

Residents want surplus used to save library hours: Poll

By Don Peat ,City Hall Bureau Chief - Tuesday, January 17, 2012



TORONTO - A new poll commissioned by the Toronto Public Library Workers union suggests city councillors use the 2011 budget surplus to avoid cutting branch hours.

The Forum Research poll comes a day before city council meets to debate the 2012 city budget, which includes a \$3.8-million cut to the library budget.

Residents were asked if the library should cut its budget by the full 10%, as originally requested, or whether that shortfall should be covered by the 2012 contingency budget surplus of \$150 million. Around 66% of those surveyed said use the surplus rather than cut the library budget while 34% said cut the budget by the full 10%.

The poll was conducted last Thursday by phone among 1,053 randomly selected Toronto residents. Results are considered accurate plus

or minus 3%, 19 times out of 20.

At Thursday's executive committee meeting, a full 10% library budget cut was taken off the table. If council approves the proposed budget, library board members will be asked to find \$3.8 million in cuts without reducing library hours in addition to the 5.9% or \$10 million in cuts they've already made.

Maureen O'Reilly, president of the Toronto Public Library Workers Union Local 4948, said she hopes councillors will listen to the poll when casting their votes on the budget this week.

"What we are asking for is just a small percentage of the surplus budget," she said. "Eighteen million Torontonians walked through our door last year, we think it is worth taking a second look at."

City staff project the 2011 budget surplus at around \$154 million. Last week, the executive committee voted to put the surplus towards paying for the \$700 million in TTC capital purchases including its new fleet of streetcars — an order placed by the previous council.

Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong disagreed with the poll, arguing residents want council to get its financial house in order.

"Residents want us to get to eliminate our structural deficit and that means not raiding one-time savings so that the same problem returns 12 months from now," he said.

Budget Chief Mike Del Grande shrugged off the poll.

"(Residents) also want better transportation, they want less crowded buses, they want new streetcars, new subways," Del Grande said.

"You know what, I don't know, I think more people use the TTC than the libraries, I think in terms of priority, I think people want those capital items, so I don't know how that filters into the equation."