Hamilton Public Library

Final Report on 2025 (2nd Review)

Date February 18, 2026

To Chair and Members of the Hamilton Public Library Board

From Paul Takala, CEO and Chief Librarian

Introduction

Each year, the Library Board issues a letter to provide Staff with updates and context for the year ahead. With Strategic Plans normally approved every four years, the letter offers a chance to reflect on the current opportunities and challenges. The Board approved the current Strategic Plan[i] in May 2023 and the 2025 Direction[i] was approved in February 2025.

The pandemic, the cyber disruption and the Council-declared crises have impacted on our operations and business planning processes. In 2025, we focused on staff and organizational resilience, as we continued to deliver and advance public library service. Given the collective challenges Hamiltonians have experienced over the last 5 years, we know the importance of advancing social cohesion and belonging by providing positive shared community spaces and experiences available to everyone. This year, as new economic uncertainty emerged from problems with key trading relationships, we have seen a material change in government fiscal priorities. Staff continued to work with the Library Board on ensuring we are effectively adapting to changing circumstances. Here is a high-level summary of major developments.

Library Services

This year, we focused on maintaining existing library service hours and study halls. We continued to grow library programs within existing capacity and worked with aligned partners to advance shared goals sustainably. Our focus on enhancing effectiveness and resiliency in 2025 looked at how Library Members interact with us when using our

services. As an organization, we remain committed to ensuring that the services and technology we deploy are Useful (solve a problem, advance a goal), are Usable (simple, intuitive, conform to standards) and Used (people utilize it).

We continued to see healthy growth in memberships with over 195,000 active cardholders representing 33% of our service population. In several areas, we saw continued recovery in usage from the 2024 cyber disruption. Technology usage grew, as did program attendance. Circulation of both physical and digital formats showed growth. Programs continued to be positively embraced by the community members, as staff continue to mature our program and partnership activities

Effectiveness and Resiliency

As a public library, our mandate and strategic direction challenge us to meet individuals, families and the community's current challenges. This means that while our core mission and values as a library do not change, what services we deliver and how we deliver them continue to evolve over time. To continue advancing City priorities and effectively provide library services, we need to dedicate significant focus and effort in 2025 to strengthening our organizational capacity. As we focus on improving our effectiveness as a public library, we will continue to maintain a multi-faceted approach to enhancing safety and security in our spaces, consistent with our values. We will continue to engage with trusted partners to bring support to our spaces based on need.

Information Technology Infrastructure

In 2025, we continued our collaboration with the City to advance the segregation of our network infrastructure. Our focus has been on enhancing IT security, improving service performance, and upgrading our infrastructure to meet modern IT standards. As we continued to rely on the City's enterprise financial and human resources systems, staff actively supported the City's implementation efforts.

In 2025, the Digital Technology Department made substantial progress on modernizing HPL's IT environment and improving operational efficiency. The out-of-date Cisco Wi-Fi system has been replaced with new Aruba Access Points, upgrading connectivity from Wi-Fi 3 to Wi-Fi 5/6 for faster, more reliable service. Phase one of the staff computing upgrades introduced 50 new Windows and 11 laptops. Phase two, which includes over 200 desktops and laptops, was initiated in December.

Cost optimization and digital service improvements remained key priorities. A comprehensive audit of cell phones and MiFi data plans eliminated unnecessary lines, reducing some recurring expenses. Usage analysis of self-check and RFID pads enabled a 25% reduction in devices, lowering maintenance costs for the upcoming budget cycle. The intranet SharePoint project reached 95% completion, creating a modern staff communication portal, while Phase One of the HPL.ca website project focused on content cleanup and updates. Procurement for the public website redesign is underway, with development scheduled to begin upon completion of that process.

Service Planning and Monitoring

To deliver excellent service to our community and to make smart investments in existing and new facilities, we must leverage data-driven decision-making. As we upgrade our systems for improved performance and security, it's crucial to implement robust tracking mechanisms and generate meaningful metrics. These metrics should be actively monitored by management and effectively reported to the Library Board and funders.

Staff commenced a full review of the data and metrics generated by each of our systems. The goal is to evaluate this and determine if we should generate other metrics to help us monitor system performance or better understand usage. We are also looking into better understanding and reporting on children's use of the Library. As we make changes to address challenges, it will be important to track our progress or lack thereof.

HPL participated in the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) **Social Impact Study**. The study replicated the methodology used successfully by the Toronto Public Library. The first stage of the study, an online survey, took place in June. The second stage was conducted in late summer/autumn and involved follow-up interviews. As one of the libraries sponsoring the study, along with CULC, we will receive both the national study results and a report focused on HPL. We look forward to reporting back to the Library Board in early 2026.

Improving Workflows and Processes

With all the changes over the last several years, often driven by external factors, we need to work with Library staff to ensure processes and systems are optimized. Ensuring the tasks/processes we engage in add value to community members is an important component of increasing our impact. Staff learning and development has been a major focus of HPL for years. We need to actively engage staff in reviewing processes and procedures, ensuring that services and technology are optimized so staff can focus on program delivery and supporting library members.

2025 saw the launch of our new Service Excellence Framework, which clarified our commitment to delivering reliable and equitable service, connecting people to learning and community. The framework is grounded in four core pillars that define how we serve the public and ensure our services are consistently high quality and community-centred. Our long-term goal remains to position HPL as a lifelong presence in the lives of Hamilton residents.

Staff have been assessing current public service needs at our information desks. Staff and management have been completing surveys to assess the types of questions received and services requested. Some staffing realignment has occurred to ensure better service. Work is underway to launch a pilot service at Central and Barton, helping Members fill out government forms. Also, Social Workers will provide staff training on helping members who need help filling out government forms and navigating government services. Barton Library will pilot a version of the Community Partners

Desk, with the same goal of more effectively supporting people's access to services offered by partners.

In alignment with our focus on enhancing effectiveness and resiliency, we completed a survey across our four rural locations to better understand community needs for extended access. We also surveyed members about after-hours study hall needs. We have developed an implementation plan to reinstate replacement fees in a clear, fair and equitable way.

The Mobile Library and Courier Services (MLCS) Department launched a revised Bookmobile Service Schedule on May 3. This update introduced three new high-potential stops—Discovery Centre, Mohawk Gardens Apartments, and Prince of Wales Elementary School—while retiring three underperforming locations. Fourteen schedule adjustments were also made, including extended visits to our top-performing sites: Rosedale, Stinson and Stoney Creek Arena. The changes reduced weekly travel by 50 kilometres, easing fleet strain and enabling more sustainable service delivery. The new schedule also includes placeholders for future outreach and school visits, supporting our commitment to Useful, Usable, and Used services.

In June 2025, HPL launched an online system for members to book meeting rooms, streamlining access and reducing staff workload. Feedback was immediately positive. This method also allows for better tracking of meeting room usage. In September 2025, the service expanded with a pilot at Central and Valley Park branches, allowing existing HPL partners to request larger meeting and program spaces through the same portal, subject to Staff approval. The pilot will continue as processes are refined, with full rollout planned for Q1 2026.

Collective Wellness

As a public library, our mandate and strategic direction challenge us to meet the current challenges of individuals, families and the community. This means that while our core mission and values as a library do not change, what services we deliver and how we

deliver them continue to evolve over time. To continue advancing City priorities and effectively provide library service, we dedicated significant focus and effort in 2025 on strengthening our organizational capacity. As we focused on improving our effectiveness as a public library, we continued to maintain and advance a multi-faceted approach to improving safety and security in our spaces, consistent with our values. We continued to engage trusted partners to provide support for our spaces.

In July, we agreed and ratified a new four-year Collective Agreement with CUPE 932. Each side was able to get several positive additions to the agreement. For the Employer, the first five Sundays starting in January 2028 will be paid at straight time. For the Union, part-time staff enhancements were a major focus. Part-time staff received enhancements to vacation and paid sick time, among other key benefits. The negotiations were successful and a testament to the longstanding positive labour relations with CUPE Local 932.

Our research partnership with McMaster University on Emotional Labour in Public Libraries moved to its next phase, a national study. *Emotional Resilience in Libraries: Tools for the Modern Workplace* — funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The national study continued to examine the emotional labour experiences of frontline library work and deliver practical, research-informed tools to promote emotional resilience and well-being. Results of the study will be released in early 2026.

To meet evolving community needs and strengthen organizational capacity, Home Library Service (HLS) and Courier expanded outreach in 2025 to include an 18th long-term care facility, bringing service to 18 sites across Hamilton. This growth reinforces our commitment to accessible, responsive library service delivery, and the expanded program is going well.

To advance social cohesion and belonging, we introduced a new role within our organization called Community Connector. This role has been designed to foster

positive experiences by providing more focused customer engagement while helping them navigate the services the library has to offer in a meaningful way. The two new HPL Community Connectors roles are currently being recruited for. These are HPL staff positions requiring social service education and hands-on experience.

Connectors are trained in library policies and procedures, understand the needs of vulnerable populations and work closely with Information Staff to maintain a strong presence in public spaces. Their role will help reduce dependency on third-party security personnel by focusing on de-escalation and proactive engagement.
The Community Connectors will work together with HPL Staff, Peer Support and Social workers. Our collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Hamilton continues through the Peer Support Worker program. We are working on gathering data from this initiative to better understand its impact and inform future decisions.

In 2025, we completed a successful pilot of washroom sensors to enhance safety, alerting us in cases of lack of movement or substance detection. We are currently deploying them to the other washrooms at Central, along with buzz locks to better control access. Other measures included an enhanced incident reporting tool to improve accuracy in trending and reporting. The Step system, introduced in 2024, continued to be used in 2025 to support members and staff when there is an increase in incidents.

Finance and Financial Reporting

Our Finance Department continues to work with the City on the implementation of new financial systems. Internally, a lot of work has been done to get us ready to complete the 2023 and 2024 audits. The Finance Department has implemented internal controls, allowing us to track and monitor all the expenses we incur. At the June Board meeting, the unaudited 2024 numbers will be reported, and we look forward to continuing the process of restoring regular financial reporting to the Board in the coming months.

The Finance Office continued to work with the City of Hamilton on implementing a paperless accounts payable system. The implementation of this system is still in its early stages, but it has already reduced the number of manual processes for this task. HPL's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) continued to closely monitor and approve all vendor invoices. This ensured costs are controlled and there is a group governance of costs and priorities.

The Finance Office continued to report financial data by manually merging various financial records together to provide Budget Variance Reports (BVR). The data compiled is a combination of payroll data, NetSuite transactions, Staples transactions and journal entries for the selected period. This information enabled each manager to compare actual costs vs budget costs for the selected period. As we close the year, HPL remained dependent on the City for its financial software and until full software implementation is conducted at the City level, HPL will continue to manage its financial data manually, to the best of its ability.

The adoption of the new Capital Plan for 2026 reduced future capital cost requirements for the next 10 years by $44.5M. Closer monitoring of capital spending will be needed to ensure that all approved capital dollars requested for the specified periods are managed and executed in a timely manner.

Starting in October, we reintroduced replacement fees on materials overdue 28 days or more. While HPL remains fine free, replacement fees have returned to encourage members to bring back their materials and ensure we have a plentiful collection for the community to enjoy. Before implementing replacement fees, more than 40,000 long-overdue items (some dating back 4 years), were removed from member accounts. This purge allows members with previously long-overdue items to borrow materials again. Since items began aging to Lost and fees began appearing in member accounts as of November 2, 3,792 items were set to lost and 3,481 items that were previously lost were returned. Of the items that aged to lost since implementation, 1,107 or 30% have already been returned.

Programs and Partnerships

Library-led programs for people of all ages are in high demand. Within existing capacity, we will continue to offer programs that provide people with positive learning and community activity. We will continue to work with partners to complement our library-led programs and to connect residents with services and support. HPL will continue to strive to animate our spaces with shared learning opportunities and free access to performances.

HPL continued to see growth in programming and attendance this year, achieving record-breaking numbers in 2025 with over 13,500 programs delivered and more than 273,000 attendees by year's end.

HPL’s commitment to cultural and literary enrichment was reflected in the continued success of key initiatives. In collaboration with McMaster University, Mohawk College, and the gritLIT Readers & Writers Festival, Hamilton Reads fosters a vibrant literary culture through author visits, community discussions, and workshops. Similarly, Hamilton Public Library’s Concert Series, delivered in partnership with the Hamilton Musicians’ Guild, continued to grow, offering enriching musical experiences across multiple branches.

Strategic partnerships extend to essential services as well. Annual Tax Clinics, delivered with McMaster University’s CVITP volunteers and the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC), returned over $2.4 million to local families this year. The Mabel Pugh Taylor Writer-in-Residence, also supported by McMaster University, nurtures local writing talent through workshops and mentorship.

In partnership with Mohawk College and Neighbour to Neighbour, HPL launched tandem programming at Terryberry in the fall, testing a new education model where student caregivers learn together in the same space. It combines academic support for

the student with developmental activities for the child, reducing barriers for caregivers and promoting shared learning experiences.

From May to October, the Mobile Library and Courier Service launched children's programming on the Bookmobile, with outdoor storytimes and StoryWalks piloted at the Discovery Centre. This initiative was designed to support underserved areas and provide more targeted and responsive programming along with borrowing and registration services.

At a broader level, programming spanned educational workshops, vibrant live music concerts, cultural celebrations, and engaging literary events, serving diverse community interests and needs. Initiatives such as the Newcomer English Conversation Club, Indigenous Storytelling series, and special events for Black History Month reflected HPL's commitment to fostering inclusive and supportive community environments. Large events continued to be a draw for our community, including the Annual Seedy Saturday for garden enthusiasts and Steel Town Love – A Festival for Romance Readers and Writers which celebrates the romance genre.

The consistently high demand for programs and enthusiastic community participation underscore the library's pivotal role as a space for lifelong learning, connection, and cultural enrichment, from our youngest learners to all ages.

Children's Programming

Hamilton Public Library's strategic focus strongly emphasizes youth activity and engagement, with targeted initiatives and investments aimed at fostering early literacy, expanding access to materials, and creating welcoming, interactive spaces for children and youth. Hamilton Public Library has been reviewing and updating programming resources system-wide, with particular attention to programming kits and the introduction of self-directed play activity equipment within children's departments. These enhancements support interactive learning, early literacy, and unstructured play, creating environments where children thrive and families feel welcome.

There is increased funding allocation toward children's and youth collections, ensuring that materials remain current, inclusive, and engaging. The expansion of express collections and the introduction of non-traditional collections that are youth-focused are also priorities, with efforts to improve accessibility and ensure that high-demand titles and resources for younger readers are readily available. The momentum of previous years continued in 2025, with a significant number of programs focused on children and youth. Data indicates continued strong attendance, demonstrating the community's enthusiasm and demand for high-quality, family-focused experiences. Campaigns that launched in 2025, such as the "1000 Books Before Kindergarten," remain central, promoting early literacy and regular library use from a young age.

HPL has deepened its collaboration with key partners to better engage youth. Notably, the library card campaign with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) was made accessible to all school-aged children through the Parent Portal, with the goal of connecting families to HPL library card sign-up and resources.

In 2025, HPL expanded its digital literacy initiatives through strategic partnerships and community engagement. Working with CityLab and Redeemer University, we began developing strategies to connect small businesses with HPL Makerspaces to foster and entrepreneurship. Our collaboration with McMaster University, led by Dr. Brian Detlor, delivered the Dementia-Friendly Tablet Training Series, providing hands-on technology education for older adults and caregivers while contributing to research on effective digital literacy practices.

A major highlight was the first-ever Makerfest in November, attracting over 500 attendees for workshops, demonstrations, and vendor showcases. Combined with staff-led training sessions and technology security awareness programs, these efforts strengthened community digital skills and positioned HPL as a leader in digital learning and innovation.

Bookmobile

Through strategic partnerships and creative use of existing resources, we expanded community engagement in 2025. Highlights included launching a new Bookmobile stop at the Discovery Centre, as noted, introducing weekly visits to Beyond the Bell programs at local schools, and participating in the City's Touch a Truck event, where over 1,100 residents engaged with library services. Additionally, surplus DVDs from Community Collections were added to Home Library Service deliveries, delighting residents in long-term care. These efforts reflect our commitment to animating spaces with meaningful, accessible programming and strengthening community connections through collaboration.

In late 2025, Hamilton Public Library secured $500,000 in funding from the City's Climate Change Reserve, a significant milestone that underscores the Library's commitment to environmental leadership. This funding, combined with Library capital reserves, will support the procurement of two new electric Bookmobiles in 2026. The investment aligns with HPL's strategic focus on sustainability and long-term planning, reducing emissions while ensuring continued access to library services across all communities. This initiative demonstrates how thoughtful infrastructure renewal can advance both service equity and climate action goals.

Facilities Master Plan and Sustainability

In 2025, we will focus on working with the Library Board to update our Facilities Master Plan to guide us to a more sustainable and impactful future. That will include exploring past successes, current trends, and future uncertainties. Internally, a new staff Sustainability Steering Committee has been established and will begin developing a framework to integrate sustainability into our operations more systematically. Additionally, we will continue to work on the Bookmobile RFP, with plans to go to market in the last quarter of 2025. Collaborating closely with City Fleet, we are exploring more sustainable options for replacing our aging bookmobiles,

including the possibility of electric or partially electric vehicles to better serve our communities.

In 2025, HPL made progress on the updated Facilities Master Plan. Although work has taken longer than anticipated, the team has completed a deeper analysis of system-wide needs, community trends, sustainability considerations, and long-term lifecycle planning. This principle-based approach continues to guide our assessment of future investments, ensuring a balance among financial responsibility, service impact and environmental performance. A draft framework is included to support consistent, evidence-based decision-making related to our facility planning. Internal engagement advanced with Managers from across the system contributing insights on building condition, service needs, and operational priorities. The project is on track to bring a full draft to the Library Board in Q1 2026.

As part of HPL's commitment to sustainability and community resilience, a newly formed staff-led Sustainability Steering Committee has developed a draft framework focused on Operations, Engagement, and Facilities—aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the City of Hamilton's Climate Action Strategy. This framework and a draft Sustainability Statement were presented to the Board in September, with a full rollout planned for early 2026.

In 2025, HPL strengthened its commitment to a more sustainable and resilient future. Earlier this year, the Library Board approved HPL's sustainability statement, guiding the ongoing update to the Facilities Master Plan. This work is grounded in our three pillars, Operations, Engagement, and Facilities and informed by community needs, lifecycle planning, and a stronger sustainability lens on upcoming 2026 capital adjustments. A major achievement was securing **$500,000** from the **Climate Change Reserve**, alongside HPL's own investment, to support the procurement of two new electric bookmobiles in 2026. Work on the RFP continues with City Fleet to ensure alignment with citywide sustainability goals.

Internally, the Sustainability Steering Committee has begun laying out the foundation for system-wide adoption of sustainable practices. Managers have been introduced to the framework, and we are now exploring effective ways to communicate our efforts through internal channels, staff engagement opportunities, as well as learning and development. The Committee is also preparing expressions of interest to identify both branch and department champions who will help embed the three pillars into day-to-day practice, ensuring sustainability becomes an active, shared responsibility across HPL.

As part of its ongoing commitment to sustainability and responsible collection management, Hamilton Public Library partnered with Zoom Books earlier this year and launched an efficient and eco-friendly solution for removing withdrawn and surplus circulating library materials. The solution involves reselling suitable items through various channels and ethically recycling unsellable materials. In parallel, HPL will continue strengthening its community collection efforts by working with local partners to place gently used materials into community-based collections.

These initiatives ensure that withdrawn items in good condition can continue serving residents through schools, shelters, neighbourhood hubs, and other community spaces, maximizing the impact and reach of HPL's collections.

Together, these complementary strategies ensure that withdrawn materials are handled in a manner that supports environmental responsibility and extends the lifecycle of library resources.

Other Major Developments

CCBC Regional Collection

Launched this year, the Hamilton Public Library has made significant strides in providing public access to the Canadian Children's Book Centre (CCBC) Regional Collection. This unique archive comprises approximately 18,000 Canadian children's titles

published between 1976 and 2024, including works by renowned Canadian authors such as Robert Munsch, Gordon Korman, David A. Robertson and Kathy Stinson. HPL continues to prioritize this collection's careful curation and phased rollout to ensure discoverability, preservation, and long-term access. This initiative enhances public appreciation of Canadian children's literature and supports research, education and cultural engagement across generations.

Internet Archive Canada

Through the Internet Archive Canada initiative, Hamilton Public Library made progress in delivering unique local content to a global audience. HPL has digitized 602,727 pages from 3,209 items, including books and pamphlets from its Local History and Archives collections. These materials attract an average of 6,462 monthly users, demonstrating strong and growing interest in Hamilton’s rich historical record. Utilizing the Controlled Digital Lending (CDL) model, HPL can lend digitized items in a manner that mirrors traditional physical lending, ensuring responsible access while preserving original materials. Work continues to expand access to unique, local Hamilton content for discovery and use by communities both near and far.

Digital Asset Management System

HPL conducted a comprehensive review of its current legacy Digital Asset Management System (DAMS), which no longer meets evolving requirements for scalability, metadata management, user experience, and public access. A modern system is essential to support ongoing digitization efforts, ensure long-term digital preservation, and enhance the discoverability of collections. A new system has been identified that offers a robust, integrated approach to digital preservation. The selected platform supports automated preservation workflows, compliance with international standards, and policy-based asset management, ensuring the sustainability and integrity of digital collections over time.

The new solution also aligns with HPL's strategic direction to reduce reliance on internal technical resources by adopting a managed, externally hosted platform. This will shift

system maintenance and infrastructure responsibilities to the vendor, enabling staff to focus on curatorial priorities and enhancing internal workflows. The purchase and implementation of the new DAMS is anticipated to begin in Q1, 2026, laying the foundation for improved digital stewardship and expanded public access to Hamilton's unique historical resources.

Ahead of the launch of the new Digital Asset Management System (DAMS), HPL implemented an interim solution to support public access to historical image research. Over 15,000 digitized images with key metadata are now accessible through a dedicated web portal. While this is a temporary and simplified solution, it bridges the gap and ensures continued public access until the full DAMS is deployed.

ii https://granicus-azmop-peak.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/9267/MultiBusinessPlanReport2024-2ndReview.pdf

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[i] https://www.hpl.ca/sites/default/files/23-05-StrategicPlan_Approved.pdf