

Provincial Advocacy: Public Libraries

By Errin Morrison

Meeting with the Minister of Education

A meeting between the public library community and the Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid, then Minister of Education and Minister responsible for Early Learning and Literacy was held on September 28 in conjunction with the Union of BC Municipalities convention in Whistler. Because of the timing of the meeting, representatives of BCLA and ABCPLD were not able to attend. However, BCLTA President Andy Ackerman, BCLTA Vice President Ivan Idzan and Okanagan Regional Library Board Chair Ted Bacigalupo represented the three organizations.

During the meeting, the Minister once again stressed that she is a very strong supporter of libraries. The library delegation expressed thanks for continued Ministry funding of public libraries and the extra \$300,000 received this year for library programs. As well, the delegation communicated the public library community's ongoing thanks for the good work and support provided by the Public Library Services Branch.

Several issues of concern were raised with the Minister. Among these were funding cuts to One Card, group database subscriptions and BC Books for Babies; the need for provincial funding and per capita grants to keep pace with enhanced library usage across the province; the pending review of the Library Act; and ongoing public library infrastructure challenges.

Overall the meeting went well and was followed, on October 21, by the first of two regular meetings per year between the three associations and Mr. James Gorman, Deputy Minister of Education.

Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Education

On the agenda for discussion with the Deputy Minister and staff were the results of BCLTA's survey of local government library funding; government services provided in public libraries; the stalled Library Act review; enabling regional library systems to

borrow funds for capital projects; using development cost charges to fund library infrastructure; return on investment studies by North Vancouver District Public Library and Vancouver Public Library; the impact of cuts to PLSB; and the financial outlook for 2011/12.

This meeting went very well and ran nearly twice as long as originally intended. The Deputy Minister was clearly interested in the subject matter and advised he would follow up on several items, including the possibility of Service BC Centres affiliating with local libraries (particularly in underserved communities); and investigating the issue of regional library borrowing once further information on this topic is provided.

He was clear on the unlikelihood of government expanding Development Cost Charge legislation to cover library infrastructure; and he was looking forward to reviewing NVDPL's return on investment study, stating that this is the kind of information government decisions are based on. On the topic of the budget outlook for next year, his objective is to protect the funding that currently exists, and he advised that January would be the appropriate time to discuss the financial picture in more detail with the Minister.

The Deputy Minister also discussed Neighbourhood Learning Centres (NLC) at some length. These are places where schools are often the hub and provide the opportunity to offer additional onsite community services people might otherwise have to drive across town to access – e.g., community theatres, not-for-profits, libraries, etc. In line with changes to the learning model government is presently contemplating, any new school will be considered as a possible NLC. More details will be available in the coming months.

Errin Morrison is BCLA's Executive Director.