

**Present:**

**Regrets:**

1. Approval of the Agenda
2. Board Feedback
3. Consent Agenda
  - a. Approval of Minutes of February 12 2025 meeting
  - b. Draft 2 – Briefing Note Template
  - c. Items for Information
    - i. Correspondence
      - a. Minister of Municipal Affairs – Provincial Priorities Act
      - b. Minister of Municipal Affairs – Budget 2025
      - c. City of Camrose – MAL Appointment Margaret Weir Andreassen
      - d. City of Camrose – Alternate Appointment to PRLS Board
    - ii. Libraries in the News
      - a. Book Banning in Canada is Quiet, Systemic, and More Effective than Ever – The Walrus
      - b. A Shadow War on Libraries - CBC
  - d. Reports
    - i. Director's Report
    - ii. Program Overview to February 28 2025
    - iii. Program Report and Library Statistics February 28 2025
    - iv. Summary of PRLS March Board Meeting
4. In-Camera Items for Discussion and Decision
  - a. Banking Options
  - b. Bank Payments Process
  - c. Interim Director Hiring

**Next regular Board meeting: March 12 2025, 5:15pm**

**Present: Renee Greer (Chair)**, Alyssa Martin (Director), Naomi Finseth (Vice-Chair), Don Simpson (Camrose Council), Joy-Anne Murphy (City Council), Cheryl Dezall, Lucy Ernst, Peter Hamm

**Regrets:** Margaret Holliston (Secretary)

Call to Order: Chair Renee Greer called the meeting to order at 5:15 pm.

1. Approval of the Agenda

Addition of 4f. to the agenda.

Adoption of agenda.

2. Board Feedback

Joy-Anne mentioned there was an article recently on the Airdrie Library, struggles around book challenges. Joy-Anne to share article with the rest of the board.

3. Consent Agenda

a. Approval of Minutes of January 15 2025 meeting

Changed time for next regular board meeting February 12, 2025 at 5:15 pm.

b. Items for Information: Board members reviewed prior to the meeting

i. Libraries in the News

a. Regina Public Library Seeking Increased Budget to Cover Rising Costs, Eventual New Downtown Facility

c. Reports

i. Director's Report

ii. Program Overview to January 31 2025

iii. Program Report and Library Statistics January 31 2025

4. Items for Discussion and Decision

a. PLSB Annual Report

PLSB Annual Report was renewed – discussion ensued about whether CPL provides Senior specific programs and whether these were outlined in the Plan of Service.

**Motion 08/25 M/C** – Naomi Finseth: Accept the PLSB 2024 Annual Report and Survey with the above-mentioned change.

b. Board Training – Advocacy

Discussion about different professional development options surrounding advocacy, with one free option being hosted by Parkland Regional Library System, and another option being to hire a provide provider and use reserve funds. Consensus was reached to watch the PRLS training and then determine if the board wishes to hire a third party for training.

## c. LAPP Audit – Funding

LAPP Audit is mandatory; LAPP has changed their requirements which has doubled the price from current provider. The annual review cost from the current provider will not double, the change in cost is due to LAPP's requirements. This audit was not included in the 2025 budget, and will require additional funds.

**Motion 09/25 M/C** – Don Simpson: Motion to pull up to \$4,500 from the Operation Reserve to cover the 2025 LAPP Audit expenses.

## d. March Library Closure – Inventory

Parkland Regional Library System historically offered a service where they would handle inventory – this year they were reluctant to do so. After discussion a compromise was met which will see both PRLS staff and CPL staff conduct inventory. This puts CPL in the position of reallocating PD hours to inventory, or closing the library for the day.

Discussion of concerns with PRSL services and communication over not hearing of this service cut sooner.

**Motion 10/25 M/C** – Joy-Anne Murphy: I move to permit the Director to choose a day to close the library in 2025 for the purposes of conducting inventory.

## e. New Procedure for Board Meetings and Briefing Note Template

Consensus was the meeting seemed to be more streamlined without seconders, and briefing notes sped up the process.

It was suggested to look at:

- Combining considerations & risks on the briefing note.
- If talking about money should be part of implications what is our current reserve and the impact.
- Comments on how to move discussion forward.

Alyssa Martin will come up with a new draft for next meeting, and where the board will continue the discussion.

**Motion 11/25 M/C** – Joy-Anne Murphy: I move to adopt the new procedure for board meetings as presented in the agenda.

## f. Discussing Alternate for Parkland Library System Board

The next PRLS board meeting is on February 27<sup>th</sup> online, and Camrose representative Joy-Anne Murphy cannot attend. Alternate Renee Greer also cannot attend, and a new alternate is sought. Tonight's motion will need to go to Camrose City Council's next meeting on February 24<sup>th</sup>, for final

approval.

**Motion 12/25 M/C** – Joy-Anne Murphy: I move to rescind Renee Geer as alternate for PRLS board and appoint Cheryl Dezall to be the alternate going forward.

5. In-Camera Items for Decision

a. Collection Assistant Grid

**Motion 13/25 M/C** – Cheryl Dezall: I move to approve the proposed grid for the new Collection assistant position, effective March 1, 2025.

6. Adjournment: Chair Renee Greer declared the meeting adjourned at 6:06pm

7. **Next regular Board meeting: March 12, 2025, 5:15pm**

## **For Discussion/Decision – Topic**

### **Issue:**

Why is this matter being brought to the board?

### **Background:**

Explain any history that is helpful for decision making?

### **Options:**

If there are options for this decision, list them here.

#### **Considerations and risks for each option:**

What happens if this decision is not made? How urgent is it? Who does it affect?  
Pros and cons.

#### **Financial Implications for each option:**

If this will affect the reserves or budget, please outline what our current balance is and how it will be impacted?

### **Recommendations:**

If there are options, which is the preferred one, and why.

### **Proposed Motion:**

If it is a decision, draft the motion so that the trustees can see it in writing. It can be changed at the meeting if necessary.

"I move that \_\_\_\_\_."





ALBERTA

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

*Office of the Minister*

*MLA, Calgary-Hays*

AR118277

February 26, 2025

Dear Chief Elected Officials/Associations/Library Boards/Regional Services  
Commissions/Municipally Controlled Corporations:

In May 2024, our government passed the *Provincial Priorities Act* to establish a process for provincial oversight of agreements between provincial entities and the federal government. The *Act* will come into force on April 1, 2025, and will ensure Ottawa is not undermining the province's jurisdiction to make decisions about what is best for Alberta and Albertans. Under the *Act*, provincial entities, such as municipalities, are required to obtain prior approval from the Alberta government before entering into, amending, or renewing an agreement with the federal government.

Throughout last summer, Alberta's government led a comprehensive stakeholder engagement with provincial entities to inform the supporting regulations. The Provincial Priorities Regulation (attached), which also comes into force on April 1, 2025, designates additional municipal entities that are subject to the *Act*. These entities include library boards, regional services commissions, municipally controlled corporations, and any entity that is established by bylaw, with the exception of business improvement areas. In addition, the regulation sets out the approval process for proposed intergovernmental agreements and includes some exceptions for the municipal sector where no provincial approvals will be needed. Examples of these exceptions include agreements under \$100,000, agreements that are in-kind contributions only, agreements with the Canadian Armed Forces, and agreements for disaster response and assistance; these will not require provincial approval.

Effective April 1, 2025, municipalities and municipal entities will be required to submit information on all new agreements with the federal government, agreement amendments and agreement renewals, along with a copy of the agreement, to Municipal Affairs, regardless of the monetary value of the agreement. Information on agreements eligible for an exception must also be submitted to Municipal Affairs in order for the exception to apply. Additional details on the process for submitting required information on federal agreements to Municipal Affairs will be shared in March.

I am looking forward to working together with you to ensure Alberta municipalities maintain access to federal dollars while protecting areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Sincerely,

Ric McIver  
Minister

cc: Chief Administrative Officers

320 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6 Canada Telephone 780-427-3744 Fax 780-422-9550





ALBERTA

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Office of the Minister  
MLA, Calgary-Hays

AR117795

February 27, 2025

Dear Public Library Boards:

I am writing to share information with you about *Budget 2025*, tabled in the Alberta Legislature by my colleague, the Honourable Nate Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance. Below are some details relevant to Alberta Municipal Affairs and public libraries.

*Budget 2025* is meeting the challenges facing Alberta with responsible decisions to fund today's priorities. I am pleased to share that *Budget 2025* includes stable funding for Alberta's public libraries. The government remains committed to providing operating grants to the province's 232 public library boards and to maintaining our support for public library network initiatives.

This means that your library board is eligible for the same operating grant in 2025/26 as you received in 2024/25. We are also continuing to fund key initiatives, including SuperNet connectivity, interlibrary loan delivery and software, and e-resource content, such as language learning tools, continuing education software, e-newspapers, and e-audiobooks. This funding also supports the *Read Alberta Project*, in partnership with the Book Publishers of Alberta Association and the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association, as well as the *Voices of the Land* storytelling platform, in partnership with Edmonton Public Library. We remain committed to funding the Centre for Equitable Library Access and the National Network for Equitable Library Service, enabling Alberta libraries to provide readers with visual impairment and other print disabilities a wide range of accessible resources and choices.

Our government understands the vital role public libraries play in both large and small communities. I am proud that public libraries support Albertans through lifelong learning, literacy and language development, job search assistance, and community building. We recognize the challenges libraries face in a constantly evolving world, and the increasing demands on services as Alberta's population grows and community needs become more complex. Rest assured, our government remains committed to supporting public libraries, ensuring you have the resources and funding needed to continue thriving and meeting the diverse needs of our communities.

Please continue to reach out to me and my staff to let us know how we can help you deliver these important services to our communities across the province.

Sincerely,

Ric McIver  
Minister





The City of  
**Camrose**

5204 – 50 Avenue, Camrose, Alberta T4V 0S8 PH. (780) 672-4426 FAX (780) 672-2469

February 25, 2025

Attention: Renee Greer, Chair  
Camrose Public Library Board  
c/o Camrose Public Library  
4710 – 50 Avenue  
Camrose, AB T4V 0R8

Email: [rgreer\\_2@telus.net](mailto:rgreer_2@telus.net)

**Re: Member-at-large Appointment – Camrose Public Library Board**

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Please be advised at a Regular Meeting of Council held February 24, 2025, City Council approved of Margaret Weir Andreassen's appointment to serve as a member-at-large on the Camrose Public Library Board commencing February 24, 2025, and expiring December 31, 2027, or at the pleasure of Council.

In her appointment letter she was informed that a Police information check is to be provided to Legislative Services, prior to attending her first meeting and that you will be in contact with her.

Here is her contact information:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Should you have any questions, give me a call at 780-781-0826 or email [pjstasko@camrose.ca](mailto:pjstasko@camrose.ca)

Kindest Regards,

PJ Stasko, Mayor  
City of Camrose

cc: Alyssa Martin, Director, Camrose Public Library [amartin@prl.ab.ca](mailto:amartin@prl.ab.ca)





The City of  
**Camrose**

5204 – 50 Avenue, Camrose, Alberta T4V 0S8 PH. (780) 672-4426 FAX (780) 672-2469

February 25, 2025

Cheryl Dezall  
6304 – 30 Avenue  
Camrose, AB  
T4V 4V9

Email: [dezallcheryl@gmail.com](mailto:dezallcheryl@gmail.com)

**Re: Camrose City Council Appointment AMENDMENT Alternate Appointment to the  
Parkland Regional Library Board**

Please be advised at a Regular Council Meeting held February 24, 2024, City Council approved of your appoint as the alternate to the Parkland Regional Library Board, with the appointment effective from February 25, 2025, until the 2025 Organizational meeting of Council.

A notice was provided by email on February 26, 2025, to the Parkland Regional Library Board advising that as Councillor Murphy is not able to attend the next Parkland Regional Library Board meeting on February 27, 2025, that you had already confirmed your availability to attend and to contact you to confirm your attendance by calling 403.846.7464 or email [dezallcheryl@gmail.com](mailto:dezallcheryl@gmail.com)

Should you have any questions, give me a call at 780-781-0826 or email [pstasko@camrose.ca](mailto:pstasko@camrose.ca)

Kindest Regards,

Mayor PJ Stasko,  
City of Camrose

cc:

- Renee Greer, Chair, Camrose Public Library Board [rgreer\\_2@telus.net](mailto:rgreer_2@telus.net)
- Alyssa Martin, Director, Camrose Public Library, [amartin@prl.ab.ca](mailto:amartin@prl.ab.ca)

BOOKS

# Book Banning in Canada Is Quiet, Systemic, and More Effective than Ever

Our libraries are being purged in the name of protecting kids

BY IRA WELLS

Updated 0:44, Mar. 2, 2025 | Published 6:30, Mar. 1, 2025



**IN THE SPRING** of 2022, the principal of my children’s elementary school told a group of parents gathered to discuss a library audit that she wished she could get rid of “all the old books.” The bulk of the library’s holdings were, from her perspective, too Eurocentric, too male, too heteronormative.

I understood these concerns, which were broadly shared among parents and teachers. Still, the prospect of liquidating several thousand library books struck me as obviously wrong—

offensive not only to me personally but also to the liberal democratic values that (however shakily) underpin our society.

I wanted to say something but quickly checked myself: Was there not a strong chance my defence of “liberal values” in this context—a children’s library, with its tiny chairs and animal posters—would come off as patently absurd?

Then the moment passed, the meeting broke up, and I was left chewing on my questions: What was so special about a bunch of old books? Were they, in fact, worth defending? Or was my fondness for these antiquated objects a product of my own nostalgia or upbringing—a sign that it was me who was antiquated?

It’s true that I grew up in a bookish household, although I was not a bookish child. There were years of sports, video games, and adolescent hijinks of a tame, middle-class variety, years in which I had no career aspirations beyond making the NHL. Eventually, I found myself yearning for a more literary life, which led to the study of English.

My job now involves teaching novels and short stories to enthusiastic university students, many of whom are budding bibliophiles; at home, I’ve read aloud to my own children almost every night for more than a decade and will keep doing so until the audience dries up. Many of my friendships were initiated or solidified over the giving or receiving of books. Somewhere along the way, I came to think of these objects as self-evidently valuable. I had lost (if I ever really had) the arguments to explain why books matter and why the banning and destruction of literature is so odious and socially corrosive.

It’s time to revive and sharpen those arguments. Book censorship is on the rise. We’ve all seen the news stories—the frequent headlines about book banning in schools or public libraries, about the takeover of school boards, about novels that are no longer teachable on university campuses, publishers pulling or issuing bowdlerized editions of suddenly controversial classics, authors who face cancellation. Not all these phenomena constitute “banning” per se, but they all fall under what we might call the new “censorship consensus,” in which books are called upon to justify their existence through demonstrations of their moral value.

Many people who consider themselves book lovers seem comfortable with the new censorship consensus. Indeed, they no longer need an external authority to tell them which books ought to go. In the summer of 2024, after Andrea Robin Skinner, one of Alice Munro’s daughters, came forward with the story of her harrowing sexual assault at the hands of Munro’s husband (and Munro’s complicity over the years in covering up the abuse), readers took to X to declare that Munro had been expunged from their shelves. “I just can’t . . .” one user posted, above a photo of a garbage can filled with Munro’s Nobel Prize-winning books.

We've long struggled with questions about how to frame the art of people who do things we abhor, but it was the lack of struggle that seemed notable in this case—at least among those who had decided that Munro's work was now trash.

**BOOKS HAVE ALWAYS** been challenged, but the current eruption of censorship feels like something new. “Book Bans Continue to Surge in Public Schools,” went an April 2024 *New York Times* headline, which found that rates of book banning were doubling year over year.

According to PEN America, thousands of book removals occurred in 2023, in forty-two states, both Democratic and Republican. PEN has now identified more than 10,000 instances of books being removed from US schools but is quick to clarify that the true number is likely much higher. One well-known study conducted by the American Library Association estimated that between 82 percent and 97 percent of all library challenges go unreported. Much of this book banning appears to be fuelled by outright bigotry. “Overwhelmingly, book banners continue to target stories by and about people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals,” PEN notes. “30 percent of the unique titles banned are books about race, racism, or feature characters of color. Meanwhile, 26 percent of unique titles banned have LGBTQ+ characters or themes.”

Book bans are as old as the book itself. In Canada, state-sponsored book censorship began with the passage of the Customs Act in the first session of the Canadian Parliament in 1867. That act prohibited the importation of “books and drawings of an immoral or indecent character”; the criminal code further forbade the exhibition of any “disgusting object.” The US outlawed using the postal service for “obscene, lewd, and lascivious” material—prohibitions backed by measures including confiscation, customs seizure, civil and criminal prosecution, and police arrests.

Where book banning once largely involved the legal and disciplinary apparatus of the state, the new censorship consensus works through both state actors and a constellation of special interest groups operating inside and outside of institutions. Their target is libraries: public libraries, in which all taxpayers have a stake, and especially school libraries, which can be uniquely vulnerable due to chronic funding shortages and lack of full-time librarians able to cultivate their collections year over year.

Libraries are natural quarry for anti-government organizations, including Moms for Liberty and No Left Turn in Education. Legal challenges against books, of the sort that once banned *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from American shelves, are costly and hindered by decades of First Amendment jurisprudence that steadily broadened the sphere of expressive freedom. Libraries, by contrast, are soft targets. Any citizen can mount a challenge. The instructions for doing so are often posted on the library website.

We should be clear on the stakes. When parental rights organizations attack libraries, they are attacking one of the last public institutions committed to intellectual freedom. While it's



true that more books are now available online, we court disaster by assuming that the internet—which is volatile and ephemeral and frequently weaponized against users across the globe—has replaced libraries as key intellectual infrastructure for liberal democracies.

Battles over book banning are especially contentious in school libraries, for obvious reasons. We compel children to attend school, and kids are more impressionable, so materials must be “age appropriate”—an inherently debatable category. Those who would cleanse the school library frame their efforts as an appeal to save children from harm.

Beneath the surface of these disputes lies a deeper conflict over our national and communal history. One reason why book banners so frequently attack works of historical fiction—including *Maus*, Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel about his father’s experience as a Holocaust survivor; *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison’s haunting novels of American racial trauma; and countless other texts at the intersection of race and history—is that the banners are fighting for control of our collective past.

At the same time, in seeking control over the narratives that children will carry into adulthood, the banners are also fighting for their vision of the future. Attacks on school libraries are, among much else, future-oriented attacks on liberal democracy and its vital institutions.

**AMONG THE MOST** influential of the US parents’ rights organizations is Moms for Liberty, which the Southern Poverty Law Center characterizes as an anti-government extremist organization given to trafficking in conspiracy propaganda and anti-LGBTQ+ hate. The group’s own membership, by contrast, understand their calls to remove library books as empowering parents and defending children from “LGBTQ indoctrination.”

Some of their book-banning efforts seem like social media-fuelled spectacles intended to galvanize outrage. Yet parents of a variety of religious backgrounds see their “anti-pornography” advocacy as a sincere expression of faith and as an expression of democratic values; their avowed aim is not to impose their beliefs upon schools or libraries but to free children from beliefs that have been imposed upon them. Their censoriousness arises from opposition to a liberal culture that would “pollute and sexualize our children,” in Florida governor Ron DeSantis’s phrase.

Ontario progressives, no less than Florida conservatives, find in “child safety” a warrant to ban books. Greater sensitivity to racially charged language and imagery has resulted in school library challenges to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Of Mice and Men*, and several titles by Dr. Seuss. After some school districts banned from classrooms all books by non-Black authors that contain the N-word, books like *Lord of the Flies* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* went from being mandatory to unteachable.

In the fall of 2023, educators in Ontario’s Peel Region (a municipality just east of Toronto, containing some 257 schools) engaged in an “equity-based book weeding process,” leading

some schools to purge thousands of books. These books were, according to the social justice framework that motivated their removal, potential sources of student “harm.”

Because no one involved with efforts to remove books from libraries characterizes their efforts as “book banning” or “censorship,” some conceptual clarity is in order.

Emily Drabinski, former president of the American Library Association, defines a book ban as “the removal of a title from a library because someone considers it harmful or dangerous”—which captures both equity-based and parents’ rights arguments for pulling books from shelves. For PEN America, the definition is slightly broader: “Any action taken against a book based on its content that leads to a previously accessible book being completely removed.”

Our school principal was adamant that she was not proposing to ban any books. Likewise, administrators in Peel Region claim that their actions constitute “weeding” rather than “banning,” but this is a misrepresentation of library protocol. As the American Library Association states, “While weeding is essential to the collection development process, it should not be used as a deselection tool for controversial materials.” The industry standard for weeding is “MUSTIE,” which stands for misleading, ugly (worn out), superseded (by a later edition), trivial, irrelevant, and elsewhere (the item is widely available).

These definitions do not please everyone. The American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, argues that PEN’s definition of book banning is too broad, because even if a book is banned from a school library, it may still be available at a public library or for purchase from online vendors. (A book’s mere existence in another library should console readers who lost the opportunity to read it in theirs and can’t afford to buy it, the AEI seems to believe.)

For others, this definition of banning (i.e., pulling once-available books) is too narrow, as it fails to capture books that weren’t “banned” because they were never ordered in the first place. “Progressive librarians already practice a form of book banning by not ordering books seen as ‘conservative,’” argues writer and podcast host Dave Seminara. Or we might be tempted to consider pre-emptive bans even further upstream in the publishing process. “Random House Canada staff try to ban Jordan Peterson’s new book,” the *Daily Mail* declared in a headline, after the firm received seventy anonymous complaints about publishing *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*.

The truth is that publishers have always shaped their lists according to their editorial priorities and business practices, just as individual booksellers stock only a tiny fraction of the millions of titles available at any given moment; neither should be conflated with book banning. Similarly, conflicts between the ideals and business imperatives of publishers (and between their employees and paying readership) lie beyond our scope (which is not to say that an illiberal culture of policing and regulating what gets produced, and by whom, is not worthy of consideration).

But even former ALA president Emily Drabinski’s relatively narrow definition of book ban (“the removal of a title from a library because someone considers it harmful or dangerous”) leaves an alarming number and range of incidents to consider.

**WHEN CONSIDERING THE** origins of contemporary book banning, we can point to material causes. We can follow, for example, the hundreds of thousands of dollars that Patriot Mobile, a self-identified Christian cellphone carrier, devoted to promoting Texas school board candidates who were committed to eliminating critical race theory and “LGBTQ indoctrination” from schools. We can point to political causes: Texas governor Greg Abbott’s 2021 campaign promise to investigate a list of about 850 books that might cause students “psychological distress because of their race or sex,” or legislative efforts in Florida, Utah, and Missouri aimed at removing LGBTQ+ content from school libraries.

In Canada, we can examine a British Columbia school board’s decision to pull *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, *In the Heat of the Night* by John Ball, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee from a grade ten reading curriculum over student safety concerns. But all of this unfolds against a broader context in which the cultural value of books and reading seems to be waning.

The rise of contemporary book banning presents a paradox. Book banners assign extraordinary power to books at a time when, by objective measures, books and literature seem to matter less and less. One recent survey found that about half of Americans didn’t read a single book in 2023. English departments have seen declining enrolments for a generation; increasingly, students arrive at university having never read an entire book in high school. In classrooms across North America, teachers are assigning ever fewer full-length books; instead, they provide summaries and key passages.

This turn away from books (“paywalled dead trees,” as the tech bros call them) is becoming educational policy. In 2022, the US National Council of Teachers of English released a clear position statement on media literacy: “The time has come to decenter book reading and essay-writing as the pinnacles of English language arts education.” Students, too, seem glad to be rid of books. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Americans between fifteen and nineteen read for personal interest for an average of eight minutes per day; no age group reads less. This at a time when teens are spending a median of almost four and a half hours daily on their smartphones. The typical teen spends more time on their phone each day than they spend reading over an entire month.

At a historical moment in which social media and digital technology occupy an increasingly central role in children’s lives, it seems strangely nostalgic to fret about the power of books to, for example, “indoctrinate” children into adopting a queer lifestyle, or, for that matter, to psychologically harm them with non-inclusive narratives. You might think, in short, that parents concerned with saving children from the baleful effects of media would focus their attention upon the forms of media that their children actually consume.

Toward that end, in 2024, eight Ontario school boards and two private schools launched lawsuits, seeking over \$7 billion in damages, against social media companies (including the owners of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok) for marketing intentionally addictive products to children and for “rewiring” the way children “think, act, behave and learn.”

But that is to presume that book banning is expected to work, and it rarely has. At least, not if we believe that the work of book banning is to eliminate dangerous or harmful or otherwise subversive ideas, however those ideas are defined. But book bans can achieve the opposite of their desired effect, increasing people’s desire to read what authorities would prohibit. “Every time a school district bans *THUG*, the sales in that area skyrocket,” tweeted *The Hate U Give* author Angie Thomas. Direct action against authors can bring similar results. On Friday, August 12, 2022, Salman Rushdie’s novels weren’t charting on the Amazon top 100 bestsellers. Then he was stabbed. By the following Tuesday, *The Satanic Verses*—the “blasphemous” novel that had prompted Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to issue the fatwa ordering Rushdie’s execution in 1989—had topped several of Amazon’s bestseller lists.

Yet there’s no denying that censorship has wrought devastating effects. Writing by Ovid, Confucius, Mikhail Lermontov, and countless others may have been censored out of existence; great libraries have been reduced to rubble; writers have been tortured and burned. Missionaries including Diego de Landa destroyed Mayan codices and Inca quipus, part of what is now understood as a broader genocidal campaign aimed at eliminating all cultural traces of pre-Christian North America. Untold monuments to human culture have been permanently lost; many more have failed to materialize under authoritarian regimes in which expressive freedom must fly under the radar of secret police.

If calls to censor Angie Thomas and Salman Rushdie lead to increased sales in the anglosphere, that is because a robust culture of expressive freedom continues to allow for the celebration of challenged books. And it is precisely this culture of expressive freedom that today’s book banners erode by normalizing censorship.

Still, given the ubiquity of digital technology that allows for near-instantaneous reproduction of material, the complete eradication of texts may strike us as increasingly implausible. Never has it been easier to upload, disseminate, or find challenged texts on the internet (at least theoretically—library patrons without the technology, time, or money to source the book elsewhere will disproportionately suffer the effects of book bans). The prospect of eliminating a book’s existence, or preventing determined readers from accessing it, has never been more fanciful than for contemporary North Americans.

**WHICH BRINGS US** to a second paradox of contemporary censorship: in an era where book banning feels less feasible than ever, more and more people are attempting it, which forces us to think again about their goals. The new censorship consensus does not “work” as



censorship once did, through pre-publication licences or the efforts of customs officers charged with confiscating and destroying contraband literature.

Instead, it works as symbolic practice, as means for the book banners to announce what they would extirpate from the library, and not only from the library. Book banning may be a symptom of political impotence, in the sense that it does nothing to alleviate underlying conditions: Peel Region is no less racist for having expunged thousands of pre-2008 library books, and the racialized student who came to school without breakfast before the book purge is still coming to school without breakfast. Banning *All Boys Aren't Blue* from the library won't prevent children's acquaintance with LGBTQ+ ideas, nor will it hasten the dawn of a new golden era of traditional gender roles in American society.

But it may work in other ways, and the “success” of book banning needn't be understood as zero sum. Today's book banners may care less about permanently eradicating certain books or ideas than about temporarily limiting access during an impressionable life stage. The effect may be to deprive a queer student of the solace of literary representation at a moment when it was needed most. Regardless of the final availability (or not) of any challenged book, book banning may perform the political work of uniting community members against a perceived threat, of defining group affiliation through opposition to an imagined other. It constitutes a form of symbolic violence, where purged books represent what banners would purge from society itself—and where the act of purging constitutes a rite of belonging.

The parental rights movement's calls to resist “pornography” and “LGBTQ indoctrination” now enjoys significant political support. When he was running for re-election, Donald Trump inveighed against school board “dictatorships” at the 2024 Moms for Liberty Summit. “Your schools and your children are suffering greatly because they're going into the classrooms and taking disease,” he warned.

For years, state legislatures have been passing bills that would prohibit teaching sexual or racial concepts in schools. Some of these have been struck down as unconstitutional, and more will be. Regardless, the fate of *Roe v. Wade* serves as a reminder that legal freedoms remain fragile; the return of regressive censorship committees, postal searches, and prosecutions remains a live possibility. Those in favour of such a regime can find inspiration not only in our own recent history but also in the systems of censorship currently thriving in authoritarian regimes around the world.

For now, we fight about schools, about what the children, who read less and less, should read. Contemporary progressive educators from Ontario bear little in common with parents' rights activists from Florida, and their aims are not equivalent. But both treat books as sources of contagion and libraries as fields of indoctrination, and both invoke the vulnerability of children as a warrant for censorship. Both abide by the new censorship consensus, where the school library is a microcosm of the ideal society, and books are levers of social engineering. In my ideal society, their thinking goes, there will be more of this and less of that: more diversity, less racism.

Both ignore the cyclical nature of censorship, presuming that the new censorship apparatus won't eventually come for them. They deceive themselves.

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## **IRA WELLS**

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# A shadow war on libraries

*Some Canadian politicians and influencers, inspired by an American-born movement, are trying to roll back 2SLGBTQ+ rights in Canada — one book at a time.*

By Grant LaFleche, Rachel Ward, Mark Kelley Feb. 7, 2025

There was a time, not so very long ago, when there was no place Theo Robertson wanted to be other than the small prairie town of Valleyview, Alta.

It is here, in a town tucked between Sturgeon Lake and the Little Smoky River about 350 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, that Robertson was raised. It is where she went to school and met friends. It is where she works in her grandfather's garage to earn pocket money.

But Valleyview no longer feels like home to the 17-year-old transgender teenager. The town now conjures up a darker feeling.

"I feel terrorized almost. I feel like existing in my community has just become harder than it was ever intended to be," said Robertson.

On the streets of the town, in public meetings and on social media, Robertson says she has been openly accosted by adults because of her gender. And it all started when she stood up for the public library.

Since 2023, a fierce debate over the fate of the library has exposed political fault lines in the once close-knit town of nearly 1,800 people. Defenders of the library and the local 2SLGBTQ+ community have been pitted against a secretive town council and its allies.

The fight is a deeply personal one for Robertson, who founded Valleyview's gay-straight alliance club, or GSA, in the library. Teens in the club say it is the only refuge in town for them — one Robertson now fears will be erased.

The conflict came to a head on Jan. 29, when the town-controlled majority on the board voted to close and move the library into a soon-to-be-built school complex. The space

<https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/a-shadow-war-on-libraries>

afforded to the library will be half its current size and potentially be subject to restrictive provincial rules around 2SLGBTQ+ expression in schools.

“This feels like this was the nail in the coffin,” said Robertson. “I don’t think anybody at our GSA would feel safe having the group at the new school.”

The experience in Valleyview is not an isolated one. An investigation by *The Fifth Estate* has found there is a shadow war in Canada against libraries and books. Its leading political actors, from small towns to large political parties, are linked to a broader grassroots movement. Steeped in conspiracy theories, this movement has stoked fears about gender identity education, child abuse and teachers.

Sometimes activists have moved through legitimate processes, including elections, running campaigns in often-overlooked races for school or library boards. Other times, they use established book challenge processes at libraries, which has caused a dramatic rise in attempts to ban books in Canada.

By analyzing more than a dozen hours of video footage, book challenge data, social media activity and secret recordings, *The Fifth Estate* traced this web of influence to the United States, where an anti-2SLGBTQ+ campaign evolved from right-wing campaign rhetoric to laws that threaten libraries in Republican states.

The battle language of this movement is found in events held by the political activist group Take Back Alberta (TBA), where the audience was told books, libraries and schools are weapons being used to corrupt children’s souls and destroy Western civilization. With the stakes this high, Take Back Alberta’s firebrand leader David Parker urged his listeners to act.

“We are on the precipice of a communist revolution. It's literally happening right before your eyes. If we rise up, we can stop it,” Parker told his followers at one of these events. “If you're too busy to save your civilization, then you deserve the gulags.”

In Valleyview, the movement’s influence looms over the landscape. On the highway into town, local business owner Rod Perron erected a massive tower in his canola field. Draped over its frame is a banner with an unmistakable message: “Taking Alberta Back.”

<https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/a-shadow-war-on-libraries>



"I think it means to me that we're moving in the right direction, getting back to our core roots," said Perron. "I guess Take Back Alberta has a lot of influence on social issues."

The debate over social issues is tied the fate of the library in Valleyview and became so divisive that one of the town councillors pleaded for unity.

"Let's not go into the community and cause a big divide," said Coun. Samantha Steinke at an April 2024 town hall meeting. "We have half the community hating the other half of the community."

### A place to be themselves

For decades, Valleyview's library has stood on 50th Avenue, a road known around town as "Main Street." It is home to more than books. It is a hub of community programs for kids, new Canadians and seniors, from reading time to computer classes.

There, surrounded by the stacks and shelves, a small group of 2SLGBTQ+ youth regularly gather. They play board games. They watch movies. They eat pizza.

Above all, they feel safe.

"It's sort of like a youth group with the underlying notion that we are accepting and that we love everybody," said Robertson. "They already identify as LGBT, and we just provide a space for them to be and to exist."

Some GSA members, like 18-year-old Grade 12 student Jazmin, said they were not comfortable meeting as a group at school.

"This space is definitely better than school because there's several teachers who have expressed their opinion about queer students," Jazmin told *The Fifth Estate*.

"It makes me feel like maybe this isn't who I'm supposed to be, like maybe I have to change myself because it's wrong," she said. CBC News is not publishing her full name to maintain her privacy for her protection.

In an emailed statement to *The Fifth Estate*, the Northern Gateway Public Schools, the school board that will get the town's library, said concerns about teachers' views of 2SLGBTQ+ students have not been raised with their administration.

Former library board director Debbie Stewart said outside the library walls, some townsfolk were suspicious of the local GSA.

"It wasn't some ulterior agenda. I mean it was just to help these kids have a safe place to meet because some of them aren't supported at home unfortunately," said Stewart. "A lot of people took exception with that."

Whatever the attitudes about the GSA in some corners of Valleyview, the town government made no public issue out of it. In fact, library staff had no idea their workplace would soon be the centre of controversy.

The first sign of trouble arrived in 2023 as an oblique warning from the network of libraries in Canada that regularly communicate, said librarian Liz Griffiths-Garcia.

The message was stark — a storm was coming.

"You need to watch out because these people are a thing, and they might start trying to infiltrate your library board, they might start trying to influence things or censor books or make waves," Griffiths-Garcia said she was told.

"These people," as Griffiths-Garcia calls them, have made their presence known across Canada as the COVID-19 pandemic retreated. Protesters made headlines demonstrating outside libraries in opposition to drag queens reading books to kids and their parents, waving "protect the children" signs and making spurious claims of grooming, indoctrination and child abuse.

Beyond the public protests, there were more organized attempts to advance their agenda.

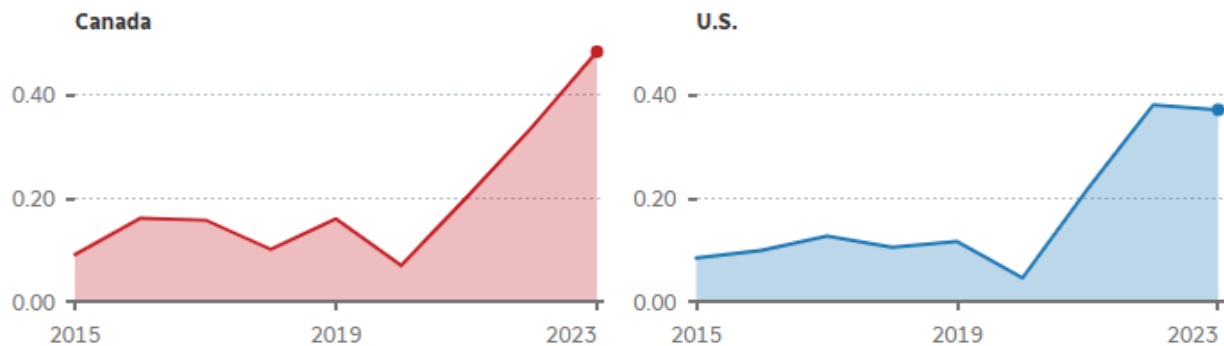
As the country began to crawl out from pandemic lockdowns in 2021, formal challenges to books in libraries began a sharp climb upward.

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By 2023, book challenges in Canada increased nearly four times the pre-pandemic average, according to new peer-reviewed research by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA).

### Book challenges in public libraries are increasing

Number of instances per 100,000 people (per capita)



Source: Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CBC)

Researchers Michael Nyby and Richard Ellis found book challenges also changed in character. Previously, the small number of challenges were focused on material that could be considered racist or homophobic. Post-COVID, those challenges are intently focused on 2SLGBTQ+ materials — including books about gender identity, educational books on sexuality and even books that have gay or transgender characters.

Nearly half the book challenges in Canada in 2023 were related to 2SLGBTQ+ materials, up from 9.8 per cent in 2019.

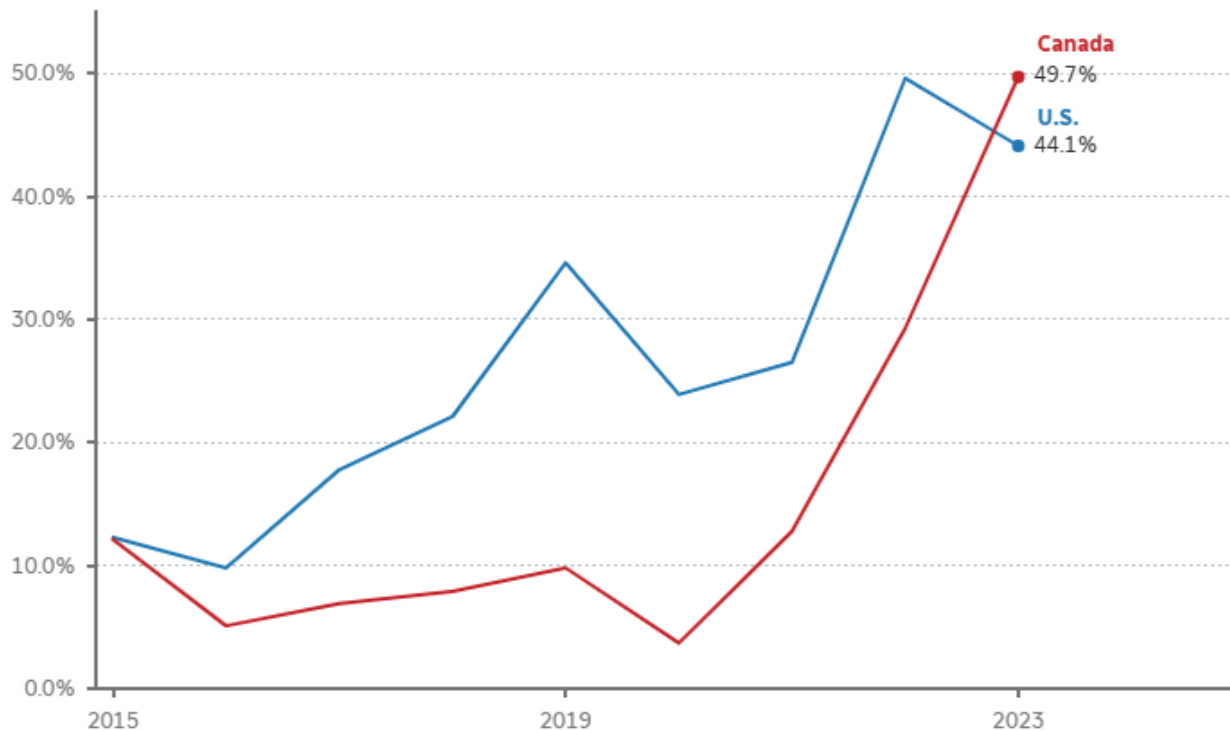
This shift did not happen in isolation. Ellis and Nyby found challenges in Canada echoed those in the United States. The same titles are often targets on both sides of the border.

"Given that the sudden about-face in Canadian library censorship trends closely followed a historic increase in similar challenges in the United States, it is difficult to imagine anything other than cross-border influence as the likely catalyst," wrote Ellis and Nyby.

Challenges sometimes succeed in getting books moved from one section of a library to another, but more often than not they fail to have books removed entirely.

## Challenges against 2SLGBTQ+ books sharply increased in recent years

Percentage of total book challenges



Source: Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CBC)

Sometimes, those opposed to 2SLGBTQ+-themed books turned to more clandestine ways to attack books.

"We've always had challenges," said Kelly Lauzon, a librarian at the public library in Airdrie, Alta., and a member of the CFLA's intellectual freedom committee. "We've definitely seen an uptake in challenges, both indirect and direct to those types of materials."

In 2023, those indirect challenges at the Airdrie library resulted in some books related to 2SLGBTQ+ themes and characters being flushed in used toilets in the women's washroom. Lauzon said her library was not about to let vandals win the day. She reordered the books.

"Some people want to teach their kids about sex. Some people do not. And that's OK," Lauzon said. "That's your freedom. But it is not your right to take that material away from other people who would like to teach their kids about gender identity and sex."

In Valleyview, a novel approach was taken to remove the books.

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Local resident and self-described white “ethnocentrist” T.J. Kennedy — a photographer with connections to the local member of the provincial legislature and an influential Valleyview political family — took to the social media platform X in April 2024 to declare he was borrowing 2SLGBTQ+-themed children's books from the library.

He encouraged others to follow his lead and “create a perpetual book borrowing cycle that keeps these books off the shelves and in your dark closet at home out of reach and out of sight of any poor child they are wanting to groom.”

In an emailed statement to *The Fifth Estate*, Kennedy said “my motivation is to protect my children and this community's children from sexualization.”

The loss of books with gender identity themes or information can have a serious impact on 2SLGBTQ+ kids and their parents as they are trying to navigate the sometimes fraught landscape of gender identity, said Florence Ashley, an academic and associate law professor at the University of Alberta.

Those resources can help teens understand themselves, said Ashley, and are an invaluable tool for parents who need help to help their children.

“Another thing is on a more basic level,” said Ashley, who is trans. “If you see books in the public library treating queer and trans characters as just a matter of course, then you're much more likely to just realize that, ‘Hey, maybe hating queer and trans people just because they're queer and trans is just not the way to go.’”

The fabricated enemy at the gates

If Valleyview’s town councillors had objections to what was on the library’s shelves, they never said anything publicly. There were no public notices or debates in council chambers. But in December 2023, they cut \$60,000, about half the town’s portion of funding, from the library budget.

Library staff said they learned about the cut from the local rumour mill.

"There is no coming back from 50 per cent," library director Kerri Danner can be heard saying in a video of an emergency library board meeting in December 2023 obtained by *The Fifth Estate*.

At the meeting was Coun. Ken Wittig, town council's lone member on the library board. He did not provide a definitive reason for the budget cut, but suggested the town's finances were a part of it, saying the town had not raised taxes in years.

"As a taxpayer, I would like to be approached about that though before I hear that services are being cut," Danner said.

"Well, we're not cutting services," Wittig said.

"You are. Library services," Danner said. "You're cutting library services."

One board member asked Wittig if the budget cut was a way to starve the library to justify moving it into a planned new Northern Gateway Public Schools complex in the town — a move the library board rejected a year earlier.

"I don't think that's the case whatsoever," Wittig said.

Members of town council, including Mayor Vern Lymburner, declined to speak to *The Fifth Estate*. They unanimously passed a motion in November behind closed doors, shortly before *The Fifth Estate's* planned arrival in Valleyview, saying no member of the elected council can speak to the media.

In a two-sentence statement uploaded to the council's Nov. 25 minutes on the town's website, the council said that any decisions it makes are in the best interests of the town's ratepayers, but did not mention the library.

The state of Valleyview's finances are not entirely clear in part because the town, unlike most Alberta municipalities, does not publish its annual budgets.

And there is no local news media in Valleyview to report on council deliberations — the town's only newspaper closed during the pandemic.

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The council does post minutes of meetings, but they rarely include reports or details of debates. Council also does not livestream its meetings, having passed a resolution that forbids “recordings of any sort of council meetings as any recordings can be utilized in the future for legal purposes.”

However, a 2023 audited budget statement obtained by *The Fifth Estate* shows the town ended 2023 with a \$1-million deficit, despite projecting a \$5-million surplus. The town also had nearly \$6 million in cash reserves.

"I don't believe it's the money issue at all," said Travis Werklund, vice-president of Valleyview's chamber of commerce.

"Sixty thousand dollars is not going to impact having to spend money for the roads or water storage after last year's fire season ... I don't think that \$60,000 has anything to do with either of those projects."

During the December 2023 emergency library board meeting, a furious Danner told Wittig the town council had better brace itself for the town's reaction to the budget cut.

"My gut is telling me that council has no idea of the backlash you're going to get," she said.

### [Taking the libraries back](#)

Valleyview's library being in the midst of a political storm was new to the town, but is in keeping with Take Back Alberta's stated aim of creating change by seizing control of the low hanging fruit of democracy, like school and library boards.

"I say this to all of you: Who here feels that horrible things are happening in our libraries?" Take Back Alberta leader Parker said during a 2023 rally outside Calgary city hall.

"The answer right now is that we have to get engaged. Every one of you has to begin participating in their democracy. If you want them to leave your kids alone, you have to be the ones making the decision about how that happens."

Low voter turnout, he said, is the key to victory.

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"Albertans and Canadians are apathetic and lazy. They never show up," he said during another October 2023 speech in Calgary. "You could take over every school board in this entire province."

Parker knows a thing or two about political success, having turned Take Back Alberta into a force in Alberta politics.

The group claims responsibility for forcing former Alberta premier Jason Kenney's resignation in 2022. And when the governing United Conservative Party held elections for its board of directors in 2023, several candidates sought Parker's endorsement — including Valleyview town Coun. Samantha Steinke.

"We're endorsing Sam," Parker said in a video in which TBA vetted candidates. Steinke, he said, was the "only TBA person" running for a board position and "was one of the key organizers behind the entire freedom movement here in Alberta."

Steinke's UCP connection runs in the family. Her husband, Nathan Steinke, works in the office of Todd Lowen, a UCP member of the provincial legislature and Alberta's minister of forests and parks. Prior to becoming a town councillor in 2021, Samantha Steinke ran the local UCP constituency association.

Samantha Steinke was on the stage at the 2024 UCP annual general meeting in Red Deer, having won her board election, where thousands of party members were in attendance. Parker glad-handed his way through the crowds.

"There are 2,288 people from Take Back Alberta that are here," Parker told *The Fifth Estate* in an interview from the floor of the convention. "That is just the people on my list."

If Parker's claim is true, Take Back Alberta followers made up nearly 40 per cent of the UCP membership at the meeting. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith distanced herself from Parker in February 2024 after his social media commentary about federal Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's marriage. But TBA's influence in the wider UCP remains.

Parker watched as party members voted on policy resolutions, informed by TBA's positions, opposing gender affirming care, GSA rules and diversity and inclusion policies.

<https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/a-shadow-war-on-libraries>

The politics championed by Take Back Alberta are not limited to Wild Rose Country. There are similar efforts in other provinces.

In 2022 municipal elections in British Columbia and Ontario, for instance, candidates from groups such as "Vote Against The Woke" and "ParentsVoice B.C." ran in school board elections, although they only won a handful of seats.

The face of local government is changing as a result of these types of electoral efforts, said Paul McLauchlin, the president of Alberta's Rural Municipalities Association, who has served five terms in rural municipal politics.

Disinformation campaigns are stirring up voters around fabricated issues, he said, resulting in the election of politicians whose agendas have nothing to do with the often mundane tasks of maintaining roads or passing land use bylaws.

"Undeniably, you can definitely create pretty big armies on wars that may or may not exist," McLauchlin said. "And I think that you can start to feed people on some concerns that they have and create this bigger enemy; the bigger the enemy you create, the more people that'll join your side."

And the politics of real or imagined grievances can tear at the fabric of a community.

"I think that when you deal with a small community, that can divide a council. I know people that will never talk to each other ever again over issues like this," McLauchlin said.

In Valleyview, the library board is not elected, but chosen by town council. In the past, the library would select prospective board members who applied and present its choices to the town council for approval.

But in 2024, council unilaterally replaced some of the strongest library defenders on the board — including GSA supporter Debbie Stewart — and appointed its own hand-picked members. That resulted in the eight-member board being split down the middle between old and new members.

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The town broke the impasse by adding a ninth member to the board.

### A town divided

As the library debate in Valleyview heated up, common ground became increasingly less common, and the teens who found refuge in the GSA felt like they were becoming outcasts.

"My idea of common ground is being able to exist in this community," said Robertson.

"And I think what [some town residents] think I mean by that is that people like me will suddenly start to control their town and that the rise in acceptance for people like me means that there will be a sudden spike in population of people like me and that we will take over ... but that's not true."

Robertson said hostility toward the local 2SLGBTQ+ community has become more open. During the 2024 annual town parade, Robertson was part of a Pride float. She was handing out candy to parade goers along the route when one man, in full view of other adults, harshly rebuffed the teen with homophobic slurs.

Robertson said the other adults nearby did nothing.

"I think really that we're kind of forgetting to be human beings and we're kind of just running with the biggest stick we can find," said Valleyview mechanic Ken Hoedl, Robertson's grandfather.

Other vocal defenders of the library were also victims of malicious smears, including Travis Werklund. Aside from his role at the chamber of commerce, he is an outspoken gay man and was the owner of the Tall Timbers café.

His café was once a hub of activity, even welcoming Premier Smith during a visit in the summer of 2023.

As the library debate raged on through 2023, Werklund says town employees, a core slice of his customer base, stopped coming to the café.

He says the decline in customers was fatal and by the summer of 2024, Tall Timbers was shuttered.

"It is the end of a dream," said Werklund. "Standing up for what I thought was just and right and loving actually backfired on me."

Shortly afterwards, T.J. Kennedy — the man who tried to get 2SLGBTQ+ books off the library shelves in town — celebrated the Tall Timber's closing with an X post dripping with damaging false accusations aimed at Werklund. Kennedy is friends with Samantha Steinke, and he said she helped him land a job with local MLA Todd Loewen.

The post included a selfie showing a grinning Kennedy pointing at the cafe's "closed" sign.

"Local groomer's business shut down permanently," wrote Kennedy. "Too bad so sad. FAFO."

In social media parlance, FAFO is both a warning and victory chant: "F-k around and find out."

"The more times that they say [groomer], the more people that believe it," said Werklund. "And it's filled with hate.... Those who know me will know that this is about hate."

Not everyone in town believes the 2SLGBTQ+ community is a target of discrimination, including Rod Perron, the man with the Taking Alberta Back tower.

Valleyview, he says, is an accepting place, but those who support cutting the library budget, which he sees as a purely financial issue, are being unfairly painted as bigots.

"I think the gay thing, it's just like if you're not out there dancing on the street with them, well, then they're saying that there's something wrong with you," said Perron. "I don't feel that they're discriminated [against] at all in our town. Maybe they just need to focus on something different and they'll probably fit in just fine."

## The conspiracy no one can see

The hostility toward 2SLGBTQ+ materials and programs in libraries in schools is explicit in Take Back Alberta events and rallies. *The Fifth Estate* has examined hours of video of these events featuring Parker at the microphone, where the mechanics of a sprawling conspiracy aimed at children are laid out as a clear and present danger to western civilization.

Those videos show that Parker is far from the only influential voice pushing these claims. In October 2023, Parker introduced a guest speaker at two Take Back Alberta events who described the architecture of the conspiracy.

"They turn the children against family. They turn the children against faith, they turn the children against themselves. They're alienating the children from who they are, incapable of understanding who they are," conservative American author James Lindsay said at a TBA event in Calgary.

"You're a parent, you show up to a school board in the United States and you complain about the perverted books they've got, you're a domestic terrorist," Lindsay said.

Lindsay's conspiracy theory casts schools and libraries as communist revolutionary hotbeds. This rebellion is so insidious, he claims, that no parents can ever see it in action.

"It'll never show up in the curriculum. They'll never show up in the book. And if you see the homework yourself, you'll never get upset about a single question. You have to see what they're doing in the classroom," Lindsay told the TBA crowd. "Let me give you a clue. If you show up that day, they won't do it that day."

Lindsay's views are not an aberration in the United States. *The Fifth Estate* found his rhetoric is a staple of Republican politics, where anti-2SLGBTQ+ sentiment has been turned into law. In several red states, these laws are designed to punish libraries for including 2SLGBTQ+ books in their collections.

"When we say that censorship is the greatest threat to democracy, it is true," said Sherry Scheline, the director of the library in the small town of Donnelly, Idaho, where state



legislation has put the library's future at risk. "When the politics comes knocking at our door, we have no choice but to become involved. Librarians have to step up and protect the books. That is our job because by protecting the books, protecting speech, we are protecting democracy as a whole."

In Idaho, for example, the Republican-controlled state legislature passed Bill 710 last year, allowing anyone who finds a library book with content "harmful to minors" — which includes "homosexuality" — to sue the library for damages. If someone complains about a book, the law obligates a library to move it out of reach of minors or face a lawsuit with an automatic fine of \$250, plus damages awarded in a civil court.

In Donnelly, the library has tried to preserve its collection and programs within the law by becoming "adults only." Children can only visit with a parent or if a parent has signed a consent waiver.

"There's no harm on my shelves," Scheline said. "Our teen LGBTQ community is the most hurt by this legislation.... And they deserve to see themselves reflected in literature."

These anti-library laws are the latest manifestation of a current of anti-transgender sentiment roiling through Republican politics for years, said Madison Pauly, an [investigative journalist with Mother Jones magazine](#) in California.

Pauly said some Christian nationalist groups and politicians were looking for an issue to engage their base after gay marriage became legal and broadly socially acceptable.

America's small transgender population — less than one per cent of adult Americans, according to the Williams Institute at the University of California — became the target.

"People don't know a lot about transgender rights, this might seem very outside of their experience, so maybe it's something they can't relate to," said Pauly of the rationale used by some social conservatives that she uncovered in her reporting on the movement.

"Let's try to spread misinformation about it and turn this into a political issue that can motivate voters."

It began with stoking fears about transgender people in female bathrooms and sports, and eventually morphed into an attack on schools, libraries and 2SLGBTQ+ books.

"It's been an incremental approach that at this point in the U.S. has become an all-out attack on trans people, their existence, their lives, their ability to live fully as themselves and publicly," said Pauly.

### The end of an era

The die was cast. The defenders of Valleyview's library tried to make their voices heard, but they were unable to prevent what was coming.

At a library board meeting on Jan. 29, the final decision was made. In a video of the meeting obtained by *The Fifth Estate*, the five town-picked members of the library board are seen outvoting the other four and deciding that the library would close in its current location and be moved to the new school complex. Like the meetings that preceded it, the deep divisions in Valleyview were on display.

"It is clear to me that a lot of private discussions and decisions have been made," said longtime board member Kelli Reimer when the motion to close the library was debated.

"Excuse me," said Tina Caron, the new board chair. "We are going to stick to the motion laid on the table. We don't need interjections of accusations.... So I need you to stick to the motion."

"I feel that you are not allowing me to speak my opinion or my comments on this matter," Reimer said.

Another board member said Caron was out of order by shutting Reimer down, but after conferring with a new face at the board table seated beside her, Caron dismissed the accusation. The person she spoke with was the newly appointed board record keeper, Nathan Steinke, Samantha Steinke's husband.

Samantha Steinke did not reply to several interview requests from *The Fifth Estate*. An interview request sent to the office of Loewen, the local member of the provincial legislature, went unanswered.

<https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/a-shadow-war-on-libraries>

In the audience was T.J Kennedy, who told *The Fifth Estate* in an emailed statement he sometimes escorts some board members to their cars after meetings to make sure they are safe.

The school board's proposed floor plan shows the library will be moved into a community space about half the size of the current library building. In a recording of the meeting obtained by *The Fifth Estate*, library directors were told the school board — which is chaired by Samantha Steinke's father-in-law — will control the space.

A library in a school has a different character than a public one, said Lauzon of the Airdrie library.

"Public libraries "collect a wide array of material for everybody on all different topics. We rely on parents to choose materials for their children whereas in schools they act in more of a parental capacity that way," she said. "And so the collections policies are quite different from a school to a library."

On Feb. 1, library board chair Caron lauded the decision to move the library in a Facebook post, saying it would be a "model of success and innovation."

"I must stress that the school will not, and cannot under Alberta law, have control of the public library," Caron wrote. The debate about the decision continued in the post's comment section.

For Theo Robertson, the decision is a defeat. She will be leaving town for university in August, and does not expect to return.

"I used to think that maybe after I was educated and I had seen the world that I would come back here. Now I don't ever feel like that," she said. "I know how hard it was before. I can't even bear to think about how hard it's going to be to change things now."

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## Director's Report

March 6 2025

Alyssa Martin

### Organizational Review

Below is an update on the implementation of the Organizational Review recommendations. A staff meeting was held to inform staff of the upcoming changes, and to brainstorm how to put them into effect in the least disruptive manner possible.

#### Contracting TAL (The Alberta Library)

Payroll was successfully sent using EFTs, but we have run into some hiccups with our timing and procedures (to be discussed). In this process, we have run against many challenges with our banking platform (to be discussed). We will be gaining access to the payroll and scheduling platform this month to explore how we may use it – we may be able to cut the HR software subscription we have externally to TAL depending on user capabilities surrounding time off tracking and requests.

#### Executive Assistant Role

Our EA has been on the job for two weeks, and is finding plenty of ways to make our new systems more efficient, modern, and to improve data and file management.

#### New HR Software

During implementation, we discovered that Collage HR cannot track time off accruals for hourly staff, making the program substantially less useful for CPL. We are investigating if we can replace the other needed features with other software that we already have access to, and assess the amount of work this will cost or save.

#### Service Desk Supervisor

CPL is experiencing staff turn-over at the moment, allowing us the opportunity to assess the staffing levels for Circulation Assistants and Collection Assistants.

#### Service Desk Changes

Staff are feeling the pinch of reduced desk coverage as the Service Desk Supervisor has had to cut back on desk coverage to have enough time to do their job and implement changes. We will continue to implement cuts



to Circulation Assistant tasks and encourage self-serve options for patrons, but we are understaffed and there is only so much to be done to mitigate this.

### **Donations**

Discussions with the Friends of the Library group continue regarding book donations and a book sale.

### **Provincial Priorities Act**

Public Libraries will be affected by the Provincial Priorities Act. This act requires the province to approve the use of federal funds for specific entities. I have reached out to PLSB to gather specifics of what this will look like, but it has the potential to impact our ability to access or utilize the summer student grants (Canada Summer Jobs and Young Canada Works) we use every year for the summer reading program and book bike.

### **Canada Post Foundation Grant**

We have applied to the Canada Post Foundation for an Outreach Programmer position for youth focused initiatives. This program would allow us to hire a programmer to visit schools and organizations around Camrose and Camrose County to promote literacy, the library, and ensure everyone knows they have access to our services, and what those services are. Successful applicants are notified in the late summer/early fall.

### **Allard Foundation Funds**

In November of 2024, CPL applied to the Allard Foundation for funding. There was no submission deadline or guarantee we would ever hear from the foundation as only successful applicants get responses, but there was no date provided on when we would know if we were successful. Since this application was submitted, we were approach with partial funding for this project, which we accepted. We have now discovered that the Allard Foundation approved our request in full for the amount of \$13,000. We are waiting for a response to see if we can reallocate funds to support the same project in a different capacity.

### **Newcomer Program**

CPL has received unexpected funds to support our Newcomer Program – we are waiting for permission to announce the origin of the \$5000.



### **Summer Programmers**

We are finishing the process of hiring our summer programmers, and we are very excited to see what they do this year!

### **Facility Concerns**

Staff have raised concerns regarding mold, and poor air circulation. These concerns have been passed onto the City of Camrose. Our furnaces will be inspected, our duct work cleaned, and then air quality tests will be conducted. We appreciate working with the City on this matter.

### **Canada Day**

The Canada Day Committee has started meeting again. This Committee and having a library presence at Canada Day supports the Plan of Service goal "Community Partnerships & Outreach", and allows us to hit every one of its objectives. CPL will be contributing staff time, library resources, marketing/swag materials, and possibly funds for speakers as this platform allows us to reach a much larger audience than hosting events in the library.

### **Welcome Camrose**

The Welcome Camrose committee has started to meet again, and this committee's work also aligns with our Plan of Service goal "Community Partnerships & Outreach" In it we connect with new facets of the Camrose community including local businesses and the Camrose County, and are able to offer the libraries support to welcome and connect our community. We will be running the Good Neighbour Campaign again this spring, where we will act as an accessible hub for people to submit their nominations to, and assist with the planning, promotion and implementation of the initiative.

### **University of Alberta Alumnus and Community Partner Career Mixer**

I attended the UofA Alumnus and Community Partner Career Mixer, where I was able to speak with students about the library and fine arts industries, as well as the opportunities that our summer programmer positions can open for them. This also supports our Plan of Service goal "Community Partnerships & Outreach".



Camrose Public Library  
 Adult Programs  
 January 1 to February 28, 2025

Outreach	Program	Attendance
Deliveries to Care Facilities	19	142
German Circle Online	8	25
Ukulele Online	8	24
Mind Masters	2	396
	37	587

In House	Program	Attendance
Spanish	8	43
Ukulele	8	83
Fibre Club	6	33
Drum Circle with CMHA	1	7
Climate Café	1	0
Cricut Classes	4	16
Life Skills 101	2	16
Lunch & Learn with FCSS	2	17
Beading Circle with Joelle Skinner	1	12
Freedom to Look? FTRW with Andrea Korda	1	6
	34	233

<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>820</b>
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Camrose Public Library  
Family Programs  
January 1 to February 28, 2025

Outreach	Program	Attendance
Read for 15	1	3426
Chuck Maclean Family workshops	2	9
Women's Shelter Family Literacy	0	0
	3	3435

In House	Program	Attendance
Snacks in the Stacks	41	997
Something Cool After School	36	226
Books & Bounces	8	114
Terrific Tales	8	129
Tech Help	15	30
Bed Time Stories	8	124
Crafternoon	6	48
Rainbow Club	0	0
School PD Matinee	1	31
Newcomers Guide to Camrose	6	55
Saturday Story Time	1	3
Weekend Wiggles	0	0
Ghibli Geeks Club	2	4
Environmental Literacy Night for Family Literacy Day	1	14
	133	1775

<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>5210</b>
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Camrose Public Library  
 Childrens Programs  
 January 1 to February 28, 2025

Outreach	Program	Attendance
	0	0

In House	Program	Attendance
BRSD School Tours	3	52
	3	52

Monthly Total	3	52
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Camrose Public Library  
 Teen Programs  
 January 1 to February 28, 2025

Outreach	Program	Attendance
	0	0

In House	Program	Attendance
Golden Flames Teen D & D	8	112
	8	112

<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>112</b>
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Camrose Public Library  
Total Programs  
January 1 to 31, 2025

Outreach Programs	40	4022
In-house Programs	178	2172
YTD	218	6194

Submitted by Nicole Kyle  
3-Mar-25

# February 2025

## Program and Library Statistics

Submitted by Nicole Kyle  
March 3, 2025

**660**

people attended programs that foster a sense of community connection and belonging.

**294**

people accessed outreach library programs and services in the places where they live, work, and play.

**443**

people attended library programs and special events designed to educate and promote a love of lifelong learning.

**1 bit of awesome feedback:**

Mother of infant twins sent photos she took of staff at Books and Bounces along with the following message "Our whole family loves the work that you do. The boys are comfortable around you and I love when you play with them. Plus, it gives me an opportunity to have a special one-on-one moment with one while you cuddle the other."



**Ongoing Programs**

**Ukulele Jam (Adults)**  
Mondays @ 10:00

**Spanish Circle (Adults)**  
Mondays @ 3 in person  
and on Zoom

**Books & Bounces  
(infants under 2 and  
caregivers)**  
Tuesdays @ 11:00

**German Circle (Adults)**  
Tuesdays @ 4 on Zoom

**Climate Cafe (All ages)**  
1st Tuesday monthly @ 5:30

**Terrific Tales (Families)**  
Wednesdays @ 10:30

**Golden Flames D&D  
Club  
(Teens, registered)**  
Wednesdays @ 4; email  
[cpltechhelp@prl.ab.ca](mailto:cpltechhelp@prl.ab.ca) to  
register

**Bed Time Stories  
(families)**  
Wednesdays @ 6

**Ukulele Online (adults)**  
Thursdays @ 1 on Zoom

**Drumming Circle with  
Recovery College (16+)**  
1st Thursday Monthly @ 5  
Register at  
<https://bit.ly/CMHADrums>

**Newcomer's Guide to Camrose (All ages)**  
March 4 @ 5: Art Night  
March 15 @ 2: Yoga Essentials for Wellness  
March 18 @ 5: English Conversation Circle  
March 25 @ 5: Spring Forward

**Ghibli Geek Club**  
February 1 @ 1 PM and  
February 13 at 4:30 (12+).  
This month: Castle in the Sky

**PD Day Matinee**  **(All ages, registered)**  
March 7 @ 11:30 AM  
Phone or email to register  
by March 1. This month:  
Howl's Moving Castle

**Snacks in the Stacks  
(Grades 1-12)**  
School days @ 3:30

**Something Cool After  
School (Grades 1-8)**  
School days @ 3:30

**Rainbow Club Public  
GSA (All ages)**  
1st Saturday Monthly @ 11

**Saturday Story Time  
(Families)**  
Replaced this month by  
Dolly Parton Party. Please  
see other page for info.

**Weekend Wiggles  
(Infants under 2 and  
caregivers)**  
Replaced this month by  
Dolly Parton Party. Please  
see other page for info.

**Crafternoon (All ages)**  
Saturdays from 1-3

**Fibre Club (All ages)**  
Saturdays @ 1

**For program and service info:**

Phone: 780.672.4214

Web: [prl.ab.ca/camrose](http://prl.ab.ca/camrose)

Email: [cpltechhelp@prl.ab.ca](mailto:cpltechhelp@prl.ab.ca)

Unless otherwise noted, programs  
& events are FREE and on a drop-in  
basis. For registered programs,  
visit <https://bit.ly/CPLEventbrite>,  
scan the QR, or call 780-672-4214.



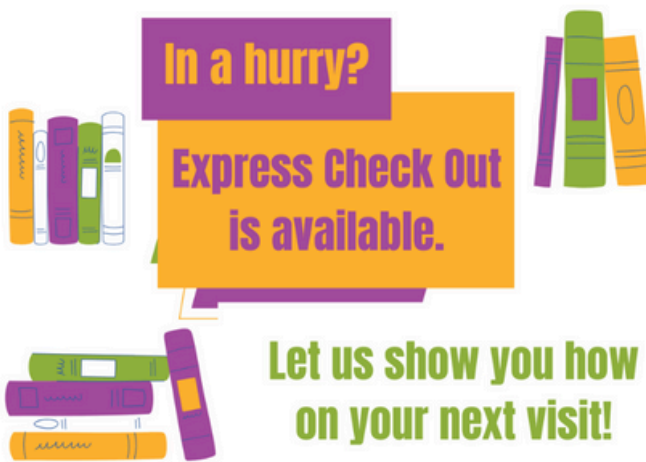
**Our Hours:**

**NEW**

**Monday 10-7**  
**Tuesday 10-8**  
**Wednesday 10-7**  
**Thursday 10-7**  
**Friday 10-6**  
**Saturday 11-4**  
Closed Sundays

**In a hurry?**

**Express Check Out  
is available.**



**Let us show you how  
on your next visit!**

**Special Events**

**Principles of Companion Planting  
March 6 @ 5:30**

Join staff from Camrose Heritage Railway  
Station to learn which plants work well  
together.

**Life Skills 101: Tenant Edition (16+)  
March 18 @ 5:30**

Join Camrose Open Doors for an info night  
about Landlord & Tenant rights and  
responsibilities, how to search for a  
residential rental, and moving tips.

**Bird Seed Ornament Family Workshop  
March 16, 10 AM to noon**

@ Chuck MacLean, 4809 52 Street.  
This art project is for literally for the birds!  
Space limited; register with QR code.

**For Cricut's Sake (16+)**

**March 20 or 27 @ 5 PM: Nail Decals**  
Space is limited; register with QR code.

**Dolly Parton Party**



**March 1**  
**11:30 AM**

Western wear, sequins, and fabulous hair are encouraged but not required.

Help us celebrate the joy of reading and the 10,000th book mailed from our Rotary Camrose Chapter of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library! People of all ages are invited to spend a morning with stories from the Imagination Library 2025 collection followed by a craft and a fabulous dance party.

**Federal Election Workshops**

**Make Your Mark**

Learn how to register & vote and even practice the ballot process!

**Monday March 3 at 4 pm**  
Roger Epp room in Augustana's Forum



**Work the Polls**

All about how to apply, what to expect, and if it's for you!

**Monday March 3 at 5:30 pm**  
at the Camrose Public Library



*Presented by*



**Journey North**

Spend an evening travelling across Canada with wilderness explorer and photographer John Dunn



All images © John Dunn / Arctilight

**March 10, 6:00 PM**



Made possible thanks to a generous grant from



**Indigenous Beading Circles**

for people of all backgrounds!

**Saturday March 29**  
**12 - 2 pm**

Interested participants are invited to join Joelle at 11:30 am for smudging

Project:  
Beaded Embroidery Basics



**Registration opens March 1st at**  
**<https://bit.ly/CPLEventbrite>**

For ages 16 & up | All supplies & refreshments provided!

**1-on-1 Tech Help**

Need assistance with some technology basics? Please call us or email [cp1techhelp@prl.ab.ca](mailto:cp1techhelp@prl.ab.ca) to book your free 1 hour appointment!

**Technology Services**



**24/7 Electronic resources:**

Visit [prl.ab.ca/elibrary](http://prl.ab.ca/elibrary) to check out electronic print materials, audio books, learning resources, and resume building software. Use your library card and PIN to log in.



# February 2025 Library Statistics

YTD daily visit averages (and hourly based on operational hours in brackets)

Mondays: 398 (avg of 44/hr)

Tuesdays: 391 (avg of 39/hr)

Wednesdays: 381 (avg of 42/hr)

Thursdays: 334 (avg of 37/hr)

Fridays: 292 (avg of 42/hr)

Saturdays: 219 (avg of 44/hr)

Circulation	Feb 2025	Feb 2024	2025 YTD	2024 YTD	Under/ Over 2024	% Chg. Over 2024
Adult Material	5225	5292	11050	11808	-758	-6%
Young Adult Material	346	449	673	858	-185	-22%
Juvenile Material	4494	4695	10818	9786	1032	11%
Realis Items Borrowed	177	118	344	242	102	42%
Relais Items Sent	28	31	63	65	-2	-3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10270</b>	<b>10585</b>	<b>22948</b>	<b>22759</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>1%</b>

Econtent	Feb 2025	Feb 2024	2025 YTD	2024 YTD	Under/ Over 2024	% Chg. Over 2024
Cloud Library/RBDigital	*	452	* 1587	1020	567	56%
Overdrive	*	1216	* 441	2533	-2092	-83%
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1668</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>3553</b>	<b>-1525</b>	<b>-43%</b>

Circulation by Residence	Feb 2025	Feb 2024	2025 YTD	2024 YTD	Under/ Over 2024	% Chg. Over 2024
City of Camrose	8356	8867	17456	18646	-1190	-6%
County of Camrose	2403	1848	4794	4024	770	19%
Outside City/County	67	19	148	86	62	72%
ME	0	27	2	57	-55	-96%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10826</b>	<b>10761</b>	<b>22400</b>	<b>22813</b>	<b>-413</b>	<b>-2%</b>

Miscellaneous	Feb 2025	Feb 2024	2025 YTD	2024 YTD	Under/ Over 2024	% Chg. Over 2024
Visitors	7458	7869	16125	15641	484	3%
WiFi Users	8641	7972	17114	15239	1875	12%
Internet Users	883	990	1907	1974	-67	∞
Exams	20	35	38	54	-16	∞
<b>Total</b>	<b>17002</b>	<b>16866</b>	<b>35184</b>	<b>32908</b>	<b>2276</b>	<b>7%</b>

## Selection of Service Responses

1. Social Engagement: Developing Relationships and Ending Isolation
2. Connect to the Online World: Public Internet Access
3. Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning
4. Visit a Welcoming Place: Physical and Virtual Spaces

Programs	Feb 2025		2025 YTD		Participants	
	Sessions	People	Sessions	People	2024 YTD	2023 YTD
1	29	204	57	417	480	420
2	6	12	15	30	30	378
3	53	670	104	1324	1233	1039
4	19	456	41	997	1365	973
Libray Advocacy	0	0	1	3426	4207	3399
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>1342</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>6194</b>	<b>7315</b>	<b>6,209</b>

\* Please note: eContent statistics were not available from PRL before report submission deadline

# **Parkland Regional Library System**

## **February 27 Meeting Highlights**

### **Executive Committee**

- Vacant seats on the Executive Committee in Areas 7 & 8 have been filled

### **2024 Annual Report**

- overall collection has grown
- Wi-Fi usage is down
- approximately 1100 ILL items weekly
- consistently updating website

### **Advocacy**

A request was made for volunteers to fill the Advocacy Committee. This committee will have three focus goals:

1. A proposal for adjustments to the funding model to support intermunicipal cooperation, allowing consolidated board to remain financially viable
2. Reassessment of SuperNet bandwidth allocations to ensure libraries can meet evolving internet standards
3. Establishing a predictable funding model
  - terms of reference for the Advocacy Committee have been modified
  - 35% of member libraries are running a deficit budget
  - AGLC needs to change their rules regarding the disbursement of fundraising monies

### **Outlet Libraries**

- With the amalgamation of the Village of Caroline and Clearwater County, Clearwater County will have one year for the creation of a library board and to appoint a board. This county board will be responsible for operating both Caroline and the Hamlet of Nordegg
- Parkland will no longer be responsible for the governance of the Nordegg Library once the County Board is formed.

### **Central Alberta Woodworker's Guild Project**

Parkland entered a partnership with the Central Alberta Woodworker's Guild to produce a variety of puzzle kits for programming in public libraries. These kits are intended to provide children

with a tool to develop their manual dexterity, assist seniors experiencing cognitive decline, and would be perfect for multigenerational programming.

### **Staff Engagement Survey**

- overall, the response rate was good, and the survey results were positive
- Parkland management will discuss how to best address the few areas where improvements could be made

### **Library Services Report**

- Maskwacis expanding into the community with regular outreach visits to all four Nations
- the search for a new, larger, and permanent location for the library continues
- eContent usage is up by 24% over 2023 numbers
- 1,518 books added to collections in 44 participating libraries in the 2024 Cooperative Collection
- Camrose leads the chart for top circulation of Large Print Rotating Blocks