

Vancouver Public Library unveils new strategic plan

By Stephen Barrington.

New, re-energized and expanded community spaces – including dynamic collaboration zones and high-tech creation spaces. A bold new way of delivering service. Dramatically enhanced opportunities to connect, learn, collaborate, create and contribute – all in places where no one has to pay a fee to enter or join. Those are among the initiatives in Vancouver Public Library's new strategic plan, which ambitiously re-envisions the library to meet 21st century needs.

"This is one of the most exciting periods in the history of Vancouver Public Library," notes Catherine Evans, chair of the library's board, which led an extensive research and consultation process to develop the plan. "Our city is changing, technology is changing, and how people interact with information is changing. We're re-imagining the concept of the public library and how VPL contributes to Vancouver."

Vancouver Public Library is one of the city's longest-standing institutions – a place for the community to connect with each other and learn from each other. Over the next three years the library has significant plans.

Launch bold new ways to deliver service – when and where patrons want it

At the central library, for instance, library staff enabled by mobile technology are coming to patrons (not the other way around) to help them where and when needed in the building.

"Remember the old way? You came to us – usually to a reference or research desk," notes VPL's chief librarian, Sandra Singh, who oversees the 22-location library system. "We have a better idea: We'll come to you."

"Our library staff are equipped with mobile technology to serve you wherever you are in our public spaces," she says. "Outside the library, we need to be where you are, and that means the transformation of the iconic library information desk into a mobile tablet that staff can take anywhere –

from inside the library and out into community spaces."

Other initiatives

Create new and re-energized community spaces – a new Downtown Eastside/Strathcona location, for instance, and redeveloped branches at Oakridge and Marpole;

Continue planning for the long-awaited 'garden in the sky' – access to the green space on the roof of the central library downtown – something originally planned, but not yet realized;

Explore use of digital interfaces so VPL is a platform for community creativity and knowledge to showcase Vancouver's history, stories and memory. A digital media space (3,000 square feet) dubbed VPL's Inspiration Lab is planned to open at the central library in late 2014, and could include a digital recording studio, video editing software and workstations, an interactive music lab and more;

Re-engage users who may not have used the library for some time, and enhance access to library collections, staff expertise and VPL's community space with nearly 2,300 more open hours a year system-wide.

VPL has an extensive network of free public spaces across the city – 22 in all, offering more than 500,000 square feet of space

"Think of the benefits to the community if we expand our opening hours – access to community space, to our outstanding collections, to technology, to staff expertise, to our programming and to other community members. This is part of our plan," Singh says.

Wide-ranging research and 10 months of consultations were key elements in the development of the strategic plan. Through *Free-for-all*, VPL's engagement process, thousands of voices were heard from across the city. VPL learned from individuals and families, community organizations,

partners and stakeholders, all of whom had different needs and different experiences with the library.

“Our plan really builds on what we heard – on our research and on the many changes around us, locally and globally,” says Singh. “It balances the traditional expectations of the library for collections and quiet study spaces with the energy of collaboration and creativity.

“At our foundation are diverse collections and programs, highly skilled staff, a network of physical and virtual branches and flexible technology,” she says. “This great library system has served Vancouver for more than 100 years. We’re deepening our connection to our patrons and the entire city so it will continue to thrive well into the future.”

To find out more about VPL's 2013-2015 strategic plan or to view the Library's informative strategic plan infographic and video, go to bit.ly/vplstratplan2013.

About VPL

Vancouver Public Library serves nearly 350,000 active card holders across 22 locations and online at VPL.ca through ebooks, databases and other digital services. VPL recorded more than 6.5 million visits in 2012; patrons borrowed nearly 10 million items, including books, ebooks, CDs, DVDs and magazines.

VPL is supported by the City of Vancouver, and is dedicated to meeting the lifelong learning, reading and information needs of the residents of Vancouver.

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