public library card. In 2021, library staff issued over 7,200 new library cards. One of the key priorities in the library's strategic plan is the *Every Child a Library Card* campaign. Over three years, library staff partnered with Richmond schools, public and private, to reach students in grades 1, 4 and 8. Over the course of the campaign, staff were able to reach and register 1,639 children and youth who did not have library cards.

### Library Visits

Over 400,000 Richmond residents have visited one of the library's four branches in 2021, with more than 240,000 people visiting the Brighthouse branch. The library has continued to observe a significant increase in visits and physical circulation which can be attributed to the expansion of weekend hours and 7-day service over the summer and the return to full operational weekday hours in September.

Our community always has access to our digital services via our virtual branch. In the spring of 2021, the library's new website was launched and there have been 2.5 million visits to the website with a notable increase in mobile visits and overall, more time spent on the pages visited.

### Collection Use

With limited physical access to library branches in 2020, the library redirected funding to digital materials and noted a 40% increase in the use of digital collections. This trend has continued into 2021; digital circulation has remained strong with residents borrowing 651,000 digital items (ebooks, audiobooks, magazines, movies and more).

Strengthening the depth and range of the core digital collection in 2020 has ensured that current funding levels support the addition of new material for both digital and print collections. Non-traditional new collections included STEAM Kits for children and in collaboration with new partners, the library launched birdwatching and fishing ExplorePACKS. With increased access to library branches, physical circulation has doubled from 2020 with over 1.2 million items being

borrowed in 2021. Supporting Richmond seniors, the library delivered more than 3,200 items to over 50 Home Services customers.

### Programming

In addition to the many literacy programs for all age groups, programming priorities for 2021 included economic recovery, mental wellness, and diversity, equality and inclusion.

Although public health restrictions continued to limit program offerings in 2021, attendance at in-person programs was strong and reflected the need for residents to come together to learn. Designed with safety and small groups in mind, the library offered over 220 in-person programs to 5,900 participants; 30 of those held outdoors with 2,200 participants. Programs included ESL conversation circles, employment fairs, StoryWalks®, book discussion groups, storytimes in the park and technical support to Salvation Army Richmond House Shelter residents.

2021 also solidified the community's desire for online programs – virtual programming is definitely here to stay. The library held close to 900 online programs with over 20,000 participants. Popular programs included storytimes, Scientists in Schools, remote 3D printing, NewToBC Library Champions, film screenings, meet the author events, and many of the Summer Reading at RPL programs, including the One Book, Four Cities interview and community Question and Answer session with the award-winning author Michael Ondaatje.

### Staff Development and Training

In 2021 there were two main areas of focus for library staff development and training. The library provided over 600 hours of all staff training in three distinct diversity, equity and inclusion programs with the goal of providing more informed and supportive library service to our community. The library also introduced the Not Myself Today mental wellness program to build greater awareness, reduce stigma, and foster a safe and supportive workplace culture that ultimately benefits our community via the customer service we provide.

### Community Testimonials

Throughout 2021, community members have shared their appreciation for the benefits provided by library programs and services. The following are just a few of the many positive testimonials received:

#### **Fine Free**

“Great idea! I often take out 40 plus books for my family and sometimes I am late by one day which can add up.” – Richmond parent

“Libraries are the heart and soul of the community. I am now more open to donate to the library and support their ongoing resources.” – Richmond senior

“Going fine free makes the library more accessible to everyone...!” – Teen volunteer

### **Fishing ExplorePACKS**

“[My son] really enjoyed the fishing time!” – Richmond resident

### **Home Services Delivery and Daisy Readers**

“Thank you, everybody, for your help with [my friend]. For referring [her] to the Home Service team, providing Health and Safety guidelines and arranging time for a Daisy reader demo – meeting me to show how the machine works and registering [her] for both RPL Home Service and CELA service.” – Richmond resident

### **Programs**

“By the way, just to let you know that [daughter] loves the Learning Together SO MUCH and she has been very looking forward in every Wednesday morning (in fact, she asked me every day "is today Wednesday?") Great thanks to you for providing us such a fun event during the pandemic.” – Richmond parent

“I have told [friend] how much my son enjoys helping in the Teen Ambassador club and how prior to COVID-19, he loved helping with the Reading Buddies and Le Club Francais programs too. I'm exceedingly grateful for your mentorship of the teens in your programs. You and your opportunities at the library have been a big part of my son's growth. And as a mom, I couldn't be prouder of his recent accomplishments in being hired at a local community centre and by the City as a lifeguard. I hope you have many teens joining you this year as things improve. Your programs are very valuable to our community of Richmond. Thank you [library staff] for creating such a fun and loving environment for teens at the Brighthouse library!” – Richmond parent

### **Customer Service**

“I went to Ironwood Library today. First time I have been to a library in over a year. Immediately an employee came to help me. She was so kind and helpful. It made my day.” – Richmond resident

“Richmond Public Library has always been a fantastic community resource. Now, more than ever, I value being able to carry on with the pleasant, "normal" activity of having access to a wonderful range of reading material. Hats off to the staff who are always pleasant and helpful and who have created a safe, welcoming environment for all.”  
– Richmond resident

“In Canada, I had many challenges and happiness in my life. Fortunately I could borrow books (about improving my English, health and other knowledge), and DVDs (about English, documentaries, Yoga, stretching) from you. I can use computers for learning, filling up paper works and my writing. I also could print files, applications and some papers. I am also asking librarians to help me find books to improve my English pronunciation and other knowledge. I believe many people are benefiting from you like me. Thanks for helping us.” – Richmond newcomer

**Financial Impact**

None

**Conclusion**

Throughout 2021, the library developed and leveraged resources to expand access to programs, services and collections for the benefit of Richmond residents. The pandemic has posed challenges to traditional library services which require continuous innovation in the planning of library service design and delivery. As a leader in the provision of library services, Richmond Public Library can expect that creating opportunities for our community to come together to learn, connect and belong in 2022 will continue the trend towards pre-pandemic levels of service.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Walters." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan Walters  
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(604-231-6466)