



## Report to County Council

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**From:** Brian Masschaele, Director of Community and Cultural Services

**Date:** January 28, 2025

**Subject:** Relocation of Aylmer Library Branch to the East Elgin Community Complex

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### Recommendation(s):

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THAT Elgin County Council endorses in principle the relocation of the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library to the East Elgin Community Complex; and,

THAT Aylmer Town Council be requested to endorse in principle the relocation of the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library to the East Elgin Community Complex; and,

THAT the Director of Community and Cultural Services report back to County Council regarding next steps in the process to accommodate the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library at the East Elgin Community Complex, including opportunities for public consultation; and,

THAT Aylmer Town Council's request "to establish a committee to advance the matter of a Greater Aylmer area Library" be received and filed based on the information contained in the January 28, 2025 report titled "Relocation of Aylmer Library to the East Elgin Community Complex" from the Director of Community and Cultural Services; and,

THAT copies of this report be circulated to the Councils of the Town of Aylmer and Township of Malahide.

### Introduction:

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Aylmer Town Council is requesting that Elgin County Council establish a committee to advance the matter of the Aylmer Library. Recently, the Board of Directors of the East Elgin Community Complex (EECC) also approved direction to approach Elgin County Council and County staff about a possible relocation of the Aylmer Library to the Complex. This report considers both requests and recommends that a consultation process begin with the EECC Board of Directors, the Town of Aylmer and library stakeholders for the potential relocation of the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library to the Complex.

## Background and Discussion:

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County Council passed the following recommendation at the December 12, 2024 meeting in response to correspondence received from the Council of the Town of Aylmer as attached “to establish a committee to advance the matter of a Greater Aylmer area Library”:

*Moved by: Councillor Couckuyt*

*Seconded by: Deputy Warden Ketchabaw*

*RESOLVED THAT Council direct the Director of Community and Cultural Services to bring forward a report regarding the Town of Aylmer's request to establish a committee to advance the matter of the Aylmer Library.*

*Motion Carried.*

This report is in response to this staff direction. In the interim, the Board of Directors of the EECC has expressed interest in offering space at the Complex for the purposes of hosting the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library. Prior to considering both requests, it is important to re-affirm County Council’s role as the sole governing authority for the Elgin County Library system and the options that County Council has available in terms of meeting space needs for the Aylmer branch.

### County Council’s Role as Governing Authority for Elgin County Library

The report from the Chief Administrative Officer of the Town of Aylmer dated November 1st, 2024 and his ensuing delegation to Elgin County Council on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024 repeatedly referenced the “Elgin County Public Library Board” as the governing authority for the Elgin County Library system. To clarify, such a board **does not exist**. The former board was dissolved through legislation proclaimed January 1, 1986 as attached. Also attached are the comments that formed the County’s delegation on this matter at the time, the contents of which remain valid in terms of the utility and administrative challenges of a separate library board. For nearly forty years, the former board’s authority has been vested with Elgin County Council under the terms of the *Public Libraries Act* (R.S.O. 1990, c. P.44) as then and now constituted. Any deliberate reference to the former board, and comments about ways that such a separately constituted board could be more effective in library governance as contained in the Town CAO’s report, is beyond the Town’s jurisdiction and only serves to confuse the model of governance that Elgin County Council has effectively established for nearly forty years.

As the sole governing authority for the Elgin County Library system under the *Public Libraries Act*, County Council does have the ability to enter into agreements to directly own or lease facilities for library branch use subject to the following provisions in the Act as if it were a library board:

### *Operation of branch libraries by county library board*

*21 A county library board shall operate a branch library in each local municipality that operated a public library before that municipality became part of the county library system, unless the county council and the council of the municipality concerned agree otherwise. R.S.O. 1990, c. P.44, s. 21.”*

### *Accommodation may be provided by local municipality*

*26 (2) The council of one or more participating municipalities may, at the request of the county library board, rent accommodation to the board and may issue municipal debentures for the cost of constructing a building for the board’s purposes, but the ownership of the building shall remain with the municipality unless the board and the council of the municipality agree otherwise. R.S.O. 1990, c. P.44, s. 26 (2); 1996, c. 32, s. 83 (3).*

The full version of the *Public Libraries Act* is available [here](#).

Aylmer Library was part of the County system when it was formally established through Elgin County By-Law No. 1898 (passed in 1965, see attached). As such, the County is obligated to operate a branch within the Town of Aylmer unless both councils agree otherwise. Furthermore, the Town of Aylmer would need to continue to own the building if the Aylmer branch remains at its current location unless both parties agree otherwise, even if the branch is expanded at that location. On the other hand, County Council does have authority to own or lease an alternate location for the branch **as long as it is within the Town of Aylmer’s boundaries**. Potential accommodation of the Aylmer branch at EECC satisfies provisions of the Act because the Complex is formally located within the Town’s boundaries. Nevertheless, it would be constructive for the County to seek the Town’s endorsement on any relocation within its boundaries out of respect as a long-standing partner with the library system and given the revenue implications to the Town at the current Old Town Hall location. **Staff are of the opinion that County Council should seek the Town of Aylmer’s endorsement on any proposed relocation of the Aylmer branch to the Complex as soon as possible before proceeding any further.** Should the Town endorse such a move, then the matter of forming a committee to advance the matter of the Aylmer Library where all options are being considered becomes secondary to exploring accommodation at the Complex as the primary solution. A committee and/or public consultation process could then be held but the focus would be on gaining feedback on the types of programs and services that could be delivered from a library located at the Complex.

### Clarifications to the Town of Aylmer CAO’s Report Dated November 1, 2024

As the future of the Aylmer Library is being considered, it is necessary to clarify certain aspects of the Town of Aylmer CAO’s report titled “County Collaboration – Library Services, Facilities & Funding” dated November 1, 2024 and ensuing delegation to County Council which took place at the December 12, 2024 meeting. This includes the following matters:

- Identification of space needs for the Aylmer branch, and any branch in the County system, are driven by recommendations contained in [Guidelines for Rural/Urban Public Library Systems \(4th Edition, 2023\)](#) produced by the Administrators of Rural and Urban Public Libraries of Ontario (ARUPLO), the organization representing most County library systems in Ontario. County Council received these Guidelines early in 2024 and subsequently received a comprehensive benchmarking analysis for all ten branches in the County system, including Aylmer, at the September 10, 2024 meeting. These Guidelines identify Aylmer as a large branch in the system for planning purposes. At no time have County staff referred to the Aylmer branch as the “Greater Aylmer area Library” or a “main library branch”, and other branches as “small rural feeder library branches”. Each branch plays a strategic role in the system and strives to have hours, services and staffing levels that are appropriate to the catchment area being served. This catchment area does not always conform to strict municipal boundaries. Aylmer is not the only branch with a catchment area that includes more than one local municipality. Port Stanley, for instance, serves both residents of Central Elgin and Southwold within its identified catchment area as a medium-sized branch according to the Guidelines. However, it is not considered a “greater area library” but, rather, a branch. Calling Aylmer Library a “main branch” is misinformed and is contrary to Elgin County Library’s operating ethos of having ten locations that are administered on an equal footing as full branches.
- The report refers to a presentation made to Aylmer Town Council by the Aylmer Library Supervisor on September 18, 2024 which is available [here](#). The Town CAO’s synopsis of this presentation states that she referenced “a deficiency in hours of operation, and a deficiency in staffing levels.” It goes on to state that she presented “the possible need to triple the number of staff supporting the branch”. **No such claims were made by the Supervisor during that presentation.** Her comments were focused on the branch’s solid statistical performance, impact of programs on the community and operating challenges being experienced strictly in the context of space needs. This is further supported by the presentation made by the Director of Community and Cultural Services on the ARUPLO Guidelines in which it was cited that Aylmer is operating within guidelines for both staffing levels and weekly hours of operation. The Director’s report also stated that “the library’s performance at the branch level against the most recent edition of the ARUPLO Guidelines can be considered solid with the exception of facilities which is the one guideline that the County does not control directly.” Staffing levels may need to be adjusted should opportunities arise for expansion, but this is not an operating challenge at the present time and was not cited as such.
- The report contains multiple references to how County Council governs the library, calling for a committee to “examine whether Elgin County has a sufficient independent organizational structure established to support local libraries”. These references continue with a belief that a formal library board could be more effective; and, further, that “an independent Chief Executive Officer could be much more effective in advancing a Greater Aylmer area Library”. As previously stated, comments on County governance and administration are beyond the purview of the Town of Aylmer. It is unclear why such comments were included

in the scope of the Town CAO's report and ensuing delegation to County Council when the matter at hand for the Town strictly relates to the provision of sufficient space to accommodate the Aylmer branch (which is within the Town's jurisdiction).

- The report makes reference to a fundraising goal of \$500,000 established sometime around 2021 towards library expansion, stating as follows: "There was an understanding that Elgin County would utilize their charitable registration and accept donations on behalf of the library branch. At the time of authoring this report, the Town has received no indication whether Elgin County holds any donated funds towards this project." County staff are not aware of this understanding, nor was there any formal direction to County staff to engage in these fundraising efforts utilizing the library's charitable status. It is highly unlikely that such an offer could be extended because funds donated to the County for library purposes generally need to go towards operating items (such as programs or library materials) and not for buildings given that the County does not own them.

### Previous Work to Design the Complex

Preliminary design work has already been completed to accommodate the Aylmer branch at the Complex. Library staff were involved in the development of these plans in partnership with the complex in 2017. At that time, a range of options were being considered that ranged from approximately 6,000 square feet of space to just over 12,000 square feet. The amount of space the EECC Board wishes to consider for the purposes of housing the Aylmer branch under a revised proposal has yet to be formally considered. Staff are recommending that a branch in the vicinity of 10,000 square feet be considered to meet the minimum requirements for a large branch under the ARUPLO Guidelines while keeping the impact on future County budgets reasonable. Future expansion at the Complex could be considered in the medium to long-term as the community grows and to fully reflect space needs relative to the catchment area being served by the branch according to the Guidelines (which is approximately 16,000 residents).

### Opportunity for Community Consultation

Elgin County Library staff can lead a user-engagement and public consultation process that will include stakeholders should County Council wish to move ahead with relocation of the branch to the Complex. How such a process will be constituted and how it will unfold can be the subject of a subsequent report on this matter. Those wishing to share their views on future accommodation for the Aylmer branch also have the opportunity (as always) to make a delegation to County Council. For Council's information, draft terms of reference were developed by the Town of Aylmer in 2017 to establish a committee to review concept drawings for the Complex. A similar committee could be convened and led by the County.

## **Financial Implications:**

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The County has a lease with the Town of Aylmer for the current Old Town Hall location of the library, the current term of which expires at the end of 2027 and then renewable should both parties agree on a five-year basis. In 2025, this lease will pay to the Town of Aylmer \$17.91 per square foot or an annual total of \$55,181. The Town CAO's report states that "it is important to allow Elgin County the ability to terminate the lease without penalty if they are able to find an interim location that will better meet their needs". Aylmer Town Council would need to formally approve early termination of the lease (if required), but this statement leads to the assumption that accommodation at the Complex could proceed as soon as feasible, or at the very least at the end of 2027.

Since 2014, provision has existed in the County's ten-year financial plan for an anticipated increase to lease payments for Aylmer Library expansion. This amount currently stands at \$65,000 which is in addition to the \$55,181 already being paid to the Town. Therefore, \$60,000 of additional funds would be required in the County budget as soon as 2026 (plus annual inflationary adjustments) to support a library in the vicinity of 10,000 square feet at the Complex, based on 2025 rates. A facility of this size would then pay to the leaseholder approximately \$180,000 (plus annual inflationary adjustments).

In addition, the County's ten-year capital plan contains provision for equipment, collections and furnishings for future library expansions. This amount currently stands at \$135,000. It is recommended that \$40,000 of these funds be utilized in the 2025 budget for the expansion to West Lorne Library, leaving \$95,000 that could be devoted towards equipment and collection needs for an expansion to Aylmer Library as soon as 2026. Any additional funds that may be required for this purpose can form part of future budget planning for 2026 or beyond, but Council can be assured that a significant placeholder already exists for this purpose.

It would be the EECC's responsibility to make any space provided for the purposes of housing the Aylmer branch at the Complex "library ready." This means that the Complex would need to invest in the necessary capital renovations to the space to accommodate library functions such as collection space, programming areas, meeting rooms / study areas and staff workspaces strictly at their cost. Library staff will work with the EECC Board to update previous design work for the purposes of a costing analysis.

**Alignment with Strategic Priorities:**

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<b>Serving Elgin</b>	<b>Growing Elgin</b>	<b>Investing in Elgin</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth.  <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future.  <input type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

**Local Municipal Partner Impact:**

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The East Elgin Community Complex is jointly owned by the Township of Malahide and Town of Aylmer and governed through a Board of Directors comprised of both councils. While this report requests the explicit endorsement of the Town of Aylmer to proceed with relocation to the Complex given that the County has an existing leasing arrangement with the Town for the Aylmer branch, Malahide Council will have to authorize re-purposing space at the Complex for library use, along with any revenue sharing agreements with the Town of Aylmer that will result. Malahide will be considered a key stakeholder in any future public engagement and planning efforts.

**Communication Requirements:**

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It is recommended that a copy of this report be circulated to councils of the Town of Aylmer and Township of Malahide for information purposes.

**Conclusion:**

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The Town of Aylmer CAO's report provided a detailed timeline on the debate and multiple options explored to better meet space needs for the Aylmer Library, with an implication that the County and library staff have not provided leadership and advocacy for library expansion in Aylmer and that the existence of a library board could be more effective in advancing the cause. This debate has extended for over twenty years, with still no significant progress to date. For much of this time, the County's Library Director and staff have been directly involved in public consultations and the necessary "behind the scenes" work to advance this cause, including active participation in committees, many hours devoted to design work and several community presentations that was

close to achieving a stand-alone, purpose-built library of just over 10,000 square feet on grounds adjacent to the current location in 2014. Staff also devoted considerable time towards initial designs in 2017 during the first proposal to locate to the Complex. Since that time, there has not been any tangible opportunities to expand the branch so it may seem that the County has played a less visible role in this matter in recent years but that largely has been the product of past experiences, further exacerbated by the global pandemic where library services had to be limited.

Aylmer Library continues to be a well-used and vital community asset, accounting for approximately 36 per cent of Elgin County Library's total circulation (2024 statistics) while serving 32 per cent of the total population encompassed by the entire system. Program attendance is also strong relative to peers despite the amount of space available to host these programs. Over the past two decades, the value and importance of the library to the community has not been the source of debate. It has been about how best to proceed with a much-needed expansion that makes the most sense from a financial perspective and how best to leverage further partnerships and investments in the community while doing so. An opportunity is emerging to better meet space needs for the Aylmer Library at the East Elgin Community Complex which may finally "stroke all the right boxes" to proceed. It is recommended that this option be pursued.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Brian Masschaele, Director of Community  
and Cultural Services

Blaine Parkin  
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk