

REPORT

Oakville Public Library Board

Meeting Date: April 16, 2026

FROM: Oakville Public Library

DATE: April 7, 2026

SUBJECT: **New Central Library Concept – April 16, 2026**

RECOMMENDATION:

That the New Central Library Concept report and presentation be received for feedback.

KEY FACTS:

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

- OPL is in the process of designing a new Central Library at 193 Church Street which will include the adaptive reuse of the existing Post Office building.
- 193 Church Street is a listed heritage building and it sits within the Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District, contributing to the streetscape and heritage character of the district.
- A structural review of the Post Office was completed in Spring 2025 and highlighted several issues with the existing building, including concerns about the ability to support the floor weight requirements of a public library. The basement of the existing building will require extensive modifications to accommodate any parking.
- The project team developed 3 design concepts for consideration by Oakville Council that address the key factors brought forward in the community consultation summary reports, the structural review and the heritage designation documentation.
- On February 23, 2026 Town Council selected Option 2 as the preferred option for further development for the proposed new Oakville Public Library (OPL) Central Library and approved the removal of underground parking from the project.
- Perkins&Will have developed full exterior concepts based on the direction provided and they will be presented to the OPL board at the April 16 board meeting.
- Round 2 of public consultation will begin following the presentation of the concepts to the OPL board.

BACKGROUND:

The new Central Library will be located at 193 Church Street, a former Canada Post building with a heritage designation. The property and building were acquired by the town in April 2012 as a potential site for a parking garage. The building is approximately 40,290 square feet in size on two levels above grade and 15,000 square feet in the basement. The project scope states that the new Central Library have the same or greater functions in general terms of amenities as the current facility with a minimum of 57 parking spaces and be approx. 47,000 square feet in size. It has a current approved project budget of \$76,224,900, which includes the cost of land for the site.

The new Central Library will include the following amenities:

- Study/work and collaboration spaces
- Children's area
- Event space
- Creation Zone
- Oakville Room (local history space)
- Teen area
- Administration/staff spaces
- Upper floor outdoor space
- Children's outdoor space
- Used bookstore and/or café space

In June 2024, the architecture firm of Perkins & Will, in partnership with Smoke Architecture, was retained by the Town of Oakville for the detailed design of the new Central Library.

The project started with a comprehensive public engagement process including dedicated consultation with the Indigenous community. This initial public engagement portion for the New Central Library ran from September to December 2024.

Engagement Overview and Results

Extensive pre-design engagement was undertaken between September and December 2024 and produced clear, consistent direction from residents, library users, community organizations, youth, library staff, donors, and Indigenous community members regarding expectations and aspirations for the new Central Library.

More than 1,000 survey responses, along with public open houses, focus groups, stakeholder workshops, and dedicated Indigenous engagement sessions, show strong public enthusiasm for a renewed Central Library and a shared desire for a facility that acts as a civic landmark downtown. Participants emphasized the importance of honouring the heritage character of the former post office while

reimagining the site to better connect with Sixteen Mile Creek and Town Square to create an inviting public presence.

Across engagement activities, the strongest program priorities were a significantly expanded children's area, improved and dedicated youth spaces, and flexible community rooms that support meetings, cultural events, and indigenous gatherings. Respondents also highlighted the value of strong indoor-outdoor connections, including terraces, seating areas, and outdoor programming zones that help the library function as an active community destination. Sustainability, natural materials, improved accessibility, and opportunities for café/food service were also regularly cited.

Indigenous engagement identified design and programming elements that support Truth and Reconciliation commitments and must be embedded early in project development. These include space for ceremony, gathering areas shaped by Indigenous teachings, water-related interpretive elements, opportunities for Indigenous art and storytelling.

Heritage Designation

193 Church St. is included in the Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District (HCD), which was approved by council on March 9, 2013. The area is predominantly recognized for its nineteenth and twentieth century building stock, the commercial streetscape of Lakeshore Road East, and its proximity to the Sixteen Mile Creek and Oakville Harbour.

The Post Office building is listed on the Town of Oakville's heritage register, and of most significant interest are the public-facing elevations on Church and George Streets.

Structural Review

An initial concept was created and reviewed by OPL/Town staff and structural project partners. Concerns were flagged over whether the current building structure could accommodate the load requirements of a public library as well as the addition of a third floor. The design was paused pending a full structural review of the post office, which was completed in April 2025. The report highlighted several issues with the existing building, including its inability to support the load requirements of the public library and the addition of a 3rd floor without significant reinforcement work. Additionally, the basement of the existing building would also require extensive modifications to accommodate any parking including dealing with a high-water table.

Given the challenges identified from the structural review, Oakville Town Council was presented with 3 concept options to review as well as a proposed change in scope for on-site parking for the project.

Option 1 – Full Façade Retained

Option 1 provides a conservative approach centered on fully preserving the Post Office’s existing façades along Church Street, George Street, and the laneway. While this option maintains strong alignment with heritage objectives and introduces several appealing features—such as a northside timber addition, outdoor public space, below grade parking for 57 vehicles, and terraces with river and downtown views—the design is constrained by the existing building footprint and structural constraints noted above. These limitations reduce flexibility for interior programming and may restrict the Library’s ability to accommodate future service and space needs.

Option 2 – Partial Façade Retained

Option 2 offers the strongest balance between heritage preservation, design flexibility, and long-term functionality. By retaining the key heritage facades and structural bays along George Street and the laneway while selectively reconstructing three central bays with a modern timber structure, this option achieves both architectural continuity and significant improvements in usable interior space. The design supports 57 below grade parking spaces, a northside ground floor addition, and a new third story that expands program capacity without compromising heritage character. The inclusion of a prominent Church Street entry plaza creates a highly visible and welcoming presence, while multiple outdoor public spaces—including a grade level plaza and second floor river terrace—strengthen community connection and support a wide range of programming. Overall, Option 2 delivers the most adaptable, future ready layout and the strongest integration of heritage, access, and public realm objectives.

Option 3 – New Building

Option 3 proposes the full demolition of the Post Office building and construction of a completely new three-storey timber facility. While this option maximizes design freedom, it eliminates the heritage asset entirely and results in the highest level of cost, disruption, and schedule risk. The proposal includes an at grade entry plaza and outdoor spaces with river and city views, as well as a single level of underground parking; however, these benefits are offset by the need for full site clearance, environmental and demolition considerations, and a longer construction timeline. Additionally, the loss of the heritage structure significantly reduces the project’s cultural and historical value, making this option the least aligned with community feedback emphasizing preservation and downtown identity.

Parking Alternative

In parallel with assessing onsite parking across all three design options, the project team also examined an alternative parking solution to accommodate not only the library but other downtown parking needs. The town is completing a study on downtown land management and parking allocation, and draft findings indicate an opportunity to re-focus parking capacity closer to the Lakeshore corridor, while potentially re-purposing more distant parking lots for alternative land uses. In

addition, the future demand for parking related to downtown growth and the planned Downtown Cultural Hub provides an opportunity to address a parking solution that not only meets the needs of the new central library but the future and current needs of downtown Oakville.

Preliminary work, including the findings from a 2015 council report that identified Lot 2 as a potential location for a downtown parking structure - shows that building a separate parking facility offers much better value than placing underground parking directly beneath the new library. A standalone structure is typically more cost effective, easier to design and construct, and avoids adding complexity and risk to the Central Library site. It would also provide more flexibility to support long-term parking needs across the entire downtown.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

On February 23, 2026, Oakville Council approved that That Option 2 – Partial Façade Retained be selected as the preferred option for further development for the proposed new Central Library, based on its superior balance of heritage preservation, design flexibility, program capacity, and long-term operational value and that onsite parking be removed from the proposed OPL Central Library project.

Following those decisions, OPL and Facilities Services regrouped with Perkins&Will to restart the project and make the necessary adjustments to the project plan and option 2 concept. Since then, Perkins&Will have been working to confirm a high-level space breakdown-based option 2 and develop a fulsome slate of exterior concept drawings. These drawings and the interior space breakdown will be presented to the OPL board at the April 16th board meeting.

Following the presentation of the full concepts, OPL will re-engage public and indigenous consultation to validate that the information gathered in Fall 2024, assuring that it aligns with the proposed concept from the public's perspective. To do this, OPL will:

- host an Open House on April 21 from 6-8 at Central Branch to present the images to the community.
- release a short survey to reach a wider audience
- re-engage the established indigenous consultation group with the support of Smoke Architecture.

An overview of the resulting feedback and any corresponding impacts will be presented to the OPL Board at the May 21 board meeting.

Prepared and submitted by:
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