WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

Information ☐	Recommendation ×	Decision Request ☐	Councillor Activity ☐

To: WHRM Council

Submitted by: _____

Chrystal Remme, Councillor District 3

Date: March 11, 2025 Committee of the Whole

Subject*:* Supporting Libraries in Our Region

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Libraries Act, R.S., c. 254, s. 1, and associated provincial funding policies.

RECOMMENDATION or DECISION REQUEST

It is recommended for Committee of the Whole to recommend to Council …

to endorse the attached letter requesting a fair and equitable funding formula for the Annapolis Valley Regional Library system, to be sent to the Honourable Dave Ritcey, Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

BACKGROUND

Property ☐	Public Opinion ☐	Environment ☐	Social √	Economic √	Councillor Activity ☐

The Annapolis Valley Regional Library (AVRL) is facing some serious challenges, and unfortunately, those challenges are getting bigger. Over the past decade, provincial funding has only increased by 10%, which barely covers rising costs and inflation. As a result, the AVRL has had to make some tough decisions, including reducing staff and cutting back on programming. These cuts have led to more frequent closures, especially at the Hantsport Library, which has left residents concerned about whether they can continue to rely on the services they need.

The situation is about to get even harder. The province has already confirmed there won't be an increase in funding next year, and there's talk of cutting bridge funding that has been helping keep things afloat. With community needs growing and costs rising, it's becoming even harder for libraries to continue providing the services we all depend on.

DISCUSSION

Libraries are more than just places to borrow books—they are essential hubs for our community. They offer much-needed support, connection, and resources that residents rely on every day. In rural communities, where other services may be limited, libraries become the lifeline for many people.

For many of our residents, the library is their only access to computers and the internet, which are crucial for things like job searches, government services, and online education. Without this access, many people would be left behind in an increasingly digital world. As one resident put it, "The library is the only place I can go to look for a job."

In addition to providing access to technology, libraries offer a wide range of programs that support personal and professional growth. These programs—whether it's a children's reading group, book clubs, a workshop on financial literacy, or job search support—help people learn, connect, and build better lives. But with staff shortages and reduced funding, many of these programs have been cut in half, making it harder for residents to access the services they need.

Beyond just programs and resources, libraries are community spaces where people can gather, meet one another and feel a sense of belonging. In small towns, this sense of connection is incredibly important. The library is often where people go to connect with their neighbors, get involved, and feel supported. As one resident shared, "The library is my connection to the community."

Libraries are also an investment in our community's future. By offering free resources, supporting education, and encouraging lifelong learning, libraries have a positive impact on our local economy. People gain skills that can help them find jobs, support their families, and contribute to a thriving community.

But these services and programs can only continue if we ensure our libraries are properly funded. Right now, staffing shortages and a lack of resources are holding libraries back from offering the services that are so vital to our community. If we want to continue building strong, connected communities, we need to support our libraries with the funding they deserve.

NEXT STEPS

☐ Encourage Council to visit the Windsor and Hantsport Libraries to get a firsthand look at how they're running, what's working well, and where more support is needed.

☐ Advocate for more provincial funding, stressing how vital libraries are to the well-being, education, and equity of our communities.

☐ Support the letter calling for a fair and sustainable funding model for libraries.

☐ Look for ways to raise awareness about the importance of libraries and encourage residents to speak up and show their support.

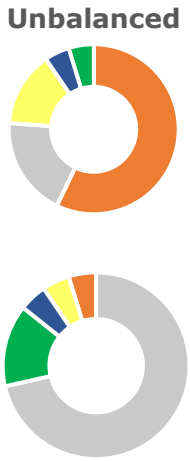
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

At this point, there are no immediate financial impacts for the Municipality. However, future budget discussions may need to consider how we can support libraries as part of our ongoing commitment to community growth and investment.

ATTACHMENTS

Letter to The Honourable Dave Ritcey, Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REVIEW



(For use if report is from a Councillor. CAO to provide additional comments on background, department/staff responsible and workload, budget, options, preferred strategy. State “Not Applicable” if report is from staff which already incorporates CAO review.)

Report Prepared by: _____
Chrystal Remme, Councillor District 3

Report Reviewed by: _____
Deanna Snair, Municipal Clerk

Report Approved by: _____
Mark Phiilips, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

January 29, 2025

The Honourable Dave Ritcey
Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
1741 Brunswick St., 3rd Floor
P.O. Box 456, STN Central
Halifax, NS B3J 2R5

Via email: MIN_CCTH@novascotia.ca

Dear Minister Ritcey,

Congratulations on your election win and on your important appointment to the Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage portfolio.

We are writing to you on behalf of our respective councils to request your department's finalization and implementation of a fair and equitable funding formula to support our library system.

On December 11, 2024, elected representatives of all member units of the Annapolis Valley Regional Library (AVRL) (the units from West Hants, Kings and Annapolis counties), met and received an impactful presentation on the state of the vital services provided by AVRL.

As a collective, we were duly impressed by the:

- significant growth in usage over the last three years
- amount and diversity in services being offered
- efficiency improvements being garnered through the creation of the Same Page provincial consortium of libraries and increased access to digital collections; and
- the large number of age groups and newcomers being served

We also heard tangible examples of how the AVRL branches are front and center in our communities, offering services such as rapid testing kits for COVID virus detection, and serving as a referral agency for vulnerable populations.

Unfortunately, as a collective we also heard and are dismayed by the:

- high turnover of staff and the present disparity between the current remuneration levels and a living wage
- unsustainable occurrences of deficit budgeting; and
- the resulting impact that these and other negative factors are having on the volume and reliability of services being offered by AVRL

Mr. Minister, we know you will agree that our province and region is presently in a state of unprecedented transition. We also believe, Mr. Minister that you will agree that many of these impacts couldn't have been planned for, but that our library system is integral in addressing the challenges and benefits our communities are facing.

Many of our municipalities are stepping up with significant capital improvements with respect to physical libraries. Creating modern and accessible libraries and community spaces has been and will continue to be a growing priority.

We believe that a refreshed funding formula to support a vibrant library system is an important part of the government's plan to grow the population of our province. We would

be most appreciative if you would action the vital work your government has been undertaking in modernizing the financial relationship.

Respectfully,

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c. The Honourable Tim Houston, Premier
Christopher Shore, Deputy Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
Stephanie Smith, Executive Director, Archives, Libraries and Museums, Dept of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
Lynn Somers, Director, Nova Scotia Provincial Library, Dept of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage