

# Library looks to the future

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The world is changing and the role of libraries is changing too. The Drayton Valley Municipal Library is aiming to meet that change head on with its five-year plan of service.

The plan of service looks ahead at the challenges and opportunities the coming years hold. Principal among those challenges for the local library is a shortage of space in its current location. The library board recently closed the Rotary Children's Library as a cost saving measure. That has led to more pressure on the main branch, which itself was already overcrowded.

"Our first priority is to get a facility that works," says Library Director Doug Whistance-Smith. "This place is so small ... when we're open (after Covid) it's going to be too tight to move comfortably."

Ideally that facility will have adequate room for the library collection, as well as dedicated space to accommodate a number of programs the library offers. It should also be located close to downtown to be as publicly accessible as possible. The Town recently advertised for expressions of interest from anyone who had a space like that available. Whistance-Smith says responses are still being looked at by the municipality.

A new location is an important step since, in spite of changing times, the library's services are still an important part of the community. As of 2019 more than 1,400 local residents had a library card. That year there were 60,000 in-person visits to the library, with an additional 22,000 online visitors. The library's public computers were in use for more

than 5,600 hours. There were also 19,000 connections to the library's free Wi-Fi.

"People think it's just a warehouse for books, but that's not what libraries are any more. Above all libraries are social spaces," says Whistance-Smith.

Tied in with that is the desire to see an increase in the number of partnerships, promotional events and foot traffic for the library. That includes seeing the library serving as a space for programming and resources as well as a hub for social engagement. That means offering inclusive access to services and offering resources to support both learning and leisure.

The five-year plan is an important guiding document for both the library board and the library itself. As a public service, input from local residents plays an important role in the planning process.

Public engagement began at last year's Fire and Ice Festival, when more than 800 people attended the library. That was a great start, but less than a month later Covid hit, making things considerably harder. Fortunately, the library had access to responses to its own customer satisfaction survey going back several years which they were able to draw on. The survey was also circulated between the first and second lockdown last year.

Whistance-Smith says the surveys and other feedback are important as they provide community input into the future direction of what is, and should be, a resource that everyone can use.

"The library is a place to freely engage with ideas ... it has to be diverse enough and inclusive enough to embrace all walks of life," he says.

Like many institutions, the library is currently closed to the public due to the pandemic. But while the door is not open, Whistance-Smith says the library's services are still available to those who need them. Books and other materials can be ordered for curbside pick up. For those who have been required to isolate they'll even deliver in or close to town. And for those who live further afield they'll make arrangements to meet you when you're in town on other business if you can't get to the library in person.

"People don't know what we do until they need us," says Whistance-Smith. "We provide the services that suit you at the time that you need it."