

Report to / Rapport au:

**Ottawa Public Library Board
Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa**

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SUBJECT: Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot

OBJET: Projet pilote de prêt de borne WiFi

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Ottawa Public Library Board approve waiving of fees associated with the lending of Wi-Fi hotspots for the pilot period, as further described in this report.

RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa approuve l'exonération des frais associés au prêt des bornes WiFi pendant la période du projet pilote, tel que décrit plus longuement dans le présent rapport.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the Public Libraries Act, RSO 1990, c.P.44, the Ottawa Public Library Board (the Board) has accountability for the full range of decisions affecting the organization. The Board uses a model that focuses Trustee attention on strategic elements, while delegating general supervision and operational direction to the CEO. Further, in accordance with Board policy OPLB-002 Delegation of Authority item #13, the Board is responsible to “set or change prices for merchandise or services.”

The purpose of this report is to seek Board approval to waive fees associated with the implementation of a Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending program for the duration of a pilot period, which will run until the end of 2018.

DISCUSSION

Since the advent of personal computers, public libraries have provided services to increase access to the internet via public PCs and Wi-Fi in branches. These services help to decrease the digital divide, which is the discrepancy that exists between people who have access to information and communication technologies and the benefits they provide compared to those who do not. The important role of the Ottawa Public Library (OPL) in addressing the digital divide has also been acknowledged in the City of Ottawa's Smart City 2.0 strategy¹.

More recently, libraries are exploring creative approaches to providing internet access to the communities they serve. One such service model being piloted and implemented across North America is Wi-Fi hotspot lending. A hotspot is a mobile wireless access point that is created by a dedicated hardware device. The hotspot contains a SIM card connected to a telecom provider's data network, and allows up to 15 personal devices to connect to the internet.

Canada's first model, at Kitchener Public Library, with a modest 10 devices, was announced in 2015². Since then, similar programs have been announced in public libraries in Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver, among others.

The majority of public libraries that have implemented a lending program have taken a general approach, with hotspots made available for lending to any library cardholder. A few libraries, including the Toronto Public Library (TPL) and, more recently, the Edmonton Public Library (EPL), have decided on a more targeted approach with a focus on lending to underserved communities. The OPL will adopt an approach similar to that of TPL, working with City partners (Ottawa Community Housing, and Recreation, Cultural and Facility Services) to identify people who might benefit the most from such a program (specifically residents receiving or earning a low income who do not have access to internet in their home).

¹ https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents.ottawa.ca/files/smart_city_strategy_en.pdf

² <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/kitchener-library-lends-portable-wifi-1.3258791>

Based on demographic data provided by Environics, staff have identified a number of neighbourhoods in Ottawa where 1 in 10 households do not have internet at home (e.g. Vanier, Lowertown, West Centretown). With a hotspot lending program, OPL will be taking some modest steps toward bridging this gap, demonstrating leadership by partnering with other community organizations and their stakeholders in addressing digital access and inclusion.

In terms of implementation, OPL has available 75 Wi-Fi hotspots for loan. The Wi-Fi hotspots will be bundled with a Chromebook, along with usage instructions and copies of OPL policies regarding acceptable use. The complete package will be available for a loan period of up to three months, with no renewals. OPL has identified four branches and two bookmobile stops as pick-up locations for the Wi-Fi hotspots, based on Environics data noted above. Working with City partners, the availability of the devices will be promoted to people without internet at home. Borrowers will be required to meet the following criteria for use:

- Active cardholder in good standing who sign the loan agreement, or new cardholder referred to OPL by community partner;
- Willing to answer a pre- and post-loan survey (in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot); and,
- Self-identify as not having internet access at home.

Recognizing that borrowers will be low-income, and given the technical capability to disable overdue hotspot devices, staff recommend the Board approve waiving of overdue fees associated with the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending program for the duration of the pilot. This will reduce barriers to the program and allow staff to focus the assessment of the pilot on device usage. Replacement fees for lost kits will be set to match the current Chromebook fees. After the pilot, staff will assess the fees component and will bring back to the Board as required.

A hotspot lending program is expected to serve as a stopgap measure and not a long-term solution to the digital access issue. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) recently mandated that the Internet is a basic

service³, so it can be reasonably expected that future funding initiatives for broadband will be made available through municipalities, making this type of program redundant.

Depending on the results of the pilot, staff will report back to the Board as part of the 2019 budget process.

CONSULTATION

OPL staff conducted a review of Wi-Fi hotspot lending programs at public libraries across Canada. Following the review, consultations with staff from various City of Ottawa departments led to the final approach, and proposed recommendation regarding waiving of fees for the pilot period.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications associated with this report are dependent on the quantity of borrowed devices which are not returned on time. To mitigate the incidence, staff will issue reminder notices at two-week, one-week, and four-days in advance of the due date.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

Technological implications have been considered in the development of this report, specifically regarding policies and procedures and lending parameters.

³ <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm>

BOARD PRIORITIES

The proposed aligns with the Ottawa Public Library values of Access & Inclusion, Informed Community, and Innovation, along with the Strategic Direction to strengthen and promote the Library's reach and value, specifically, to align Library services in support of community needs.

In addition, the Wi-Fi pilot aligns with the City of Ottawa's Smart Cities plan, the Government of Ontario's focus on digital inclusion as critical to civic participation, and to the new service objectives of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to recognize high-speed broadband internet as a basic telecommunications service and one that all Canadians are entitled to receive.

DISPOSITION

Upon approval of the recommendation, OPL will launch the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending program and report back on the pilot as necessary, as part of the 2019 budget process.