

Self-Service Hours – Update

Date:	February 24, 2020
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update the Toronto Public Library (TPL) Board on the status of the Self-Service Hours Pilot that was launched at Todmorden Room branch in November 2018 and at Swansea Memorial branch in January 2019.

Self-service hours provide an opportunity for Toronto Public Library to leverage new technology that improves access to the two smallest branches in the system by increasing the hours of service in these locations, from 28 hours to 48 hours at Swansea Memorial and 53 hours at Todmorden Room.

Self-service has proven to be popular with customers, providing convenient access to library space, and additional time to pick up holds, borrow materials, and use onsite electronic resources and wifi. A total of 692 customers have registered for the service, accessing the space more than 3,000 times in 2019. Customer feedback in response to the service has been very positive as demonstrated by the results of the year-end survey that was conducted over a six-week period (December 2019-January 2020).

Safety was a key priority and concern in providing this service, as such, a risk assessment was conducted to ensure all risks were identified and mitigated. In addition to the risk assessment, staff engaged Toronto Police, Toronto Fire and Toronto Paramedic Services to provide feedback and recommendations to ensure the safety of customers and security of the space.

Based on the success of this pilot and results of the evaluation, self-service hours will continue at Swansea Memorial and Todmorden Room with the hours being slightly modified to maximize access. The size and location of these two branches make them well suited for this service. There are no plans to expand this service beyond these two locations.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact as a result of continuing this service beyond what has been approved in the operating budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

This initiative aligns with the first focus of TPL's Strategic Plan (2020-2024), "Creating inspiring, inclusive and sustainable public spaces." Self-service hours extend customers' access to free and accessible spaces for personal, educational, and professional needs.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Residents have expanded access to free and accessible space, collections, and resources, including wifi and computers through self-service. This is especially beneficial for older adults, adult job-seekers, and families who visit our partners at Swansea Town Hall or the East York Community Centre, and would appreciate being able to access library services at the same time. By contributing to a hub of community services in one place, this enables Torontonians to make efficient use of their time at these locations. This is especially important for those who work multiple jobs and have limited free time to visit the Library, or those with mobility issues who find it challenging to make their way to our facilities on multiple occasions. For example, 29.1% of customers using self-service hours are 65 years and older.

DECISION HISTORY

At its June 22, 2015 meeting, the Library Board approved a resolution requesting library staff to explore additional options for pop-up and alternative community-based services as part of the strategic planning process. The report identified and included the option to implement extended open hours technology that would allow TPL to expand access to library service beyond staffed hours.

<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2015/sep21/04-Minutes-June-22.pdf>

Community consultation for this initiative occurred during the consultation process for the 2016-2019 strategic plan, in accordance with the TPL Board's Consultation Policy. One of the clear messages from this consultation was public interest in increased

access to branches and services, resulting in the strategic plan's priority of "Breaking Down Barriers to Access and Driving Inclusion". To achieve the outcomes related to this priority, TPL has responded with a number of initiatives, including additional Sunday hours at branches across the city, installation of kiosks at Union Station for promotion of and access to the Library's e-book collections, the update of the Library's Open Hours Plan and the implementation of a pilot to extend open hours at Swansea Memorial and Todmorden Room, the two branches with the lowest number of open hours in the system.

The TPL Board approved the Self-Service Open Hours initiative as a part of the 2017 Strategic Plan Work Plan at the December 12, 2016 Board Meeting.

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2016/dec12/14-2017-strategic-plan-work-plan-att-2.pdf>

Status updates for this initiative were provided to the Board as a part of ongoing Strategic Work Plan Status reports at the June 19, 2017 and January 29, 2018 TPL Board meetings.

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2017/jun19/16-2017-work-plan-semi-annual-status-report-combined.pdf>

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2018/jan29/15-2017-strat-plan-work-plan-update-2018-2019-work-plan-combined.pdf>

Staff further reported on the project at the September 25, 2017 TPL Board meeting and provided an update on the upcoming implementation plan for piloting self-service hours, including operational and security details and an assurance that there would be a final update report following the evaluation of the one-year pilot.

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2017/sep25/19-extended-open-hours-pilot-project-implementation-plan.pdf>

At the March 7, 2019 meeting of City Council a motion was passed requesting the City Manager to monitor TPL's Self-Service Open Hours Initiative in conjunction with the Toronto Police Service, Toronto Fire Service and Toronto Paramedics Service and the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division for any safety or security issues.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EX2.5>

Staff have reached out to the City Manager's office to assist and provide information as required.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

What is Self-Service Hours?

The Self-Service Hours initiative is an opportunity for TPL to leverage new technological options to increase access at the two smallest branches in the system, (Swansea Memorial at 1,100 and Todmorden Room at 550 square feet) which also have the lowest number of open hours (28 hours/week).

The year-long pilot was launched at Todmorden Room in late November 2018 and at the Swansea Memorial in late January 2019, is intended to extend access beyond the current open hours and provide customers with more convenient options and the ability to pick up their holds, borrow materials and use onsite electronic resources and wifi. This initiative is not intended to replace existing staffed hours, or staff. The initiative is only intended to provide limited library service beyond the current open hours at these two locations. There are no plans to expand this service to any other library branches.

How does Self-Service Hours Work?

In order to implement self-service hours, staff researched various solutions and technologies, and spoke with other library systems that have implemented similar services in order to assess outcomes and impacts. Following this research, a Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued in December 2016 and awarded in March 2017. The successful proponent was Bibliotheca, a leading provider for library self-service technology. A risk assessment was also completed as a part of the planning and development of the service that ensured that any risks were identified and appropriately mitigated.

The service allows customers 18 years of age and older, who have pre-registered for this service, to gain extended access beyond the current 28 open hours per week at these two branches using their library card and a PIN. Customers must pre-register in person at one of the following branches: Swansea Memorial, Todmorden Room, S. Walter Stewart, or Runnymede.

During self-service hours, the branches are monitored through the use of live-streamed video cameras and by mobile security visits. Customers also have access to staff using a dedicated phone line that will connect them directly to library staff should assistance be required. Self-service hours will only be offered within the existing regular hours of operation of Toronto Public Library branches.

What has been the reaction from the public community partners, and the media?

Significant media interest in the pilot was triggered in March 2017, generating a number of questions from the public, staff and TPL partners. As a result of media

reports and misinformation regarding how the service would operate, reaction from the public was initially mixed, with both support for and concern raised about the initiative.

Most of the concerns were with respect to perceived loss of staff and potential safety issues. TPL responded and affirmed that this initiative will not be used to replace existing staffed hours, and that security considerations were an integral part of the implementation, including provisions for video surveillance and registered customer card access. In the majority of cases, once the service is explained and understood concerns are alleviated, which results in support for the service. Since the service launched in late 2018/early 2019, there have been very few concerns raised and as the results of the evaluation show, self-service hours have been very positively received.

TPL's partners at Swansea Town Hall and East York Community Centre also had initial questions regarding roles, responsibilities and incident management (including emergency response). TPL staff have had ongoing meetings with local community centre partners and have provided clarification and addressed the issues that were raised. A memorandum of understanding has been signed between TPL and each of the community centres, and FAQs have been produced and shared with community centre staff to ensure they can address questions raised about the service. The Library maintains a positive relationship with onsite partners at both locations and has made improvements based on suggestions, such as improved signage.

Staff regularly provide updates and attend Board meetings at the Swansea Town Hall to provide updates as requested to Parks, Forestry & Recreation.

Have there been any incidents during the pilot period?

Establishing procedures to ensure the safety and security of customers and staff has been a priority for this initiative. Customers must pre-register in person at one of the following branches: Swansea Memorial, Todmorden Room, S. Walter Stewart, or Runnymede. Staff review safety features and expectations with customers, including not letting other customers into the branch who may not be registered for self-service hours.

Staff also orient customers to the telephones located inside and outside of the branch that connect them directly with TPL staff. Customers are also shown the dedicated button on the interior phone which allows them to call 911 if necessary.

Other safety features include the installation of cameras that are monitored by Toronto Reference Library security and staff training for Answerline staff, IT Service Desk staff, Security, and branch staff.

There were only two incidents during the pilot period, both occurring at Todmorden Room. One incident involved two elderly customers who engaged in a minor altercation at the East York Community Centre before self-service hours began. The second incident involved a 12-year-old female customer who entered the branch as another customer was leaving. She didn't realize that the branch was in self-service mode. She remained in the library, reading and writing at a table for about 90 minutes before leaving the branch. There were no incidents at Swansea Memorial and no incidents involving emergency services or 911 calls in either location.

TPL staff have contacted local Toronto Police Services staff, local Toronto Fire Services staff, as well as Toronto Paramedic Services to see if they have any concerns with the service or related safety issues. All three services also completed site visits to view the branches and self-service technology. Toronto Police provided some recommendations that were incorporated into the design to ensure clear sightlines, but otherwise did not have any concerns with the service. Toronto Fire and Paramedics also responded with no concerns with the service or the space from their perspective. All three services have confirmed that they have not received any 911 calls to these locations related to self-service.

How was the service evaluated and what are the results?

An evaluation framework was developed to determine the success of the service. This included a survey that was distributed to registered users of the service, gathering feedback from customers and community partners as well as tracking and reviewing metrics such as visits, circulation, registration and issues/incidents.

An online and in-house customer survey was administered over a period of six weeks, from December 18, 2019 to January 26, 2020. A total of 692 customers are registered for self-service and 95 customers (14%) completed the survey.

Overall, the survey results were very positive with many commenting that they were happy that the service was made available and that it has provided them with greater access. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents reported that they used the library more often since the introduction of self-service hours. And they use the library most often to pick-up and drop off holds, to find something to read, or to use the computers and Wi-Fi.

The vast majority of customers indicated that they were either very comfortable (65%, 55 respondents) or somewhat comfortable (18%, 15 respondents) with the safety and security of the space while only a small number indicated they were somewhat uncomfortable (5%, four respondents) or uncomfortable (2%, two respondents). The majority of the respondents (71%, 60 respondents) were also aware of the safety measures that are in place in relation to the service.

Comments collected as a part of the survey were also overwhelmingly positive with many commenting that they appreciated the service and enjoyed having additional access. The most common suggestion from customers was to extend the number of self-service hours beyond the pilot hours.

Visits per hour of self-service averaged 2.2 at Swansea Memorial and 3.95 at Todmorden Room. Items circulated during self-service hours (as a total percentage of all items circulated) was 14% for Swansea Memorial and 16% for Todmorden Room.

Both circulation and visits have increased since the service was introduced at the two locations. Due to the closure to prepare the space in 2018, the comparator year for Todmorden Room was 2017, while at Swansea Memorial, the last full year of uninterrupted service was 2016. At Todmorden Room, visits increased by 18% while circulation increased by 8%. Swansea Memorial saw a 16% increase in visits and a 4% decrease in circulation; however, Swansea Memorial was still closed for most of January 2019, which is most likely the reason for the slight decrease in circulation.

COMMENTS

Due to the success of the pilot project, this initiative will be moving into regular operations at both locations. One of the most requested improvements to the service has been to increase the hours of service. As a part of the pilot, the hours were kept to shorter bands. Moving into regular service, the hours will be slightly expanded to provide some additional hours through out the week. This increase does not impact staffed hours and will only be within the regular band of open hours of TPL branches. The hours of operation for both locations for staffed, pilot self-service and regular self-service are outlined in the following chart and will come into effect in March 2020.

Todmorden Room			
	Regular Staffed Hours	Self-Service Hours During Pilot	Self-Service Hours
Monday	Closed	10:00-6:00	9:00-7:30
Tuesday	12:30 – 8:30 Closed 5:00 – 6:00	10:00 – 12:30 5:00 – 6:00	9:00-12:30 5:00-6:00
Wednesday	9:00 – 5:00 Closed 12:00 – 1:00	12:00 – 1:00	12:00-1:00
Thursday	12:30 – 8:30 Closed 5:00 – 6:00	10:00 – 12:30 5:00 – 6:00	9:00 – 12:30 5:00 – 6:00
Friday	Closed	10:00 – 6:00	9:00 – 6:00
Saturday	9:00 – 5:00 Closed 12:00 – 1:00	12:00 – 1:00	12:00 – 1:00
Total # of hrs per week	28	53 (incl. staffed hrs)	58.5 (incl. staffed hrs)

Swansea Memorial			
	Regular Staffed Hours	Self-Service Hours During Pilot	Self-Service Hours
Monday	Closed	10:00 – 6:00	9:00-7:30
Tuesday	10:00 – 6:00	Not available	Not available
Wednesday	1:00 – 8:00	10:00 – 1:00	9:00 – 1:00
Thursday	10:00 – 6:00	Not available	Not available
Friday	Closed	10:00 – 6:00	9:00 – 6:00
Saturday	10:00 – 5:00	9:00 – 10:00	9:00 – 10:00
Total # of hrs per week	28	48 (incl. staffed hrs)	52.5 (incl. staffed hrs)

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SIGNATURE

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