

Library Boards: Roles and Responsibilities

Public Library Service in Alberta: An Overview

In Alberta, public library service is municipally based. A municipality may choose to provide public library service at a local level by having a library in the community, and/or having library service at a regional level by joining a library system.

A municipality makes the decision to have public library service in their community via a local library. Council passes an establishment bylaw under the *Libraries Act* (Part 1, Section 3) to create a library board for the provision of public library service. Upon its creation, a library board is a governing board and is a corporation with full management and control of the public library (Part 1, Section 7).

Legislation: The *Libraries Act* and the *Libraries Regulation*

In Alberta, public library service is governed by the *Libraries Act* and *Libraries Regulation*.

The *Libraries Act* sets the legal framework for public library service through the establishment of library boards, who manage library service on behalf of the municipality.

The *Libraries Regulation* sets out sound management practices for library boards.

The *Municipal Government Act (MGA)* and the *Libraries Act* are two distinct pieces of legislation. Neither is superior to the other because the *MGA* and the *Libraries Act* do two separate things:

- The *MGA* is the law under which municipalities in Alberta operate, govern and are governed.
- The *Libraries Act* and *Libraries Regulation* form the legal basis for public library service in Alberta.

Public library boards in Alberta are not subject to the *MGA*, e.g. library trustees are appointed by the terms outlined in the *Libraries Act*, not the *MGA*. There are only three references to public libraries in the *MGA*:

- The first is section 648 (2.1) which includes libraries as being eligible for off-site levies.
- The second is section 362(1)(j), which states that municipalities cannot tax public library boards.
- The third is section 271(2.1)(a) which states that a municipality may use a community services reserves for public libraries.

The Public Library Services Branch (PLSB) of Alberta Municipal Affairs is the provincial body that administers public library legislation and the provincial Public Library Network.

PLSB staff are responsible for the administration of the *Libraries Act* and *Libraries Regulation*, delivering operating grants to municipal and system library boards, plus building and maintaining the provincial Public Library Network. PLSB staff members are available to consult with library boards, library staff and municipal councils. For more information about PLSB, visit www.albertalibraries.ca.

The Public Library Network links public libraries at a provincial level and enables sharing. In Alberta, the Public Library Network links public libraries and enables sharing by two different means: a provincial policy framework and a technological infrastructure. The purpose of the Network is to support equitable and seamless access to library resources for Albertans, and does so through things such as SuperNet connectivity, resource sharing, and the centralized acquisition of electronic content.

The Roles and Responsibilities of a Municipal Library Board

The municipal library board is the legal entity that manages and controls the library. Its formation is defined by the *Libraries Act* – it is created via bylaw passed by municipal council.

The library board is a governing board, not an advisory board – it has full management and control of the library. This is defined in legislation (*Libraries Act*, Section 7). Note that library boards are different from other non-profit boards formed under other legislation (e.g. the *Societies Act* or the *Municipal Government Act*). The library board is a corporate body, a legal entity able to sue or be sued, enter into contracts and employ staff.

Upon establishment, the library board is a corporation administered under the *Libraries Act* with full management and control of library service in the municipality.

The library board is a governing board. The library manager is employed by and reports to the board, and the board is accountable not only to council, but to all citizens of the municipality and to the provincial government.

The library board passes safety and use bylaws and policies to enable the provision of public library service delivery.

The library board determines library service priorities and creates a plan of service based on community needs assessments.

The library board is responsible for acquiring library funding, requesting the funds from council and applying for provincial grants.

The library board keeps financial records and bank accounts, and prepares and manages the budget. The library board selects and hires a financial reviewer (who is not a library board member).

The library board may operate one or more public library service points, or, with the permission of the minister, may enter into agreements with other boards to share the operation of one or more library service points (intermunicipal library boards).

The library board is responsible for providing the space and staff required for public library service delivery.

Did you know?

The *Libraries Act* was one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the newly formed Alberta government in 1907.

Support and Resources

If you have any questions, please contact the Public Library Services Branch by phone at 780-427-4871 (toll free by dialing 310-0000 first), or by email at libraries@gov.ab.ca. Information is also available on the PLSB website at www.albertalibraries.ca.