

Inside Toronto – Nov 28, 2014

Nov 28, 2014

Proposed budget cut for Toronto library security guards under fire by union

Library board chair calls union concerns ‘fearmongering’

By [David Nickle](#)

A plan to cut the budget for security guards at Toronto Public Library branches is under fire from the union representing library workers.

The \$660,000 cut, approved at the November meeting of the Toronto Public Library Board, would mean a 40 per cent reduction in security service at library branches across the city. Mike Foderick, the library board’s chair, maintained that the security guards at the branches are often idle given the relatively small number of incidents.

But Maureen O’Reilly, president of the Toronto Public Library Worker’s Union, said that the guards are essential for the safety of staff and the public — particularly given a rise in the number of incidents between 2012 and 2013, at a rate of 49 per cent.

“We’re certainly not saying the libraries are unsafe but we have to deal with the reality of being in a large urban centre and being open to all,” said O’Reilly, who said that in most instances library workers are indeed able to deal with troublesome patrons and other emergencies.

“It’s a very heartfelt library tradition that we’re proud of,” she said. “We simply need some assistance here and there.”

Foderick, however, maintains that the number of incidents don’t justify the presence of guards — particularly as the security guards hired to work at library branches aren’t empowered to intervene physically in a crisis.

“I think it’s completely unjustifiable in every way and somewhat embarrassing,” said Foderick, pointing as an example to the Centennial library branch in North York, where a security guard is on duty for 27 hours a week and in 2013 only one incident occurred.

“That’s almost a full-time person sitting there with one incident for the entire year. I think it is unjustifiable to have a full-time person for a full year with nothing to do. You can be fearmongering as much as you want, but it doesn’t make it a responsible decision,” said Foderick.

The budget approved by the Toronto Public Library Board is still not set in stone.

Now, the proposal will go to City of Toronto finance staff, who will incorporate it into a recommended budget, which council will ultimately approve or reject in early 2015.

O’Reilly said she’s hoping that by the time the new council is in place and seized of the issue, the decision will get reversed.

“The new administration will be selecting councillors to sit on the Library Board and it is our view that this current library board has been quite divisive the last four years — they’re only interested in cutting the library budget,” said O’Reilly.

Foderick, who is a citizen appointee to the board, said that if council were to put the \$660,000 back into the library budget he wouldn’t say no. But he said he would rather spend the money elsewhere in the system than in beefed-up security.

“I would say if council wants to give us \$660,000, you would be amazed at the significant number of hours that I could open branches,” he said.

<http://www.insidetoronto.com/news-story/5162629-proposed-budget-cut-for-toronto-library-security-guards-under-fire-by-union/>