



Alternative formats and communication support available upon request.

Please contact clerks@town.aylmer.on.ca or 519-773-3164 for assistance.

Date	November 1, 2024
To	Council – November 20, 2024
From	Andy Grozelle, Chief Administrative Officer
Report No.	CAO 60-24
Report Title	County Collaboration – Library Services, Facilities & Funding

Recommendation

That Report CAO 60-24 respecting County Collaboration – Library Services, Facilities & Funding be received for information; and,

That Aylmer Council send a request to Elgin County Council as the Elgin Public Library Board to establish a committee to advance the matter of a Greater Aylmer area Library.

Executive Summary

This report is in response to Council direction provided following the delegations of Dalene van Zyl, Elgin County Aylmer Library Supervisor, and Kirk Barons, representative for the Aylmer Library Expansion Supporters (ALES), at the September 18, 2024, meeting of Council.

Staff are recommending that Aylmer Council request Elgin County Council, as the Library Board, establish a committee to advance the issue of a Greater Aylmer area Library.

Given the level of concerns raised by Elgin County at the September 18th meeting, staff are also recommending that Aylmer Council allow the County to seek temporary facilities for their provision of library services within the Town. This option would be

up to the County to pursue, however Aylmer providing flexibility in releasing the County from their current lease arrangement may assist the County. Such release could facilitate the County seeking a more suitable interim location until the Greater Aylmer area library issue is substantially advanced. Within this there is an understanding that Aylmer Council supports library services and has no desire to limit Elgin County as the Library Board from addressing the lengthy list of concerns raised at the September 18th meeting.

This approach also acknowledges that expansion of the library will initially seek to service a population of 15,000 – 20,000. This in turn is not a replacement of 'like for like' but would be the establishment of a main library branch for Elgin County. Such a main branch would serve as the hub for regional programming and events. Considerable stakeholder engagement by the library board will be required to consider all aspects of the services provided including programming, access, design, staffing, and operating hours.

Background

Attached to this report is a brief summary of the historic background on the library. Those who have followed this know it has been contentious. Following the defeat of the project in 2017 the project of constructing a new facility was removed from the Town's ten-year Capital Plan.

More recently, after receiving budget survey feedback in September of 2021, Council established that no further work be undertaken on this file until such time as \$500,000 in fundraising occurred. 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.

The September 18, 2024, presentation from Dalene van Zyl, Elgin County, Aylmer Library Supervisor, noted numerous issues with the current Aylmer Library branch facility. These issues included, but were not limited to, a deficiency of approximately 12,500 square feet, a deficiency in hours of operation, and a deficiency in staffing levels. Other issues with the current facility include accessibility issues, the need for additional public washrooms, a lack of community meeting rooms, a lack of privacy, and a lack of programming space.

This is a servicing challenge with implications for a greater area than the Town of Aylmer. Elgin County has indicated a desire for the Aylmer Branch to service a catchment area of 15,738 residents, everything south of College Line within the Township of Malahide. The County recognizes the Aylmer Branch as the sole large branch operated by Elgin County. Further, the challenge is interlaced with aligning facilities needs with the operational direction of the library services the County delivers. For example, their presentation noted the possible need to triple the

number of staff supporting the branch and expand the range of services provided at the facility.

A wholistic regional approach is required to develop a new main Elgin County library that will be established in the County's largest settlement area but will provide equal levels of service and programming to those in the surrounding rural communities. This requires considering all aspects of library services such as staffing, stakeholders, access, and hours of operation.

Analysis

As noted in the presentation, and in the associated report to Elgin County Council, the County has indicated a desire to take a stronger leadership role on this matter. Staff are hopeful that this approach can better align capital, operational, and community planning for library services in the greater Aylmer area. The County has not yet indicated what action it will take. Staff are suggesting that Council consider making recommendation to Elgin County as the Elgin County Library Board.

Points to Advance with the Library Board (Elgin County Council)

There are multiple important points that staff believe could be advanced through a committee established by the Library Board. To summarize:

1. County Leadership on Library Services and Facilities

Discussions occurred with the former CAO of Elgin County on a commitment by the County to lead the process of developing a plan and design for the library and to oversee engineering and project management. Staff believe that this is important with the evolution of library systems to provide numerous 'creative' community spaces. As Aylmer does not provide library services, we should not oversee the design or layout of the library.

2. Library Construction Policy

This policy, last updated in 2015, is unusual. Similar policies in other municipalities speak to project management, design standards, and AODA considerations. The main purpose of the County's policy appears to download obligations to construct and own buildings on local lower-tier municipalities. While this is likely a position in the County's interest, it is not a position that we would expect an independent library board would support. Such a policy may be effective for small rural feeder library branches but will never be able to support the development of a large regional main library branch that is being advanced.

3. Library Governance and Community Participation

Examine whether Elgin County has a sufficient independent organizational structure established to support local libraries. Library Boards generally meet on a monthly basis, and although they have political representation, they are driven by Community appointees. Staff believe such a body under an independent Chief Executive Officer could be much more effective in advancing a Greater Aylmer area Library.

4. County-Wide Library Operations and Facilities Strategy

Circulation and utilization of the existing library identifies high usership of the library by non-Aylmer residents. There needs to be a shift in thinking in how the County invests in urban communities as growth centres that provide services to surrounding rural areas.

5. Fund-Raising and Capital Planning

Work with Elgin County staff to ensure supports are provided to local groups fundraising in the hopes of encouraging meeting the fundraising goal of \$500,000. Further, the committee could guide a process to ready Elgin County for any grant opportunities.

Town of Aylmer Financial Constraints

The Town constructing more space to lease to Elgin County has become more challenging to address than it was in 2017. The additional difficulty arises from the significant investments made by the Town. Investments in major capital projects, like the Water Tower, AIM Park, and Elk Street. These projects along with addressing aging infrastructure, such as the EECC and Town Hall and Old Town Hall, have placed the Town in a position where our reserves are depleted. Debt issuance may be required to fund capital works that are already planned.

The last term of Council reviewed the library and determined that the Town undertaking a capital investment for the County's library service would not be possible without significant local fundraising. Since that time, this Council has received facility condition assessments on two facilities that have introduced substantial costs. Council has also added an indoor pool to the ten-year capital plan which could cost between \$8-\$10 million and for which the Town has no plan on how to finance either capital or operational.

Given the financial pressures facing the Town of Aylmer it is important to be realistic. With the removal of this project from the ten-year capital plan after the 2017 decision, funds held by the Town were placed in the building reserve fund. This reserve is underfunded to address anticipated costs that the Town became aware of

over the last two years through facility condition assessment reports. Despite the history of the library, the removal of this item from the Capital plan means that this is a brand-new capital request that is not envisioned in the Town's current financial or asset planning.

Staff recognize the substantial value of the library services to the Greater Aylmer area. Aylmer however has a small tax base and is unable to sustain the current level of investment in capital. Projects like the Water Tower, Lagoon Upgrades and AIM Park development represent strategic draw-downs of the Town's position for the future long-term residential and economic development interests of the Town. These investments will pay dividends; however, they will not be immediate and multiple years of frugality on capital projects will be required to build up reserves and avoid negative impacts to taxpayers.

Strategic Priorities

This report supports the goals and objectives set out in [Council's Strategic Pillars](#). The library is identified in the Town's Strategic Objectives as a level A priority. During the update in 2024 Council adopted continuing to hold this as an A priority item with no current action required until fundraising is completed.

Conclusion

Staff are recommending forwarding this matter to Elgin County Council and requesting that a committee be established to advance this matter. We believe this is appropriate and would like to work with the County to develop a plan of action on a Greater Aylmer area Library.

As Council heard with the many concerns about the library's current accommodations, staff believe 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 is supportive of library services, and we do not desire to be seen to hinder the County from providing the level of service they desire for the community simply to keep a tenant in our building.

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Grozelle
Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix

Attachments

1. Appendix A: Brief Background Summary – Old Town Hall Building History
2. Appendix B: Brief Background Summary – Library Expansion History

Follow Up

In adopting this report, what follow up action is required?

By-law

Agreement(s)/document(s) to be signed by Mayor and/or Clerk

Social media/Website update or communication

Other communication – Specify:

Appendix B – Brief Background Summary

Library Expansion History

Ardent followers of library expansion history in Aylmer are most certainly already aware of the details relating to this subject. As such, this section will serve to provide only a broad overview for the benefit of adding context to this report and to provide background for those who are unaware.

In the late 70s, the municipal offices that were previously housed at 38 John Street South were moved to 46 Talbot Street West, leaving the Old Town Hall building vacant. A referendum was held that asked residents whether they were in favor of restoring the Old Town Hall to house a new public library. Despite a majority vote that opposed restoration to house a new public library, Council voted in favor with proceeding. The official opening of the library was June 18, 1982.

The early 2000s saw the establishment of a Library Steering Committee to undertake a needs assessment and planning process. The Town of Aylmer and the County of Elgin Library Services commissioned the Ventin Group Ltd., Architects to prepare a Master Plan Investigation of the Aylmer Old Town Hall Library in 2004. This report proposed purchasing 46 John Street South to meet space requirements (6,600 sq. ft. in addition to its existing space). Further, it included recommendations for a new elevator, washrooms, kitchen, and storage rooms in the new addition to complete the design of the proposed expansion. The cost of this expansion was quoted at \$1.57-\$1.78 million based on 2005 costing. Elgin County Council approved the 11,000 sq. ft. expansion on or before 2009.

Under the lease agreement at the time – originally signed in 1982 – the County leased 3,081 square feet for \$7 a square foot plus 100 percent of the operating cost of the library section of the building and 41.9% of certain capital costs including insurance, maintaining Old Town Hall's exterior and the library's heating system. The lease did not apply to new, expanded, or relocated branches which would require a new operational lease.

Council voted to demolish the house at 46 John Street South in 2008.

A Library Facility Review Committee was established in 2011 that included Town of Aylmer staff and Council members, Aylmer residents, and County of Elgin representatives. The mandate was to explore the requirements, logistics and identify options for the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Public Library. The final recommendation of the committee was that the Town of Aylmer should proceed with the development of plans and all other related activities for the construction of an expanded library based around the current Old Town Hall with a minimum of 8,000 square feet of assignable library space and the expansion set to be to the west and/or the north. The "Town Square Block" (bounded by Talbot Street West, John Street South, Sydenham Street West, and Centre Street) were to be considered as the preferred location.

Archon Architects were retained in 2013 to prepare a design concept for the new library. A geotechnical investigation was prepared by exp Services Inc. in 2014 as part of Archon Architects' development proposal. Council endorsed proceeding with the building of a new library subject to RFP approval. Council requested a \$400,000 interest free loan from the County of Elgin however their policy is set to approve a maximum of \$100,000. Staff researched numerous grant opportunities. A motion to call a referendum to determine the will of the people of the Town of Aylmer in consideration of "the magnitude and debt-inducing cost of the proposed library building" and "who will carry the financial burden of this project" was defeated in 2014.

Several options for library expansion were investigated over the course of 2015-2017 including inviting expressions of interest for potential lease or purchase of building space for library services. Relocation to the Aylmer Legion (211 John Street South), relocation to the East Elgin Community Complex (531 Talbot Street West), purchasing and annexing of 20 John Street South, and lease or purchase of the ground floor of Trillium Park were some of the proposed options that were ultimately rejected.

Two locations were officially proposed for the Aylmer Library: 23 Myrtle Street and 38 John Street South. A petition was received in support of pursuing the Myrtle Street location for the new library and in opposition to building on the Old Town Hall. A separate petition in support of locating the new library in the downtown core area was also received. The Town of Aylmer hosted a survey in 2017 regarding the library location with 77% of respondents preferring an addition to the Old Town Hall at 38 John Street South. Numerous comments and delegations to Council presented arguments for and against both proposed locations.

The Town of Aylmer retained CJDL Consulting Engineers in 2017 to provide capital and operating costs for the proposed library locations. An 8,000 sq. ft. stand-alone building was proposed for 23 Myrtle Street at a cost of approximately \$1.59 million. The proposed 5,000 sq. ft. addition to 38 John Street South totalled \$1.09 million.

A motion that an enlarged Aylmer Library be situated on the John Street site and that it include a 5,000 sq. ft. building and atrium attached to the current library was defeated in a 4/3 vote in 2017.

A motion to move forward with building the library on the Myrtle Street site was also defeated in a 4/3 vote in 2017.

The current lease agreement with the County of Elgin for 38 John Street South is a 5-year term that commenced January 1, 2023 and ends December 31, 2027. There is no provision in the current agreement for contributions to capital costs on the part of the lessee.

1873 - Plans for a New Town Hall

- Townspeople directed Aylmer Council, by a 63 to 37 vote, to proceed with plans for the new hall in 1873
- Architect: George Watson and Son, London
- Contractor: John H. Arkell
- Construction Inspector: Harrison Maw
- Uses:
 - Clerk-Treasurer's office, Council chamber
 - First floor: post office, police department
 - Mechanic's Institute
 - Second floor: opera house

1911 - Second Floor Renovations Town Hall

- 16-foot brick addition to the front of the Hall to accommodate more office space as well as a 6-foot stage addition and a back stairway
- Uses:
 - Town Assessor's Office
 - Township of Malahide office
 - Rations Issues Office
 - Welfare Officer's Room
 - Criminal and Small Claims Court
 - Driver Examinations
 - Ontario Municipal Board meeting
 - Fire Department
 - Public Works Department

1976 - Municipal Offices and Police Department Move to 46 Talbot St W

1980 - Old Town Hall Heritage Designation & Library Integration

- March 1980, the Old Town Hall was designated a heritage structure under the Ontario Heritage Act
- The building was vacant - Council entertained the idea of demolition
- Elgin County Council and various historical societies for restoration offered grant money to improve the building's exterior
- Referendum November 10, 1980: "Are you in favor of restoring the Old Town Hall to house a new public library?"
 - Outcome: 1032 to 841 not in favour of restoration to house a new public library

- Despite this result, the Council voted in favor of proceeding with the restoration of the Old Town Hall to house a new public library and to accept all grants and assistance
- Roger Verbuyst hired a lawyer to investigate possible ways to force council to abide by the results of the referendum
- The lawyer for the town argued that the result of a referendum was not legally binding upon Council
- The Ontario Supreme Court upheld the decision of Aylmer Town Council to proceed with restoration of the Old Town Hall for use as a library
- Money for the restoration project was provided by the County of Elgin, the Town of Aylmer, the Ontario Heritage Foundation, Wintario, Heritage Aylmer, the sale of the old library and individual donations
- Official opening of the library: June 18, 1982

1987-1988 - Second Floor Restoration

- Reinforcement of balcony and roof; painting of the Union Jack; restoration of the balcony railing; stage, dressing rooms, washrooms
- Fully restored Opera House official opening September 24, 1988
- Library not utilizing the upstairs after renovations for Local History collection

1999 - 125th Anniversary of the Old Town Hall

2000 - Aylmer Library Renovation

- Closed August 21 - October 10
- Books were packed and moved to the bandshell
- Painting, carpet

2007 Future Renovations of the Old Town Hall/Aylmer Public Library

- Under the terms of the lease between the County of Elgin and the Town of Aylmer for the operation of the Aylmer Public Library, the County may be responsible for 41.9 percent of such capital costs - any expenditure would require advance notice and approval as part of the County's annual budget deliberations

2011-2013 - Aylmer Library Building Committee

- Library Facility Review Committee - Final Report to the Town of Aylmer
 - Mandate: To explore the requirements, logistics and identify options for the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Public Library

- Recommendations: the Town of Aylmer should proceed with the development of plans and all other related activities for the construction of an expanded library based around the current Old Town Hall with a minimum of 8,000 square feet of assignable library space and the expansion set to be to the west and/or the north
- County Staff report 'Aylmer Library Space Requirements' using the 2005 guidelines suggests that a 'Large Rural Branch' like Aylmer with a 'Catchment Area' of 13,000 residents should be between 7,000 sq ft to 21,000 sq ft in size. (ARUPLO Guidelines for Rural/Urban Public Library Systems)
- The "Town Square Block" (bounded by Talbot Street West, John Street South, Sydenham Street West and Centre Street) be considered as the preferred location
- Based on information from the county and town planner, a construction fee of \$200/square foot is used as the benchmark in determining the possible cost of construction
- Report from Brian Masschaele Director of Community & Cultural Services, County of Elgin April 11, 2011 re: current lease with County, guidelines for County Library Branches, Elgin County Library Branch Construction Policy, overview of Aylmer Library programs
- Amalgamation of AMMA and Library proposed 2011
- 2012 - Funding for Aylmer Library Expansion Study - February 21, 2012 Report to County Council
 - That Elgin County fund 41.9% of costs incurred by the Town of Aylmer for architectural and engineering services for a new or expanded facility for the Aylmer Library with an upset limit of \$20,000 pending approval of the 2012 County Budget; and,
 - That payment to the Town of Aylmer proceed upon presentation of actual costs to the County prior to the end of 2013
- Petition in opposition to library expansion September 4, 2012 Meeting of Council
 - 803 signatures
- Grant considerations
 - Community Infrastructure Investment Fund (2012)
 - Cultural Capitals of Canada (2002)
 - Trillium Funds (2003)
 - Heritage Challenge Fund (2000)
 - Canada Cultural Spaces Fund (2016)
 - Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program (2006)
 - Historic Places Initiative (2006)
 - Ontario Heritage Trust (2006)
- Referendum to consider the magnitude and debt-inducing cost of the proposed library building (2013 resolution)

2015-2017 - Aylmer Library Relocation

- 2016 Expressions of Interest: provide information for a potential lease or purchase of building space for library services

- Relocation to the Legion proposed
- Purchase of 20 John St S proposed
- Lease or purchase of ground floor of Trillium Park proposed
- Offer to fund new space from the Palmer Estate through Andrew Gunn
- Report 51-15 Library Options examines:
 - Option 1: Do nothing, retain the existing location
 - Option 2 - Lease available space in the core area of approx. 6,000 sq. ft. (or more) and preferably within the BIA boundary
 - Option 5 - Build a new standalone building
- Special Council Meeting October 30, 2017 to receive input from the public about the two locations proposed for the Aylmer Library
 - 23 Myrtle Street
 - 38 John Street South
- Petition received from Kory MacDonald and Anne MacDonald in support of pursuing the Myrtle Street location for the new library and in opposition to building on to the Old Town Hall (Received at Council meeting: October 2, 2017 and Presented at Special meeting: October 30, 2017)
 - 51 names
- Petition received from Bill Murch in support of locating the new library in the downtown core area (Delegation May 8, 2017)
 - 1412 signatures
- Report ADMIN 52-17 - Library Location Survey Results
 - 186 surveys received - 144 respondents (77%) preferred the addition to the Old Town Hall located at 38 John Street South
- Comments received in opposition of library expansion at John Street
 - Mennonite Furniture Gallery re: decreased parking
- Comments received in opposition of library relocation to Myrtle Street
 - David Ritchie re: flood plain - examined as potential site for Police Station which produced a CCCA report about flooding potential and soil issues
 - Penny Hilliker McGregor PS - keep library downtown for ease of access for students
- Motions to investigate feasibility of relocation of library to EECC and establishment of a library committee rescinded May 2017
 - Aylmer & Area Chamber of Commerce correspondence re: polling membership (businesses and organizations in the Town of Aylmer, Township of Malahide, Municipality of Bayham, City of St. Thomas and surrounding areas)
 - 70% voted no "Do you feel it is in the best interest of the community for the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library to be relocated to the EECC?"
 - 70% voted yes "Do you feel it is in the best interest of the community for the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library to stay in the downtown core?"
 - 61% voted yes "Do you feel it is in the best interest of the community that the Aylmer branch of the Elgin County Library stay where it is if there are no other options available at this time in the downtown?"

- Report ADMIN 42-17 - Library Options provided capital costs for new library locations (CJDL)
 - Capital Costs
 - 23 Myrtle Street (8000 sq ft stand alone building)
 - \$1,590,000 including building cost, landscaping, sidewalks, parking lot, environmental assessment, design, contribution from reserve, county loan (\$100,000)
 - 38 John Street South (5,000 sq ft addition)
 - \$1,094,000 including building cost, landscaping, sidewalks, parking lot, environmental assessment, design and administration, contribution from reserve, county loan
 - Annual Operating Costs
 - 23 Myrtle \$75,400 including county lease revenue
 - 38 John \$45,400 including county lease revenue
 - Administrator - Report ADMIN 52-17 - Library Location Survey Results
 - Resolution 416-17
 - That Report ADMIN 52-17 Library Location Survey Results, from the Administrator, be received for information.
 - The motion is carried.
 - Resolution 417-17
 - That an enlarged Aylmer Library be situated on the John Street site.
 - The motion is amended:
 - Resolution 418-17
 - That the resolution be amended by adding:
 - And that is include a 5,000 sq. ft. building and atrium attached to the current library.
 - The motion is carried.
 - The amended motion 417-17 reads:
 - That an enlarged Aylmer Library be situated on the John Street site, and that it include a 5,000 sq. ft. building and atrium attached to the current library.
- The motion is defeated with a 4/3 vote.
- Resolution 419-17
- That Council move forward with building the library on the Myrtle Street site.
- The motion is defeated with a 4/3 vote.

Documentation regarding Aylmer Library found here:
<https://aylmer.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/107065/>

○