



City's library board seeks 7.1 per cent budget hike

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Weeks after Mayor David Miller directed all city departments and agencies to flatline their budgets for 2009, the Toronto Library Board is asking for a 7.1 per cent budget increase.

The board wants to spend an extra \$11 million to bump its budget to \$166.8 million.

Members say the money is needed in part to extend the same level of service to all areas of the city.

The hike is far beyond the zero-increase target Miller set. In fact, departments and agencies were asked to try to cut 2009 spending by 2 per cent to ease inflationary pressures. On the other hand, Miller is a big booster of the library system; he often cites it in speeches as the world's best and busiest.

Councillor Janet Davis – Miller's designated representative on the library board – backs the proposal.

Davis said the library suffered deep cuts in 1998, when the megacity was born. It lost 200 staff who haven't been replaced, though library services and traffic have grown. "We just can't stretch any further without adding some staff," she said.

The board cut Sunday service last year at Miller's request, after the delay in imposing new taxes left the city short of money. An arbitrator ultimately called this improper and ordered the branches to reopen.

The 2009 needs include \$2.2 million stemming from a pay equity settlement that gave raises to female staff. A further \$1.5 million would cover cost-of-living increases, the board said.

The biggest single cost, however, is \$2.8 million to open 24 more branches on Sundays; currently, only 27 branches open that day.

Davis said this would help equalize library access across the city, a goal since the 1998 amalgamation.

Councillor Paul Ainslie, who sits on both the library board and city budget committee, said it's a good budget: "We think we put a good business case forward."

But as a budget scrutinizer, Ainslie said he may come to a different opinion. "I'm going to have to look at it and say: 'You're no different than anybody else. You have to justify this ...'"

"It might have to be changed, whittled down, revised."

Adam Chaleff-Freudenthaler of the library board said key councillors support wider Sunday hours and he's optimistic the budget will be approved "to give the people the library service they expect and the library service they deserve."