REPORT

Oakville Public Library Board

Meeting Date: September 18, 2024

FROM:	Oakville Public Library
DATE:	September 9, 2024
SUBJECT:	**Digitization Update – September 18, 2024**

RECOMMENDATION:
That the Digitization Update report be received for information.

KEY FACTS:
The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Oakville Public Library's collection of physical newspapers, comprising over 300,000 pages spanning 80+ years, has been stored in the Woodside branch basement for over a decade and requires digitization to ensure preservation and accessibility.
- The original project proposal outlined a plan to both preserve the materials and provide free public access to the digitized content.
- In 2023, the Board approved funding for the preservation phase, securing $100,000 in municipal funding from the Town and an additional $213,500 from OPL's Development Fund.
- OPL holds a valid 1994 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (Appendix A - Oakville Beaver MOU 1994) with The Oakville Beaver, granting permission to scan, index, and provide public access to historical newspapers.
- Following an in-depth analysis of digitization efforts by other library boards, the OPL Board decided in June to proceed with the initial plan for preservation, with further evaluation of Mississauga's current digitization approach.
- OPL is currently awaiting the release of the RFP for the preservation phase of this project, which is in queue with the Town's purchasing department.

BACKGROUND:
The Oakville Public Library (OPL) currently houses a significant repository of Oakville's newspaper history, stored in the basement of the Woodside branch for the past decade. While a small portion of this collection has been digitized, the majority remains in vulnerable physical formats, including paper and microfilm, which are susceptible to damage and are currently inaccessible to users. Through a 1994

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contract (Appendix A - Oakville Beaver MOU 1994), OPL was granted permission to scan and provide public access to all information and images contained in The Oakville Beaver and other defunct local newspapers.

This digitization project aims to:
- **Digitize and Preserve:** Ensure the long-term, web-based accessibility of Oakville's historical newspapers.
- **Enhance Accessibility:** Develop a new local history landing page and portal, consolidating OPL's historical resources in one easily accessible location for all Oakville residents.
- **Demonstrate Commitment:** Showcase OPL and the Town of Oakville's dedication to preserving the community's heritage.
- **Promote Local History:** Increase awareness and accessibility of Oakville's history via the opl.ca website.

To initiate the immediate digitization and preservation, the Board approved a unique funding model. This model combines incremental funding, including $100,000 from the Town and $213,500 from OPL's Development Fund, ensuring the project is financially supported to move forward.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:
With the 1994 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Ian Oliver, Publisher of The Oakville Beaver, OPL has valid documentation to digitize the material. The MOU grants OPL permission to "*scan into its electronic database, index, and provide public access to all information and images contained in The Oakville Beaver and other defunct local newspapers."*

Despite potential misalignment with TorStar (Appendix B – Digitization Stakeholders Involvement), during the July Board meeting, the OPL Board of Directors reaffirmed their commitment to this project. This decision directs OPL to proceed with the immediate preservation of materials, followed by a future enhancement of the existing digital content management system interface. This approach ensures the safeguarding of Oakville's history through the digitization of historical newspaper holdings. Utilizing OPL's existing third-party, non-profit platform allows for full integration of a local history subsite within opl.ca, improving visibility, accessibility, and promotional opportunities while presenting a cost-effective method for providing public access. This will be complemented by seamless integration with the federated search system and a new Local History portal on the library's website, encouraging broader engagement with these resources.

In researching similar digitization projects by neighboring library boards, OPL identified the Mississauga Library (ML) as having the most comparable contractual scenario. ML has been involved in digitizing their historic newspapers for over a

decade, starting with in-house scanning of newspapers on microfilm. In 2012, ML signed a licensing agreement with Metroland, allowing them to digitize their collection related to The Mississauga News and host it on their website. However, this agreement excluded defunct Mississauga-based newspapers. ML currently possesses equipment and staff resources to digitize microfilmed newspaper collections in-house, resulting in lesser quality, high-resolution files. The City IT department provided crucial tech support and created the web infrastructure for public access.

The OPL Board of Directors requested additional research into ML's public access system to evaluate its potential applicability for OPL's digital collection. After reviewing ML's digitization approach, it is evident that while their system has been effective in certain respects, it presents significant challenges that make it unsuitable for OPL. ML's Historic Images Gallery (HIG), originally created in the late 1980s, was expanded with City IT's involvement, resulting in a complex, internally managed system that lacks essential features such as bulk upload capabilities and AODA compliance. The system also relies heavily on time-intensive methods, like manual indexing, and requires significant staff effort to maintain, with limited support for expansion or integration with other platforms.

Additionally, the HIG system is not exportable, meaning that metadata and other crucial information cannot be easily transferred or shared with a new system, making it a closed system with little flexibility. With all municipalities currently on high alert due to cyberattacks, ML's IT department is unlikely to share system architecture or collaborate with external organizations, further complicating the possibility of adapting their system to OPL's needs. Given these limitations and the ongoing debates within ML about the public availability of digitized newspapers, OPL would be better served by continuing with its original digitization plan.

OPL's research and legal consultation have highlighted the complexities and potential paths forward for this digitization project. OPL will proceed with issuing the RFP for the immediate removal of the newspaper collection from Woodside's basement into safe storage, followed by the digitization of all materials. OPL will catalogue and index all material to meet AODA and industry standards. As the Board has only approved the budget for the immediate preservation and digitization of the material, OPL will provide further updates regarding the costs and options for public access at a future Board Meeting.

APPENDICES:
Appendix A - Oakville Beaver MOU 1994
Appendix B - Digitization Stakeholders Involvement

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