

Library intends to focus on expanding programs and diversity over next four years

By Rob Paul

The Caledon Public Library (CPL) has unveiled its new strategic plan that charts the future growth of the library and services over the next four years.

CPL unveiled the plan ? titled Building the Bridge to Possibilities ? to Caledon Town Council at its July 6 meeting

Colleen Lipp, CEO/Chief Librarian and Janet Manning, Chair of the Caledon Public Library Board presented the plan that, according to Lipp, ?confirms the Library's commitment to work with Council, community partners and residents to guide the future of library spaces and services.?

?The plan is the product of community surveys and engagement of residents, staff and key stakeholders to clarify community needs and confirm municipal priorities,? said Janet Manning. ?Designed to be a thoughtful, proactive and achievable road map for the next four years, it will ensure our efforts to serve Caledon can change, grow and evolve in tandem with residents' needs, community priorities, enhanced technologies and shifts in public library services.?

With a mission for Caledon Public Library to empower community connections, spark innovation and creativity, and energize the transfer of knowledge, it lays out four goals that will be the key priorities for CPL over the next several years: grow and innovate; respond to community needs; celebrate culture and inclusion; demonstrate its value.

?This new strategic plan is proof not only of Caledon Public Library's commitment to providing the best in library service, but of a dedicated Library Board and Staff becoming our vision to be the heart of our community ? building and connecting a thriving, engaged, and informed Caledon? said Lipp. ?We invite all of Caledon to join us in making that happen.?

The CPL plan will direct the work of the board and staff through to the end of 2024 and was developed over the last year to ensure that the identified priorities and objectives would be accomplished over the next four years.

?Though we certainly didn't anticipate we'd be undertaking a new plan in the midst of a global pandemic, we really took the time to ensure that the plan took into account the current context as a result of COVID-19 and the anticipated long-term impact on library services, as well as the role that the library can play in supporting Caledon's recovery in the years ahead. Caledon's growth and the ongoing depth of library services in the public sector were also key contextual factors. It was very important to us that this be a true community-led plan. A great deal of work was done to engage with those who work, live, and learn in Caledon.?

The vision of the plan is to be the heart of the community ? building and connecting a thriving, engaged, and informed Caledon.

?It's a broad and ambitious vision that looks beyond the future of just the library,? Lipp said. ?It envisions a Caledon where all members of the community can benefit from CPL resources, services, and spaces. And how do we achieve that vision? Well, our mission is to empower community connections, spark innovation and creativity, and energize the transfer of knowledge.?

With Caledon growing, CPL is committed to exploring new opportunities and creative solutions for expanding services and spaces. Under the grow and innovate pillar of the plan, it will be developing innovation and creativity spaces in partnership with the Town, businesses, and community partners.

It will be enhancing efforts to bridge the digital divide by investing in technologies for exploration, learning, connection, and creativity and invest in digital resources and expand the virtual branch experiences while ensuring the library has the staff capacity to meet the needs of Caledon while it grows.

?Much of the work to grow and innovate is already under way or will begin shortly,? said Lipp. ?This includes the renovations of the Albion-Bolton branch.?

To help respond to community needs, CPL will focus on helping in Caledon's COVID-19 recovery as well as eliminating barriers to library access while engaging with community members to gain insight into their needs with an emphasis on spaces, services, and programs for teens and older adults. CPL has identified these two demographics as the most isolated during the pandemic.

One of CPL's top priorities is having something to offer every member of the Caledon community and that's why they want to help cultivate a culture of collaboration by contributing to shared priorities to improve community vitality and reduce isolation.

To tie into the recovery of Caledon, CPL will also be expanding series and supports to local businesses and entrepreneurs as they try to bounce back from the impacts of COVID.

Something CPL staff has heard through community engagement is the dissatisfaction with the online catalog being offered and will be working to expand it going forward.

?We'll be introducing a new online catalog experience and the implementation team met (July 6) to start the project and the new service will be up and running by January,? said Lipp.

Culture and inclusion have always been a key component with CPL, but the library staff hopes to do more by increasing accessibility to all and by having a collection of resources that represent all voices. They also will be striving for the board and staff to reflect the diverse community they serve in Caledon.

As a key cultural intuition, they plan to do more to honour Caledon's heritage, environment, and local history and work to lead the growth of arts and culture in Caledon. To do this, they will focus support on Caledon's creative talent and cultural economy by showcasing local authors, artists, performers, and makers.

The final goal of the plan is to demonstrate the value of CPL to the community by raising awareness of the need for the libraries in the community with the resources and services they provide while growing engagement with those who don't necessarily take advantage of what they offer.

CPL will also explore opportunities with other community organizations and encourage more investment into the library by expanding services beyond the branches.

To know the plan is working, Lipp and staff have identified a few factors to track: increased library memberships; more demand for services; technologies and innovations are embraced and adopted; increase in funds raised through donations, grants, and sponsorship; a more inclusive and diverse board and staff; and increased engagement from customers.

?These are the possibilities we intend to realize over the next four years,? said Lipp.