



## **Administrative Report**

**To:** Members of Essex County Library Board

**From:** Robin Greenall  
Chief Librarian/CEO, Essex County Library

**Date:** June 23, 2021.

**Subject:** Post COVID Service Planning Report

### **Background**

As of March 16, 2020, the Province of Ontario enacted regulations that limit access to public resource and services due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Due to these regulations, the Essex County Library has continuously adjusted their processes and procedures for the delivery of resources, services, and programs to the residents in the County of Essex.

As vaccine rates increase and case counts decrease, the Province of Ontario has put forward a "Reopening Ontario Roadmap" to support the gradual but cautious return of our business, services, and programs for community access and use. The roadmap is the first step to a fuller, less restricted way, of living; however, a cautious approach is still advised as COVID-19 variants still present a global threat.

All agencies, businesses, and organizations are assessing their services and programming with some consideration as to how our services have changed over the course of the past 18 months of adapting, as well as how to best proceed forward. This report highlights some of the changes the Essex County Library has adopted over the past 18 months, proposes how to possibly adjust, and adopt new service structures moving forward.

### **Discussion**

#### **Past Service and Structures**

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Pre Covid (Prior to March 16, 2020) the Essex County Library provided library service via 14 branch locations and a 24/7 online virtual branch.

### Hours of Branch Services

Branch	Weekly Schedule		Hours / Week
<b>Amherstburg</b>			
Amherstburg Branch	Monday & Tuesday Wednesday & Thursday Friday Saturday	1P-8P 10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P	49 Hours/Week
<b>Essex</b>			
Essex Centre Branch	Monday & Tuesday Wednesday & Thursday Friday Saturday	1P-8P 10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P	49 Hours/Week
Harrow Centre Branch	Monday – Thursday Saturday	1:30P-8P 10A-4P	32 Hours/Week
McGregor Centre Branch	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday Tuesday Saturday	5P-8P 2:30P – 5:30P 10A-3P	17 Hours/Week
<b>Kingsville</b>			
Kingsville – Highline Branch	Monday & Tuesday Wednesday & Thursday Friday Saturday	1P-8P 10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P	49 Hours/Week
Cottam Branch	Monday & Thursday Tuesday Saturday	5P-8P 2:30P – 5:30P 10A-1P	12 Hours/Week
Ruthven Branch	Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Saturday	2:30P-5:30P 10A-1P 5P-8P 10A-1P	12 Hours/Week
<b>Lakeshore</b>			
Lakeshore – Toldo Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday (Seasonal	10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P (12P-4P)	55 (59) Hours/Week

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Lakeshore – Libro Centre Branch	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Saturday	5P-8P 2:30P-5:30P 10A-1P 5P- 8P 10A-3P	17 Hours/Week 2020 proposed Not implemented due to COVID
Lakeshore – Comber Branch	Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Saturday	2:30P-5:30P 10A-1P 5P-8P 10A-1P	12 Hours/Week 2020 Proposed Not implement due to COVID
Lakeshore _ Stoney Point Branch	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday Tuesday	5P-8P 10A-1P	12 Hours/Week 202 proposed not implemented due to COVID.
<b>LaSalle</b>			
LaSalle William Varga Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday (Seasonal	10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P (12P-4P)	55 (59) Hours/Week
<b>Leamington</b>			
Leamington Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P (12P-4P)	55 (59) Hours/Week
<b>Tecumseh</b>			
Tecumseh Cada Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday (Seasonal	10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P (12P-4P)	55 (59) Hours/Week

Total system branch service hours: 481 (497)

### Staffing Structures

Staff were structured into working teams by Municipal boundaries. Each team would be responsible for the primary service delivery at all branches located within the municipal boundaries.

All Essex County Library staff were scheduled to work at their primary sites; however, staff could be scheduled to work at any branch within the system for

any available supply hours (following agreed upon procedures for filing supply/vacant hours).

### Programming and Outreach Services

**In-Branch Programming:** The Essex County Library provided an array of in-branch programming opportunities through our community branches. The programs were structured to support the interests of the local residents and to promote our resources and service offerings.

**Partnerships:** The Essex County Library has successfully engaged with local community partners to support community projects and services. Partnership opportunities took many different forms: some partners used our spaces (in-branch and virtual) to deliver their service programs and information; we supported partners by simultaneously delivering information through our various communication channels; we created joint programs with partners that were delivered within our branches or at external sites (or both). To support the vision of the Essex County Library to "*Creative partnerships encourage social interaction and cultural vitality*" effort was underway to further expand/develop our community partnerships.

**Outreach:** Outreach is the library's effort to deliver its resources, services, and programs outside of the traditional library building. Outreach supports the concepts that the "library" is the services, programs, and resources we provide beyond the physical building. In 2019, the Essex County Library was encouraging efforts to increase our outreach services and to connect with our community in new spaces and places, to expand the community's awareness of our services.

**Makerspace and Technology Services:** In 2019, the Essex County Library opened their first Makerspace centre in the newly renovated Leamington Library. This space supports the development of Trans-Literacy skills. To further support community access to our makerspace and technology equipment and services, the Essex County Library purchased an outreach vehicle to deliver programs and resources throughout our communities.

As of March 16 ,2020 – the programs, services and operations of the Essex County Library were ceased due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. As of this date, the Essex County Library has adjusted how they structure their staff and deliver service to meet local and provincial health regulations.

### **COVID-19 Adjustments for Staffing and Service Structures**

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As of July 2020, the Essex County Library continuously restructured its programs and services to meet the limitations and regulations as stipulated by the Province of Ontario and the local Public Health authority. The Essex County Library created 8 working teams (7 branch teams, 1 administration team) and relocated staff to work out of one branch per municipality. The restructuring was adopted so that each branch would have a small consistent team that could support and sustain a consistent delivery of services through the one branch; our system temporarily eliminated all cross-branch supply to reduce or minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposures.

### Administration Office

The administration office hours are typically scheduled between 8:30A – 4:30P, start times and stop times vary slightly.

The Administration office was cleaned and reorganized so that staff desks were relocated away from main traffic areas. Privacy screens were installed to create defined workspaces. Workspaces were structured to provide ample room to allow for ease of movement throughout the area (see images).



While the administration office provides plenty of space for the full complement of staffing during the various stages of COVID-19 regulations, to err on the side of caution and to minimize the number of staff who would be accessing the main County Civic Centre, the administration team reduced their daily attendance numbers by scheduling staff to rotate between working on-site and a Work-From-Home option.

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### Branch Services

At the early onset of COVID-19, public access to all library services and resources was restricted. Staff, who were able to work, were scheduled to work through the 14 site locations to support adequate physical distancing and safety precautions. All non-union desk clerks were laid off from service and all union staff were assigned training and collection work to support their regularly scheduled hours of service.

As COVID-19 regulations were adjusted, brief periods of public service with restrictions was permitted. The Essex County Library branch staff were organized to work at one of seven site locations. One branch per municipality was designated as the main service branch.

Hours of service at each of the seven branch locations were extended:

An 8:30A start time was scheduled for one staff/day/location, allowing this staff time to organize and prepare the branch for daily service.

Branch	Weekly Schedule		Hours / Week
<b>Amherstburg</b>			
Amherstburg Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday	9P-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
<b>Essex</b>			
Essex Centre Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday	9P-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
Harrow Centre Branch	CLOSED		
McGregor Centre Branch	CLOSED		
<b>Kingsville</b>			
Kingsville – Highline Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday	9P-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
Cottam Branch	CLOSED		
Ruthven Branch	CLOSED		
<b>Lakeshore</b>			
Lakeshore – Toldo Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	9P-8P 9A-5P	58/ Hours/Week
Lakeshore – Libro Centre	CLOSED		

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Branch			
Lakeshore – Comber Branch	CLOSED		
Lakeshore _ Stoney Point Branch	CLOSED		
<b>LaSalle</b>			
LaSalle William Varga Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	9P-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
<b>Leamington</b>			
Leamington Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday y Sunday (Seasonal)	9P-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
<b>Tecumseh</b>			
Tecumseh Cada Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	9P-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week

Total System Branch service hours: 406

### Resource Services

The Essex County Library adjusted their services to meet the regulations as directed by the Province of Ontario, these services included:

- Direct to home mailing – return delivery included.
- Curbside pickup.
- Staff phone support for reference services
- Technical support (access to database, use of personal devices, etc.)
- Resource's support (surprise book bundles, readers advisory, etc.)

### Programming

The Essex County Library quickly pivoted to develop new programs and services to remain connected with our community members. Programs and outreach included:

- Online programming and promotions
- Podcasts
- Virtual partner programs and book clubs.

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The new services and programs have assisted Essex County Library extend their reach into the community in ways that have not readily engaged prior. The new services and programs required the staff to quickly learn to adapt and develop new skills that were not always in their comfort zones. The success of these programs has been through everyone learning and working together to create quality and engaging products.

### **Post Covid Proposed Service and Structures.**

Since the Province of Ontario announced the Reopening Ontario Roadmap, agencies and industries across the province are drafting return-to-work plans for how they will operate in the "new normal". For many, plan development is looking at the traditional pre-covid services that were offered prior to March 16, 2020, and the new services and structures that have been developed over the course of the past 18 months, and how to best align new and old services going forward.

The Essex County Library is also reviewing its current plans while considering how to adjust and return in-branch and programming services to the community. Through this planning the administration is proposing we investigate the following considerations:

#### Reopening Seven Main Branches

The Essex County Library propose to the Board that we plan to wait until Step 3 of the Provincial Reopening Ontario regulation plans. The estimated date for this step to go into effect is Monday July 26, 2020.

At this step, the Essex County Library would open seven branches, one in each municipality. The hours of service for main branches would be consistent at each location. Hours of service would be 58 hours/week, with all branches providing morning hours start time at 9A and extending through to evening hour until 8P (Monday- Thursday) or 5P (Saturday and Sunday). This schedule would consistently provide for 2 staff to be scheduled during the majority of public service hours at each site location.

During the past year, we have altered staff starting times by scheduling one staff to start at 8:30A. This staff member is responsible for preparing the branch for open service. Staff have commented that the adjusted start time is appreciated as they can ready the facility for service prior to patrons arriving; this allows staff time to present themselves and the space in a professional manner and allows patrons to experience a readied and prepared space.

Branch	Weekly Schedule	Hours / Week
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<b>Amherstburg</b>			
Amherstburg Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday	9A-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
<b>Essex</b>			
Essex Centre Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday	9A-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
<b>Kingsville</b>			
Kingsville – Highline Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday	9A-8P 9A-5P	58 Hours/Week
<b>Lakeshore</b>			
Lakeshore – Toldo Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	9A-8P 9A-5P (12P-4P)	58 Hours/Week
<b>LaSalle</b>			
LaSalle William Varga Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	10A-8P 10A-6P 10A-5P (12P-4P)	58 (62) Hours/Week
<b>Leamington</b>			
Leamington Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	9A-8P 9A-5P (12P-4P)	55 (62) Hours/Week
<b>Tecumseh</b>			
Tecumseh Cada Branch	Monday – Thursday Friday & Saturday Sunday (Seasonal)	9A-8P 9A-5P (12P-4P)	55 (62) Hours/Week

Total Main Branch Service Hours: 401

Limitation of Staff Scheduling

During the initial phases of reopening, staff will remain limited to working only within the schedule of their primary community branch(es). This restriction will impact our ability to bring other community branches online, as service hours will be limited to a small working team. All service hours need to be realistic and sustainable. This limitation should remain in effect until the provincial

regulations/ restrictions are eased, or the current pandemic declaration has been lifted.

### Student Desk Clerk.

Student Desk Clerks are a valuable addition to our service teams. They assisted with the scanning, organization, and retrieval of material. Throughout the pandemic, the Provincial regulations required public libraries to disinfect or quarantine all materials upon return. The Essex County Library has opted to disinfect/clean its returned materials. As of Step One, the regulation to disinfect/ quarantine has been revoked, however the Essex County Library has opted to continue to clean all/ most materials upon return with a simple soap and water spray solution. This is to maintain the cleanliness of the materials and reduce unnecessary transmission of dirt/debris/germs. This is a process that we will adopt into our regular workflow, and the Student Desk Clerk will be essential in assisting with this job.

At this time, we are proposing that Students Desk Clerks would resume their duties in early to mid-September, with hiring orientation and training commencing in August.

### Programming and Outreach

**In Person Programming:** The Essex County Library is anticipating that in person programming may be scheduled in early to mid-fall. It is being proposed that the state of the community's health is assessed as we move through the summer months. Programming may be restricted to locations with ample space and ventilation, and it may be restricted to smaller attendance numbers. We will continue to assess the Provincial regulations for timing and programming structures.

The Essex County Library has been successful in adapting the programming services to maintain connection with the communities using video, social media, and audio podcasts. We will encourage this new programming to continue as our patrons return to interacting in our physical spaces. The Essex County Library will investigate how we can create a hybrid model of programming to maintain the new patrons we have attracted through our social media and virtual channels and welcome patrons into our physical spaces. The new hybrid program structure will need to be considerate of, and work within, our current programming funding allotment.

**Maker Space Service:** The Essex County Library will return the Makerspace services at the Leamington Branch as soon as we are able to permit people

into smaller spaces. This service may be delayed in its return until early/mid fall.

**Outreach:** The Essex County Library will continue to support local partnerships and programs through virtual services until partners are willing and able to connect in either our or their physical spaces.

### Community Teams

Prior to March 16, 2020, the Essex County Library organized its service teams by municipal boundaries. This structure was designed so that all branches in a local municipality could align their staffing, services, and programming to meet the needs of their local municipal communities. This structure created some community teams working through 3 or 4 branch locations, and other community teams working through 1 branch location.

As we return to opening our branches, COVID-19 restrictions will still limit our ability to support staffing being able to support supply hours across all sites. The restrictions will limit the Essex County Library's ability to sustain all 14 branches if the historical model remains in place. It has been proposed that the Essex County Library restructure the working teams so that one Main branch (7) is planned to be paired with one addition branch (7), allowing the small teams to maintain service at two primary sites.

This proposed change has been positively received by the Community Supervisor group. Supervisors who supported multi branch locations expressed frustration with the previous model, and Community Supervisors who supervised one site location, expressed an understanding. The proposed model will provide an equal balance of staffing per two sites for all teams.

Additional branches will be returned to service in a staged approach in the following manner:

### Enhanced Community Access Branches

The following branches were identified as sites to implement the Enhanced Community Access Services. These branches were identified as McGregor (2020), Harrow (2021) and Woodslee (2022 – budget depending). Returning these three sites into service will require the following:

1. Adequate staffing – During the past 18 months, as staff retire or resign, their positions were not filled unless necessary to maintain our COVID levels of service. Prior to returning an Enhances Community Access Service branch into service, additional staffing maybe required with

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adequate time to hire and/or train (exception is the Woodslee site, where adequate staffing is currently in place)

2. RFID tagging – prior to the sites returning to service, all resources will need to be tagged and prepared with RFID tags.
3. Scheduling – community team schedules will need to be adjusted to support the secondary branch.

### Proposed Timeline for Enhances Community Access Branch return:

#### Woodslee – Libro Branch

- August 2 – 20, 2021 – Start to prepare the site resources (RFID) for service.
- August 23 - Open the branch for public service with adjusted 17 hours of operations. Scheduled hours may be adjusted from proposed 2020 schedule to support the new community team structure)

#### McGregor Branch

- July/August – Hire additional staffing.
- August 23, 2021 (approximately) - Schedule the branch to open with the planned 20 hours of service as planned for the introduction of the Enhance Community Access Service. Promote the service program to the local community.
- November 1, 2021 – Enhanced Community Access Hours will be initiated.

#### Harrow Branch

- July/ August – hire contractors to complete renovations for in the installation of the Open+ Enhanced Community Access Service.
- Fall 2021 -Prepare site for return to service.
- Late Fall (approximately November 2021) – Open site with adjusted 20 hours of service.
- Early 2022 -Open facility for Enhanced Community Access Service hours

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Branch	Weekly Schedule		Hours/Week
Woodslee -Proposed Enhanced Community Access Service (2022)			
Woodslee 2021 services	TBD	TBD	17 hours/ week
Woodslee 2022 ECA	TBD	Community Access TBD  ECL staffed hours	49 Hours/ week  20 hours – scheduled staffing
McGregor = Enhanced Community Access Service (2021)			
McGregor ECL staff scheduled hours	Tuesday -Thursday Friday-Saturday	4P- 8P 1P – 5P	20 Hours / Week
McGregor Community Access Hours	Monday - Tuesday – Thursday Friday -Saturday	CLOSED. 9A -8P 9A- 5P	49 Hours/ Week
Harrow – Enhanced Community Access Service (2021/2022)			
Harrow ECL staff scheduled hours.			20 Hours/Week
McGregor Community Access Hours			49 Hours/Week

Total Enhanced Branch Service Hours 2021: 49

Total Enhanced Branch Service Hours Early 2022: 98

Total Enhanced Branch Service Hours Mid 2022: 147

Total Enhanced Branch Service Hours + Main Branch Service Hours: 548

The proposed service schedules for the 7 main locations and 3 Enhanced service sites provides an addition 81 hours for patrons to access community facilities and does so within the current funding allotment for scheduled staffing hours.

Additional 4 branch locations.

It is proposed that the remaining 4 branch services remain closed until all the Provincial pandemic restrictions and regulations are removed, and the Essex County Library system can sustain all services through a system wide supply effort: approximately early 2022.

Returning the 4 remaining branches with their traditional hours of operation and service into the system and maintaining the proposed service schedules for the Main and Enhanced branches, as listed above, could have a negative funding impact as an additional 50 hours of staffing would be required.

To support new staffing schedules and systems without a significant negative impact to the operating funds, the Essex County Library Board could consider:

1. Reverting schedules to a more historical model: where branch service hours vary across the system.
2. Reducing staffing levels at the some of the Main branch locations to support staffing the smaller locations.
3. Increasing annual operating budget to support additional staffing hours.
4. Consider an alternate service model.

**Alternative Service Model – Community Access Centers**

It is proposed that the Essex County Library Board consider investigating an alternative service model where the Essex County Library would seek support and partnership from the local municipalities (Lakeshore and Kingsville) to possibly transform the current facilities into Community Access Centers (CAC).

How could the CAC site operate?

The Essex County Library Board would be seeking the local municipalities to support upgrades and renovations of the sites so that the spaces can be made accessible for community groups, organizations, and services to schedule for programming or meeting use.

The Essex County Library would install and monitor the Open+ technology to provide hours of service for:

- Community groups and program bookings
- General community access for library resources and services
- Library programming – targeted to support specific community needs.

The proposed site would maintain access to free wireless service, computer access, digital collections, and select tangible resources. Community members would be able to pick up their resources and utilize the patron kiosk, Library service would maintain a presence in the community centre through targeted programming and resources to support community interests and needs.

Designated hours would be established for community members to access the centre for library resource pick up/ check out.

Designated hours would be committed for local community groups to book the spaces for small group meetings, such as the local service clubs, local knitting clubs, social service groups or meetings.

Transforming the space into a Community Access Centre would extend the use of the facility for community programming and service groups and allow the Essex County Library to maintain its presences and support.

Initial discussions have occurred with the administration from the local municipalities of Kingsville and Lakeshore. Further conversation would need to be arranged to explore partnership agreements, safety and security concerns of individual sites, and renovation needs to support community use.

Operation schedules would consider needs of the local community groups, the local municipality, and library services. The hours should be flexible to support the needs of all partners.

This model would need to be implemented through shared capital costs between the Library Board and the Local Municipality. The proposed model could be supported through the Library Boards current staff funding allotment.

## **Recommendation**

It is proposed that the Essex County Library Board approve the Return to Service Plan as presented, understanding timelines are estimated due to Provincial Regulations and Restrictions.

It is further proposed that the Essex County Library Board approve that the CEO further explore the Community Access Centre model with the local municipality of Kingsville and Lakeshore.

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Submitted by

*Robin Greenall*

Robin Greenall

Chief Librarian/ CEO