

## Amid rising user rates, Library could have to make tough decisions without inflationary boost

Amid a surge in users, the Aurora Public Library could have to make some tough decisions if they do not get a financial boost due to inflation in the Town's 2026 Municipal Budget.

Jodi Marr, CAO of the Aurora Public Library (APL), made the Library's case at last week's Budget Meeting where she said the APL continues to exceed expectations, reaching new milestones in community use, and participation.

A well-used Library demonstrates the value we provide to residents and reflects a community that is connected, supported, and evolving together," she said. "APL is busier than ever, but that success also brings with it financial pressures. Our cost for vendors, technology, and program supplies continues to rise and we are doing more than ever by expanding our services with partners beyond our Library's walls. Inflation compounds this challenge and a busier environment brings more complex situations for staff to manage. We are focused on supporting our team and making sure we have the right resources and safeguards in place to protect both the Library and the municipality.

Despite these pressures, we continue to manage resources responsibly so every investment delivers strong value to the community. Aurora Public Library remains deeply committed to accessibility and service excellence. Over the past four years, APL has followed a disciplined, sustainable budgeting approach aligned with the Town's Multi-Year Plan. For 2026, the final year of this cycle, we are asking to maintain the planned 2.0 per cent operating increase, which works out to only a 0.8 per cent net levy impact after the Town's 1.2 per cent assessment growth or \$33,500 over last year.

No increase, she noted, would lead to a 1.2 per cent cut, "undermining the stability" of the multi-year plan.

"Public libraries are not luxuries; they are essential community infrastructure, as vital as roads or water systems," said Marr. "Libraries put people first, providing equitable access to information, technology, and lifelong learning, bridging the gap between those with resources and those without. Our history shows that Aurora has been a community that understands this principle and wants to support growth, learning, and connection for everyone who calls Aurora home."

The Aurora Public Library has served Aurora residents in various forms for more than 165 years and continues to evolve to meet the needs of a growing community. In addition to the books on shelves and the computers on desks, they have expanded to include a "Library of Things," where card-holders can borrow everything from camping equipment to small appliances for a short period of time, allowing residents to save money. Community partnerships continue to flourish, expanding programming for youth, adults, seniors, and newcomers, while the new kiosk at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex launched earlier this year has allowed them to expand their reach into Aurora's northeast.

While many of these initiatives come at a cost, Marr said they come with a significant return on investment.

Numbers derived through VOLT "the Valuing Ontario Public Libraries Toolkit" challenge "misconceptions about free services by quantifying the invisible social and economic impact of the public library," she said.

"Of the N6 libraries, Aurora Public Library offers the most open hours at a single location. But we are not just open, we are continuously delivering service with a high value of impact to our community," said Marr. "Based on 2024 service and usage data, Aurora Public Library delivers an estimated \$2,282 in community value for every hour it is open. This translates to over \$150,000 in value generated each week through programs, services, technology access, space usage, and community engagement.

"The VOLT framework measures Aurora Public Library's community impact across seven connected domains that together show how libraries strengthen every part of community life. It makes the impact we had visible and measurable. In 2024, Aurora Public Library generated a 392% return on our operational investment. With rising engagement in 2025, that value will continue to grow.

This interconnectivity is reflected in our key projects for 2025, like the SARC Browse and Borrow Book Kiosk.

While the VOLT demonstrates why that activity matters, linking library use directly to social and economic impact, the steady rise in library visits show that we are not just busier, but more essential. Residents are using the library to fill a gap, be it financial or otherwise. In 2025, Aurora Public Library is projected to reach its highest ever in-person visits with 412,000, a 30% increase over in 2024 and a 57% increase over our pre-pandemic record. Visits have rebounded from approximately 102,000 in 2022 to over 315,000 in 2024, a 208% increase in just two years.

Quarterly averages now exceed 90,000 visits, showing consistent year-round engagement. This growth highlights the Library's strong return on investment and reaffirms its role as an essential part of our Town.

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