



Welland Public Library

Community Needs Assessment

DRAFT | September 2026



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DRAFT | September 14, 2026

Prepared by:

**MONTETH
BROWN** 
PLANNING CONSULTANTS

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1.0

Introduction

1.1. About Welland Public Library

The public library remains a core institution within Canadian society, and the same is true for WPL which is consistently evolving and innovating in line with rapid advances in technology. Since its establishment in 1824, Welland Public Library (WPL), has served as an enduring hub for Welland residents. Over its history, WPL has grown its services to keep up with community needs and adapted its library branches to reflect emerging societal and technological trends.

WPL serves an estimated population of approximately 70,000 residents¹ with three library branches along with a Bookmobile. Collectively offering 43,269 square feet of library space, each library branch has a different model of ownership involving the City of Welland, a local school board, and a private commercial property owner. Over the past five years, use of WPL's facilities and services has grown as measured through visits to the library, borrowing, and programming. The ability of WPL to evolve and adapt with changes in Welland and Canada as a whole demonstrates the longevity, relevance, and impact of library services in the City of Welland.



¹ City of Welland. 2022. Development Charges Background Study & By-law(s).

Table 1. WPL Branches, Size, and Ownership

Library Branch	Size (sq. ft.)	Ownership	Date Opened & Renovations
Main Branch 50 The Boardwalk	34,200	City of Welland	Opened in 2005 Renovated in 2019
Seaway Mall Branch 800 Niagara St.	5,069	Leased space in Seaway Mall from Doral Holdings Ltd. and 430635 Ontario Inc.	Opened in June 2017 Minor Renovations in 2024 and 2025
Diamond Trail Branch 315 Southworth St.	4,000	Shared library in Diamond Trail Public School through an Operating Agreement with the District of Niagara School Board (DSBN). DSBN is the registered owner of the lands and premises.	Opened in 2013
TOTAL FLOOR AREA		43,269 square feet	



194,944
Library Visits

1,052,605
Total Circulation

1,731
Programs Run

45,447
Program Attendees

Source: WPL CEO's Annual Report, 2025



The **Main Branch Library** opened in its current location in 2005 and was renovated in 2019. Located in Civic Square and integrated with City Hall, Main Branch is WPL's largest facility, serving as the centralized collections, programming, and administrative hub for the organization. A variety of public spaces, programs, and services are offered here.



The **Diamond Trail Branch** was opened in September 2013 within the Diamond Trail Public School. The library branch is used by the school during the day and opens to the public after school hours, functioning as a neighbourhood hub for many children, families, and older adults in south Welland.



WPL opened the **Seaway Mall Branch** in June 2017. This busy location serves the north end of Welland and provides a full complement of programs and services. Residents throughout the city can make use of this branch while completing other errands at the mall. This location received the Age Friendly Business Awards from the Welland/Pelham Chamber of Commerce.

1.2. About the Community Needs Assessment

This Community Needs Assessment (CNA) identifies needs for library branches and other access points in Welland over the next 15 years. The CNA is a tool for the Library Board, WPL staff, City Council, and other decision-makers to guide investments in existing and future library spaces.

During the CNA's community engagements, Welland residents consistently expressed how important WPL services are to them, speaking to the continued value of libraries today. The City of Welland is undergoing substantial residential and economic growth, with the population projected to exceed 100,000 residents by the year 2041.² As Welland's population grows and diversifies over the next 15 years, pressures will be placed on library facilities and services to keep pace with the evolving needs of the community. The CNA will help WPL to proactively plan for the future, in a manner that complements community building activities and the quality of life being sought for people living in Welland.



1.3. Planning Process

This CNA was developed through a comprehensive planning process conducted in 2026. In-person site visits and desktop research were conducted to inform directions based on a robust understanding of WPL's facilities and services. Engagement played a critical role in informing the CNA, helping it reflect the needs of the local community.

Figure 1. Project Timeline



² Ibid. Development Charges Background Study, 2022.

1.4. Alignment with WPL's Strategic Plan

This CNA builds upon WPL's new Strategic Plan (2026 – 2030) to provide guidance for planning existing and future library spaces and access points as directed by Objective 3.1.A of the Strategic Plan that states *"Conduct a feasibility study and facility needs assessment to guide WPL's long-term growth and service delivery."*

The recommendations identified in the CNA align with WPL's vision, mission, values, and priorities to help implement the Strategic Plan.

Figure 2. WPL Strategic Plan (2026 – 2030) Highlights

Vision

A welcoming, connected community that can grow, learn, and thrive.

Mission

Opening doors to knowledge, ideas, and opportunity for everyone.

Values

Inclusion: We make sure everyone belongs here, with equitable access and inclusive services.

Collaboration: We work with one another and our partners, building relationships that strengthen our community.

Curiosity: We spark curiosity and support learning at every stage of life.

Innovation: We adapt and grow with creativity, experimentation, and openness to new ideas.

Integrity: We act with honesty, accountability, and respect in everything we do.

Intellectual Freedom: We uphold the right to read, learn, and exchange ideas freely.

Strategic Priorities

#1: Inspire Curiosity & Learning

#2: Enhance Experience & Engagement

#3: Invest in People & Places

1.5. Alignment with the City of Welland

Like other public library systems in Canada, WPL has demonstrated remarkable resilience over its 200+ years of operation. As one of the oldest continually operating institutions in Welland, WPL has a long history of supporting the community and is a natural partner to help the City of Welland achieve its goals pertaining to community building and vibrancy, economic development, environmental sustainability, and other quality of life initiatives.

Libraries play a foundational role in creating complete communities. As free, accessible, and multi-functional ‘third spaces’, Welland’s libraries support people of all ages and abilities, fostering community cohesion, civic engagement, and lifelong learning. This CNA aligns with a number of policies and objectives set out in the new City of Welland Official Plan³ which sets out a bold vision for the development of the community through land use planning, urban design, and other directions. In particular, WPL supports the City’s growth management strategy and move towards complete communities.

“Complete communities are places such as mixed-use neighbourhoods or other areas within cities, towns, and settlement areas that offer and support opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to conveniently access most of the necessities for daily living. Including an appropriate mix of jobs, local stores, and services, a full range of housing, transportation options and public service facilities.”

~ City of Welland, Final Proposed Official Plan, Section 2.3.1

WPL’s Strategic Plan (2026–2030) and the City of Welland’s Strategic Plan (2023–2026) both share the Values of “integrity” and “innovation,” reflecting strong institutional alignment between the two organizations. Implementing this CNA will help WPL expand their reach and impact as the community grows, allowing them to support the City’s efforts to advance these shared values.

Expanding WPL in step with community growth will also support the City’s Strategic Priorities, as libraries provide an ever-evolving range of services that target these areas, as shown in the table below.

³ City of Welland Official Plan. February 2026. Final Proposed as presented to City Council on April 28, 2026.

Table 2. How WPL Services Support City of Welland Strategic Priorities

City of Welland Strategic Priority	How WPL Services Support this Priority
Economic Growth	WPL provides residents and businesses with access to free technology, resources, services, and skill development, strengthening the workforce and economic potential of a community.
Environmental Stewardship	WPL fundamentally supports environmental stewardship at the local level by promoting a borrowing culture that shares and reuses resources. WPL also delivering programming aimed to educate and promote sustainability. The growing digital collections at libraries allows users to access materials without having to purchase goods, reducing resource consumption.
Health and Well-being	WPL offers safe, welcoming, and accessible spaces that provide a variety of free programs and services to people of all ages and abilities, supporting childhood development, literacy, lifelong learning, community connections, and overall wellbeing.
Livability	Every year, WPL hosts a number of events and activities that create vibrant, attractive communities for residents.



2.0

Selected Trends & Operating Insights

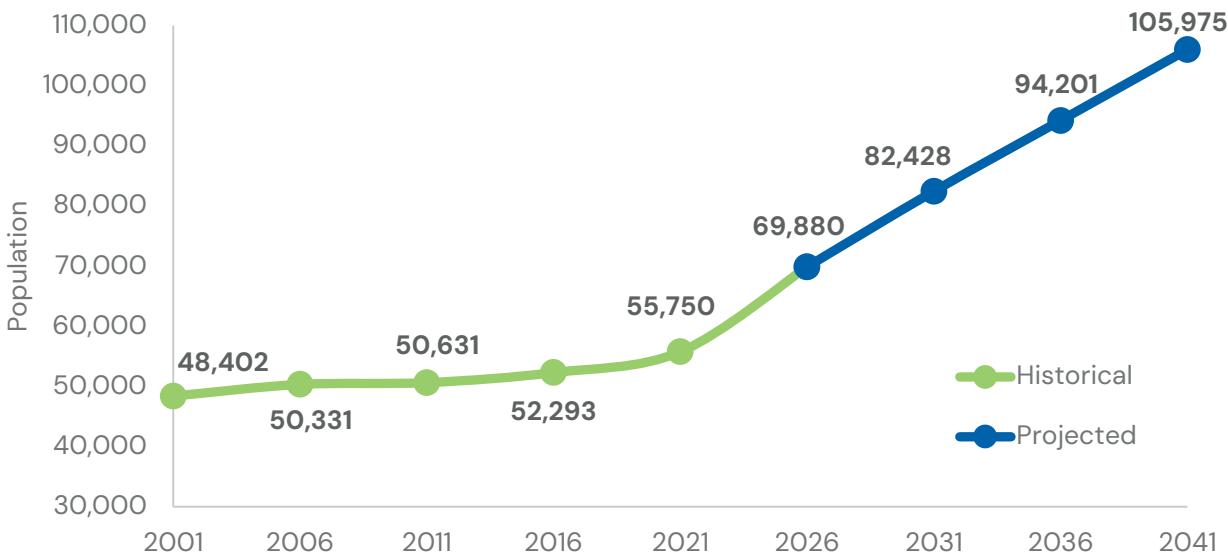
2.1. Libraries & Welland’s Population

City Growth and Development

The number of people living in Welland influences how many library branches are required, the amount of floor area needed, the number of programs and services offered, and more. Monitoring how the population changes will help WPL anticipate the degree to which pressures may increase, decrease or stay the same for the city as a whole as well as in neighbourhoods that are within a particular library’s catchment area.

The City’s Planning Division advises that the population forecasts contained in the 2022 Development Charges Background Study should be referenced for the CNA’s 15-year planning period, during which growth is projected from 69,880 residents in 2026 to 105,975 residents by the year 2041. The forecasted rate of growth is more rapid than Welland has historically experienced. With over 36,000 people projected to arrive in Welland over the next 15 years, it is reasonable to expect that WPL will experience growing pressures for library spaces, services, and staffing.

Figure 3. Historical and Projected Population for the City of Welland, 2001 to 2041



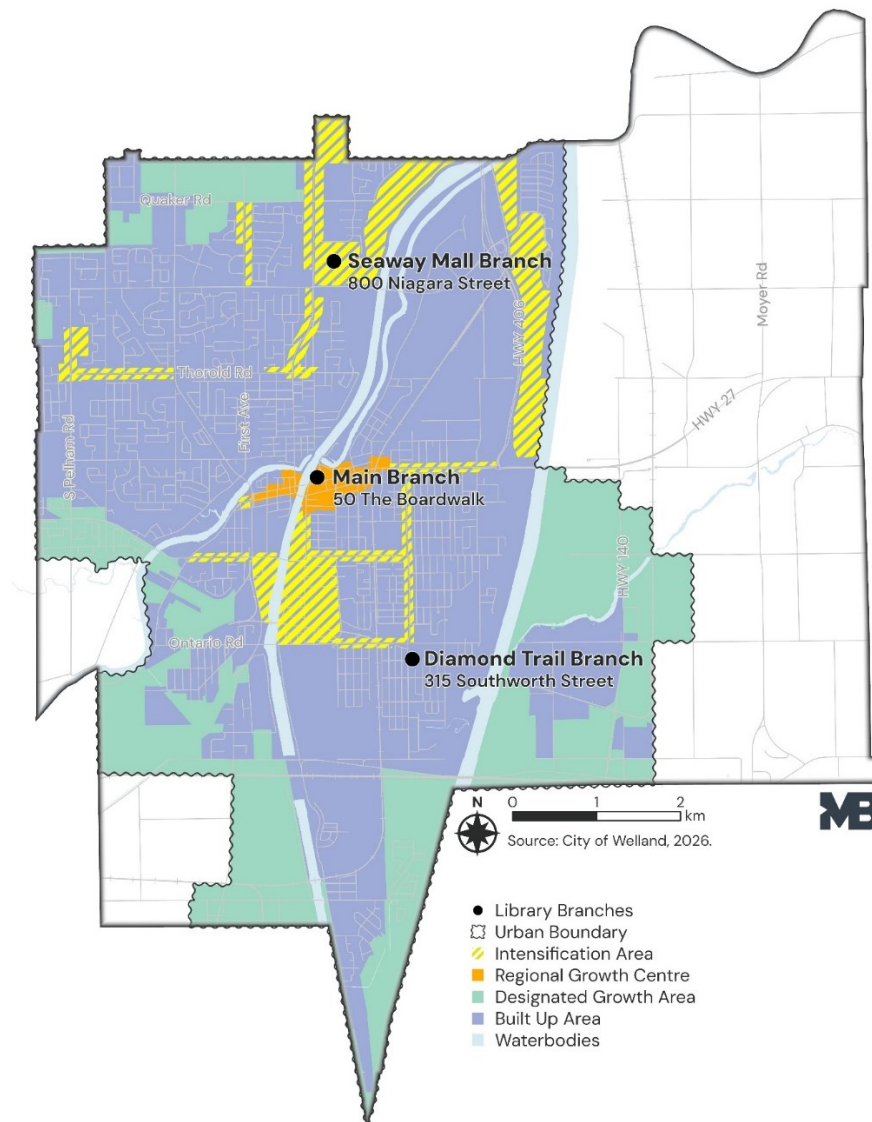
Note: Population projections include a 2.84% census undercoverage rate.

Source: Historical population is from the Statistics Canada Census Profile. Projected population is from the 2022 Development Charges Background Study and By-law(s) as directed for use by the City’s Planning Department.

Welland's population distribution and urban structure is composed of an Urban Area and an Agricultural and Rural Area that are bisected by the Welland Canal, the Welland Recreational Waterway, Highway 406, and Highway 140. A series of natural corridors and features are distributed throughout Welland which form the City's Natural Environment System.

The following map shows the City of Welland's structure based on their Official Plan (2026). The growth management strategy in the Official Plan directs all urban growth to lands within the City's Urban Area Boundary to support the development of complete communities. As recommended by the Region of Niagara, the City has a local municipal intensification target of 75%, meaning that 75% of all annual housing development should occur within the Built-up Area.

Map 1. City of Welland Urban Structure



Source: City of Welland Official Plan, February 2026

The greatest amount of infill and intensification will be directed to the Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre, near WPL's Main Branch location. Additional, appropriately planned infill and intensification are also encouraged in: Intensification Areas, including the downtown health and wellness centre; brownfield sites along the Welland Recreational Waterway; and intensification corridors which are generally along certain transit routes, arterial roads, collector roads, and regional roads.

Serving Residents of All Ages and Abilities

Age Profile

A person's age can influence how they use a library and the types of spaces, services, and programs they may be interested in.

Different age groups can have unique needs and interests in the library:



Children: Many libraries may have areas and amenities for children that appeal to their interests, including storytime mats, floor cushions, colourful furniture and designs, and books for their reading levels. The creation of children's zones in libraries can separate noise from other parts of a library where quieter activities, such as reading and studying, are taking place.



Youth & Teens: Youth and teens are primarily interested in using WPL for its technology (e.g., computers, video games), study areas, and spaces to hang out. Programs such as Dungeons & Dragons, crafts, makerspace activities, gaming events, and movie events, can be appealing to these ages.



Young & Mature Adults: This age-demographic is typically busy with work and family commitments, valuing convenient and flexible services and programs that can fit in their busy schedules. 'Parent and Baby' programs can be popular amongst parents, providing opportunities for them to connect with other parents to develop a network and support system.



Older Adults & Seniors: Libraries are a key destination for many older adult groups and social activities, such as book clubs, knitting circles, and game groups. Older adults may also be interested in using the library for technology assistance, tax assistance, and printing important documents. This demographic typically prefers quieter spaces and may desire nooks and corners with comfortable seating and tables that are away from the louder children and teen spaces.

Population aging is a phenomenon that many municipalities across Canada are experiencing, driven by the baby boomer generation, longer life expectancies, and lower fertility rates.⁴ The median age of Welland's population in 2021 was 45.2 which was an increase of 1.3 years from 2011. Comparatively, the median age of the population in Niagara Region in 2021 was 46.0 years, while for Ontario it was 41.6 years.⁵ These findings suggest that Welland and the surrounding Region are experiencing population aging to a greater extent than other parts of Ontario.

Historical population count data by age group for Welland further emphasizes this trend, showing that the individuals aged 55 and up experienced the largest percent increase in population from 2011 to 2021 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Population Distribution by Age Group for the City of Welland, 2011 and 2021

Age Group	2011	2021	Change from 2011 to 2021
0 to 9 years	5,035 (10%)	5,470 (10%)	+435 (+9%)
10 to 19 years	5,915 (12%)	5,740 (10%)	-175 (-3%)
20 to 34 years	8,810 (17%)	10,130 (18%)	+1,320 (+15%)
35 to 54 years	14,355 (28%)	13,245 (24%)	-1110 (-8%)
55 to 69 years	9,925 (20%)	12,180 (22%)	+2,255 (+23%)
70+ years	6,585 (13%)	8,985 (16%)	+2,400 (+36%)
TOTAL	50,625	55,750	+5,125 (10%)

Source: Statistics Canada Census, 2011 & 2021. Note that 2026 Census data was not released at time of writing.

Future population projections by age group were not supplied for Welland; however, the Ministry of Finance projections for Niagara Region can provide some insight into how Welland's age profile may look in the future. Based on these projections for the Region, continued aging is projected for the future, with minimal growth anticipated for children, teenagers, and young adults (see Table 4). However, there have been certain indications that Welland is attracting younger households – due in part to its designated supply of future residential lands and a postsecondary presence – and thus the 2026 Census will provide a better indication of how Welland's age structure compares with that of the Region's once Census age data is released in mid-2027. An appropriate balance of spaces and services to reflect the population's age distribution is needed to ensure all age groups have sufficient spaces and services to meet their needs.

⁴ Government of Ontario, "Ontario's Long-Term Report on the Economy 2024," updated December 30, 2024.

⁵ Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2011 and 2021.

Table 4. Percent Change in Population by Age Group for Niagara Region, 2026 to 2041

Age Group	Change from 2026 to 2041	Age Group	Change from 2026 to 2041
0 to 9 years	+0%	35 to 54 years	+23%
10 to 19 years	+2%	55 to 69 years	-2%
20 to 34 years	+11%	70+ years	+45%

Source: Ministry of Finance, Ontario Populations Projections, last updated August 1, 2025.

Persons with Disabilities

The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability found that 28% of Ontarians aged 15 years or older self-reported one or more disabilities (defined as any difficulties or long-term conditions lasting for six months or more that may keep persons from doing certain activities), which is a 4% increase since 2017.⁶ This increase is primarily due to the rising prevalence of mental-health disabilities among youth and working-age adults, as well as increases in pain-related and seeing disabilities in the aging population.

In the St. Catharines–Niagara CMA (of which Welland is a part), 35% of the population aged 15 years or older self-reported one or more disabilities, which is 7% more than the province.⁷ These findings may in part be due to the aging population in this area, as disabilities are more prevalent among seniors than any other age group.⁸ As Welland and the surrounding region experience population aging in the future, the percentage of residents with a disability will likely continue to increase.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) mandates that organizations, including libraries, must follow standards to become more accessible for people with disabilities. These standards help organizations create barrier-free spaces and services, expanding opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in everyday life.

WPL believes that its services and facilities must be accessible to all regardless of their ability or exceptionality. If a disability prevents a person from coming into the library, staff will make arrangements to have volunteers deliver library materials to their home. WPL has a variety of collections that can support people with disabilities, such as large print books, audiobooks, and decodable books for dyslexia. The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) collection is also available through WPL, which contains over 200,000 items in accessible formats to support people who have difficulty reading due to a visual, physical, or learning disability.

⁶ Statistics Canada, “Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 to 2022,” published December 1, 2023.

⁷ Statistics Canada, “Persons with and without disabilities aged 15 years and over,” published March 24, 2025.

⁸ Government of Canada, “2011 FDR – Section 1: Defining seniors with disabilities,” last modified December 16, 2022.

Indigenous Peoples in the Library

Welland is located on the treaty land of the First Nations, such as the Hatiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The percentage of the population in Welland that identifies as Indigenous is 4.3% (or 2,365 people).⁹

Libraries can help advance Truth and Reconciliation by promoting Indigenous authors, facilitating culturally relevant programming and education, and partnering with Indigenous communities and Indigenous libraries. In 2022, WPL's Technical Services Department initiated a Decolonization Project to remove offensive subject headings from their catalogues. Moving forward, the library aims to ensure new materials entering the library have appropriate terminology.

A Designated Francophone Community

The City of Welland is one of Ontario's designated Francophone communities under the *French Language Services Act*. In the 1920's many Francophones from Quebec, New Brunswick, and Northern Ontario moved to Welland for work opportunities.¹⁰ To this day, there is a Francophone presence in Welland, with 7.2% of the population's first language being French.¹¹ There are a variety of supports for the Francophone community in Welland, including French schools, churches, and clubs. WPL helps to support the Francophone community by offering a wide range of French language materials and including the French language in their logo.

Benefits to Low-income Populations

Libraries can be used by residents of all financial backgrounds; however, they are a key support for low-income individuals and families, as they provide free access to technology and books, job search support, connections to social services, and more. Free access to public libraries is ensured by the Provincial *Public Libraries Act*, which restricts libraries from charging users for entering a library, borrowing materials, or seeking information. WPL has some novel offerings to support residents experiencing low-income, such as the "Pay What You Can Market" and the "Little Free Pantry," which offer personal care and pantry staples based on what one is able to afford.

In Welland, the median and household after-tax incomes for 2020 were lower than those of Niagara Region and Ontario. Additionally, the prevalence of low-income after-tax was higher in Welland (12.0%) compared to Niagara Region (10.4%) and Ontario (10.1%). These findings

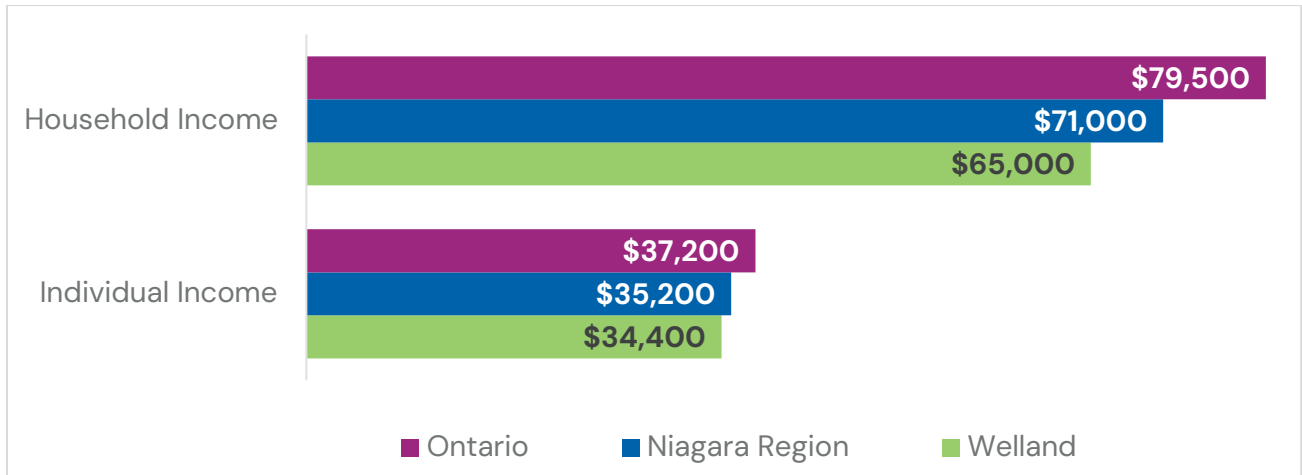
⁹ Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021.

¹⁰ *Vivre à Niagara*, "Who We Are," accessed April 16, 2026.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021.

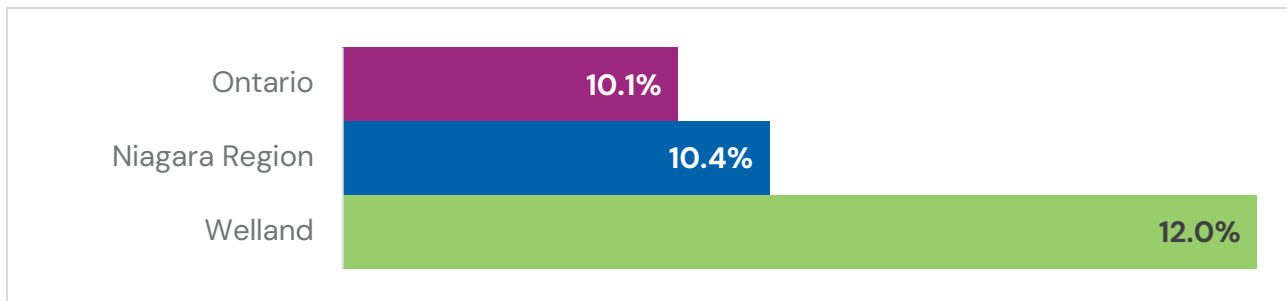
suggest that there may be a greater demand for library spaces and services in Welland relative to other parts of the region and province. Not reflected in these statistics is the rising cost of living after the COVID-19 pandemic, which further exacerbated affordability challenges for many Canadians, underscoring the importance of library services.

Figure 4. Individual and Household Median After-Tax Income, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada Census, 2021. Note that 2026 Census data was not released at time of writing.

Figure 5. Prevalence of Low Income based on the Low-Income Measure, After Tax, 2020



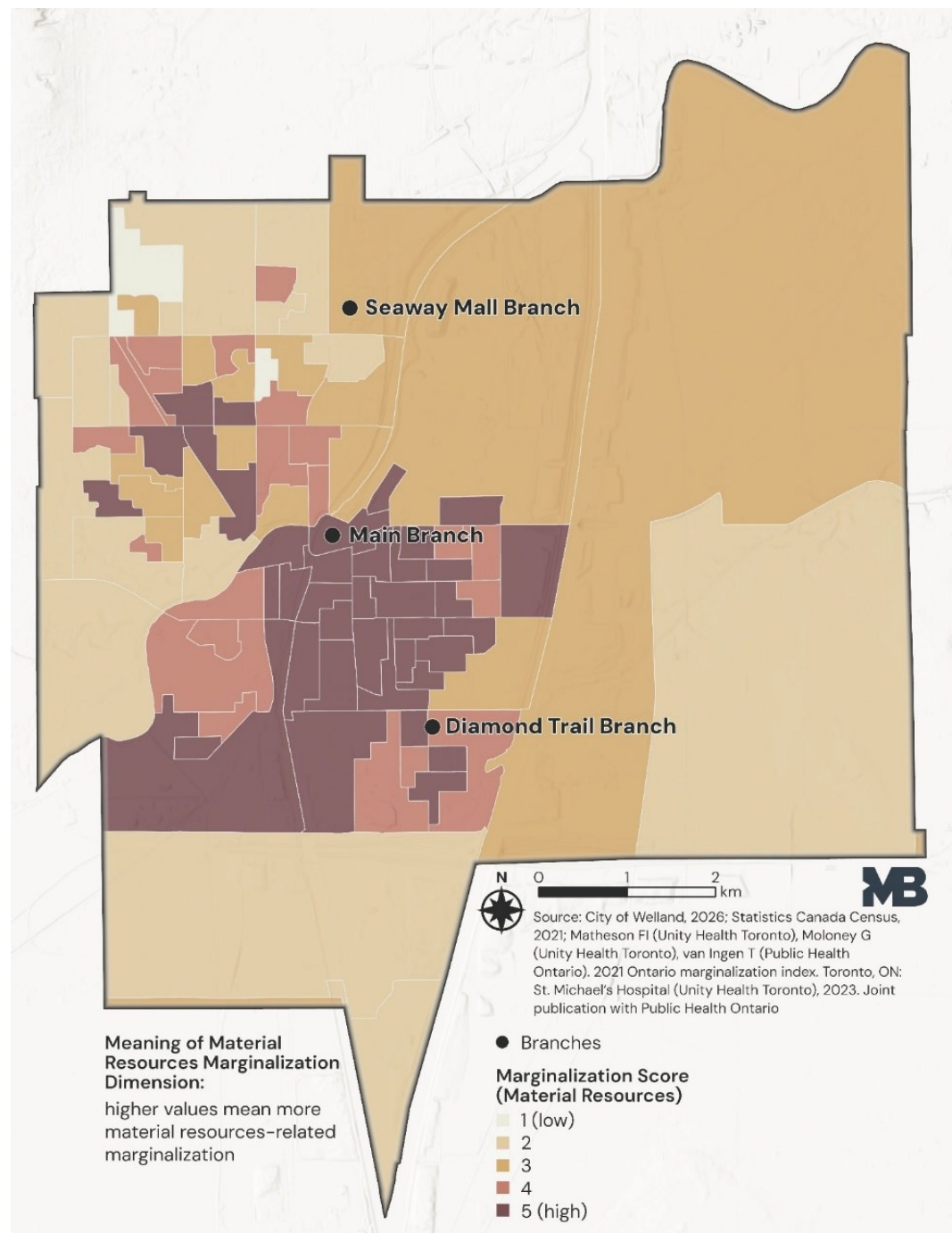
Source: Statistics Canada Census, 2021. Note that 2026 Census data was not released at time of writing.

The Ontario Marginalization Index (ON-Marg) is a tool that combines a wide range of demographic indicators from the 2021 Statistics Canada Census to create four distinct dimensions of marginalization. The 'material resource' dimension can identify areas where residents may have challenges accessing or attaining basic material needs, helping to identify where library service gaps may exist. Examples of indicators included in this dimension include the unemployment rate, people without a high school degree, low-income, lone parent families, and households living in dwellings that are in need of major repairs.¹²

¹² Public Health Ontario, "Ontario Marginalization Index," 2021.

Map 2 shows the material resources dimension by dissemination area in Welland. The areas surrounding Main Branch and Diamond Trail Branch have high marginalization scores. WPL services can support these communities by providing free access to materials and services to people who may not be able to afford them otherwise. There is also an area in west Welland that has a high material resource marginalization score; however, there is no library branch servicing this neighbourhood.

Map 2. Material Resource Dimension by Dissemination Area



2.2. WPL Usage Indicators

In-Person Visits

Based on gate count data shown in Figure 6, WPL's three branches collectively received nearly 195,000 visits in 2025. In-person visits have rebounded from COVID-19 pandemic-related declines, with visits in 2025 exceeding 2019 pre-pandemic levels by 4%. Main Branch received the most in-person visits in 2025 (98,399), followed by the Seaway Mall Branch (88,576), and then Diamond Trail Branch (8,019).

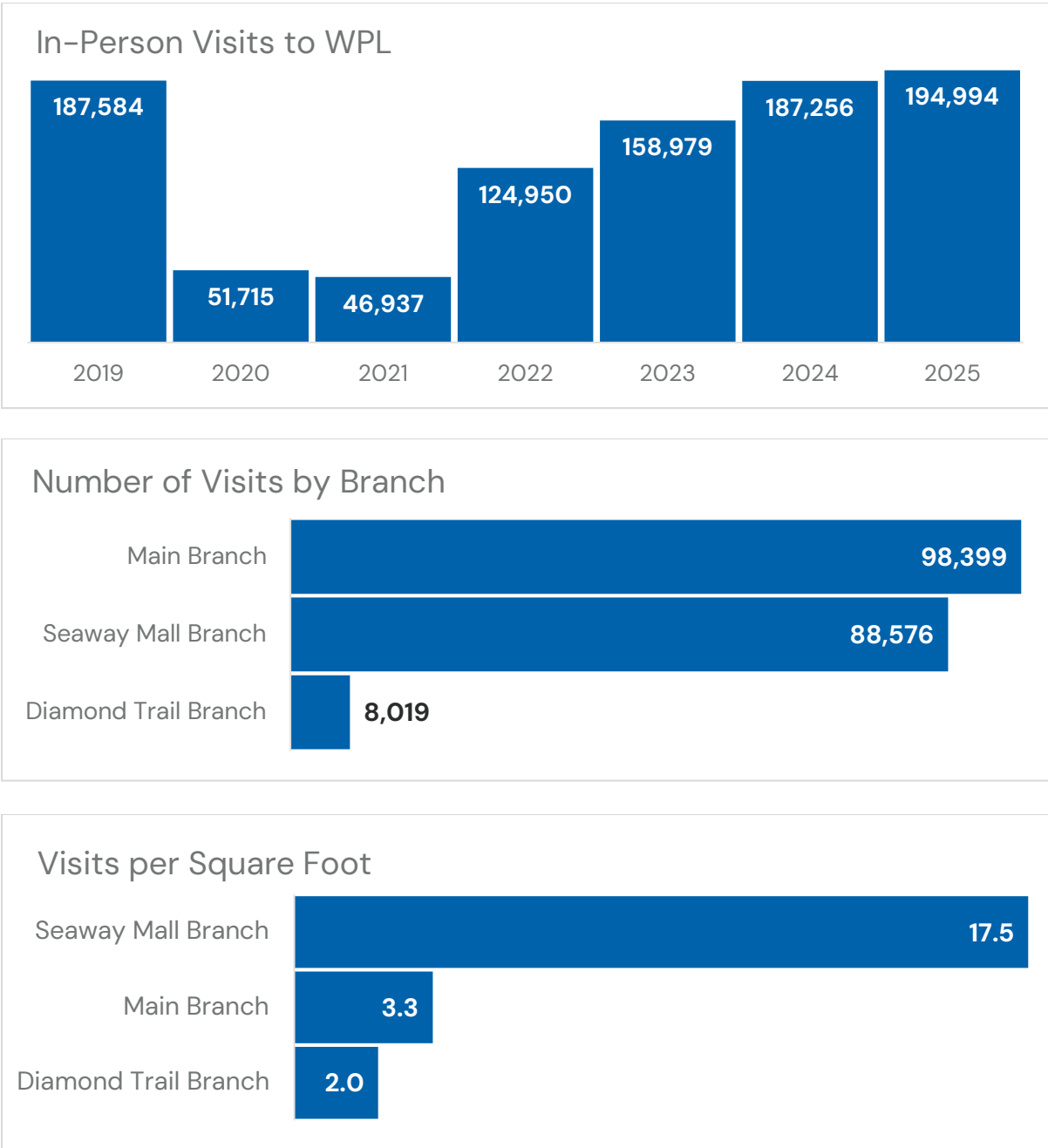
Figure 6 illustrates that Seaway Mall Branch has a significantly higher number of visits per square foot, amounting to over five times more than Main Branch and Diamond Trail Branch. This is an indication of the level of intensity being placed on that library in relation to its physical size. This higher use per square foot reflects this branch's location within a busy shopping centre, benefiting from the mall's foot traffic and the convenience of having a "one-stop shopping" destination. The abundant free parking and proximity to a Niagara Region Transit stop make the Seaway Mall Branch easily accessible by a variety of travel modes. Several complementary services are also located in the mall (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara, Service Canada, Service Ontario, etc.), often referring their clients to Seaway Mall Branch for resources and services, such as computers and printing.

Strong levels of visitation to Main Branch are attributed to it being part of a vibrant hub in Welland's core. It is walkable to many of the residents living in or near the downtown, as well as to core area businesses, and access by public transportation is strong. Being embedded in the downtown means that Main Branch is an important anchor within a broader civic and community cluster where library services are located in close proximity to the City Hall, Welland Heritage Council Immigration Settlements, and the Welland Historical Museum to name but a few. Visitation is also bolstered by the largest collection held of any library in the city, the most programming opportunities, and a safe and welcoming environment for people of all ages and backgrounds, including those seeking respite from extreme weather. In conversations with WPL staff and the community, the requirement for paid parking is a barrier for a number of residents, some of whom specifically indicated a willingness to drive a longer distance to Seaway Mall for its free parking. While the size of the collection can be a draw for some people and is important for the inter-branch lending system, the amount of floor area devoted to housing the vast majority of library holdings means that there is less space that can be devoted to library users for seating, study, programs, and other activities.

Diamond Trail Branch had the lowest number of visits per square foot which is likely reflective of its role as a small neighbourhood branch in a quieter neighbourhood and its limited hours of operation. Due to its proximity to several schools, this branch is walkable for many children and is often used by this demographic after school hours. Families and

older adults in the area will also make use of this location; however, staff have noted challenges with making the community aware that this facility operates as a public library outside of school hours. Free parking is available at this location and there is a nearby Niagara Region Transit stop, making this location accessible to a variety of travel modes.

Figure 6. In-Person Library Visit Indicators, 2019 to 2025



Notes: 2020 and 2021 visits were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Back of house staff workspaces were excluded from the Main Branch square footage calculation.
Source: WPL CEO's Annual Reports

Library Cardholders

~1 in 4 Welland residents had an active library card in 2025 ¹³

WPL has gone above and beyond in making public library card activation easy and convenient for the community. Following the COVID-19 pandemic decline in new memberships, WPL began proactively mailing library cards to non-member households in Welland, reducing barriers to access, increasing registrations, and promoting services to equity-deserving residents. The mailout initiative received an Ontario Public Library Service Award in 2025, highlighting WPL’s innovative mindset.¹⁴

WPL grew its cardholder base from 22,447 in 2024 to 25,828 in 2025, representing a 15.1% increase in a single year. The number of active WPL cardholders¹⁵ increased from 12,416 in 2024 to 17,372 in 2025, which is an increase of 40%. Based on this data, approximately one in four Welland residents has an active library card.

The heat map on the following page shows the distribution of active WPL cardholders in Welland. Nearly all residential areas in Welland’s Urban Area Boundary had moderate to high concentrations of cardholders, showing cardholders are distributed throughout the city. Large clusters of cardholders surround Main Branch as well as the Diamond Trail Branch, while there is a sizeable concentration residing west of the Welland River, particularly west of Niagara Street that likely travel to either Main Branch or Diamond Trail Branch. While Seaway Mall is a busy branch, cardholder clusters are primarily outside of its catchment areas which is a result of the mall being surrounded by a number of commercial, institutional and light industrial land uses along the Niagara Street and Quaker Road corridors.

Table 5. Number of active cardholders in library catchment areas, 2025

Library Branch	Active Cardholders in Catchment Areas, 2025*
Main Branch	4,194
Seaway Mall Branch	889
Diamond Trail Branch	1,633

Source: WPL, December 31, 2025.

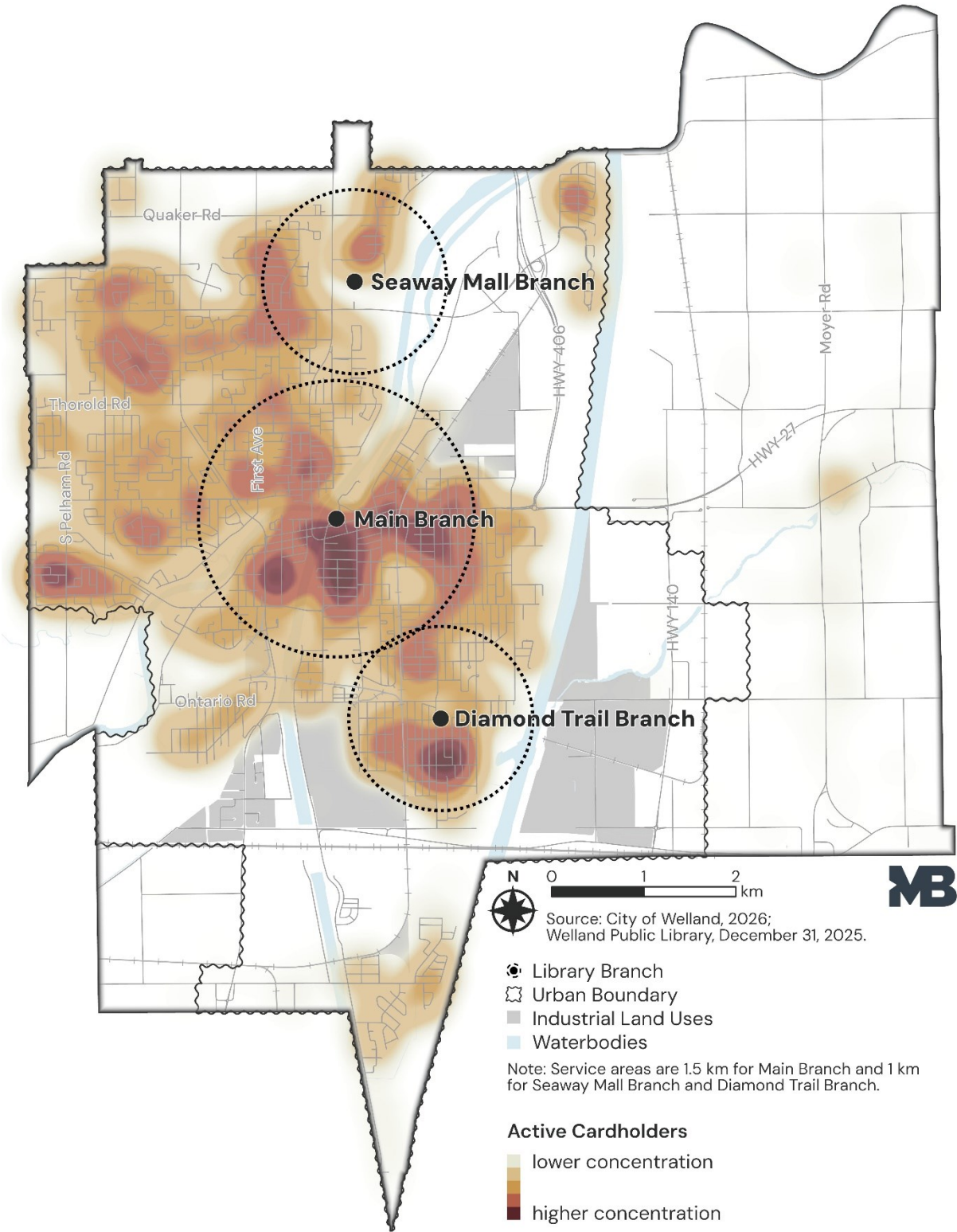
*Catchment areas are defined as a 1.5 km radius for Main Branch and a 1.0 km radius for Seaway Mall Branch and Diamond Trail Branch.

¹³ Based on WPL active cardholder data from December 31, 2025, and 2025 Statistics Canada Population estimates.

¹⁴ Government of Ontario, Ontario Public Library Service Awards, 2025.

¹⁵ WPL uses the Province of Ontario definition for active cardholders, which includes members who have used their library card in the past 2 years.

Map 3. Active WPL Cardholders in Welland, 2025

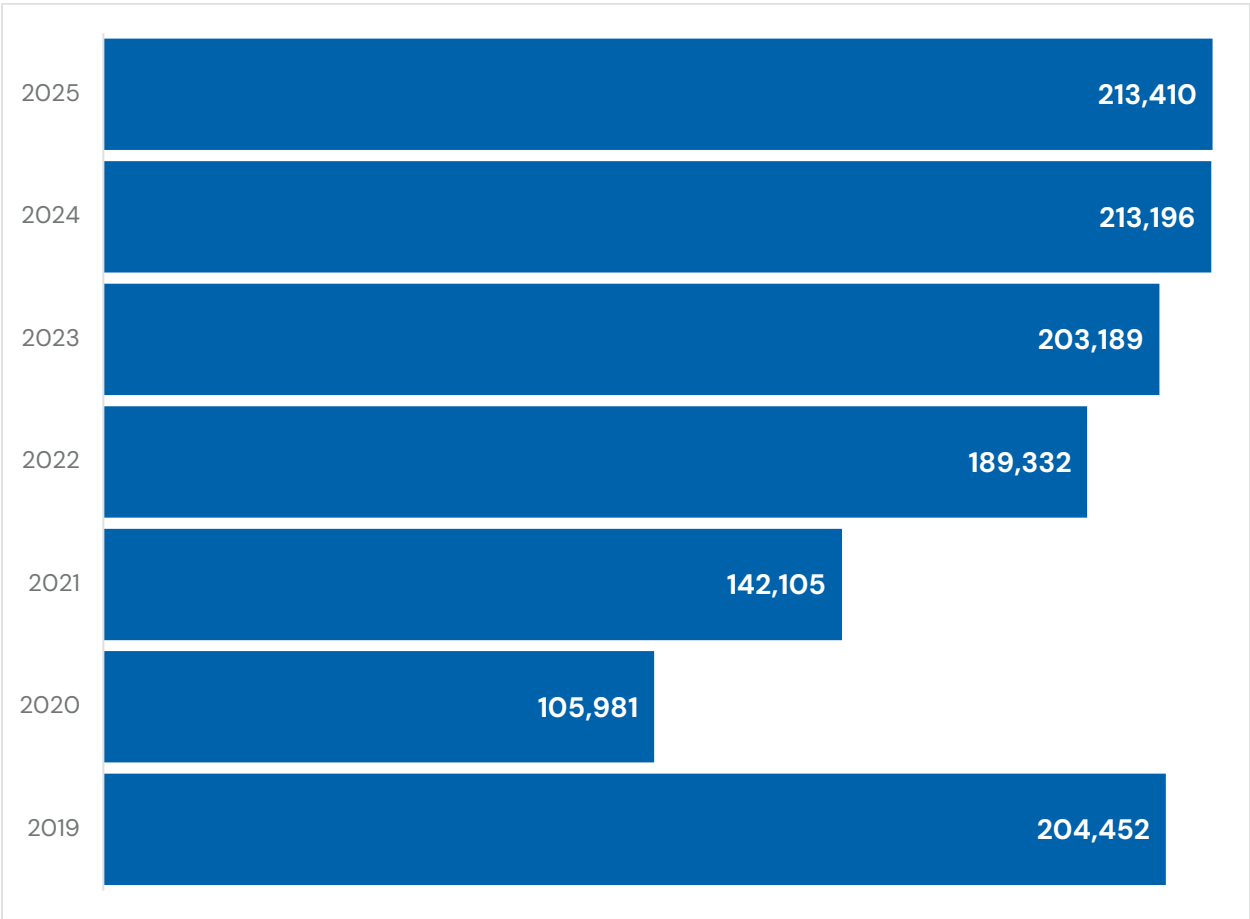


Physical & Electronic Circulation

Like other public library systems in Canada, WPL has constantly evolved and innovated in step with world-wide trends. WPL offers more than just books, it has a Library of Things with collections including instruments, games, sports equipment, educational and maker kits, electronics, toys, park passes, and more.

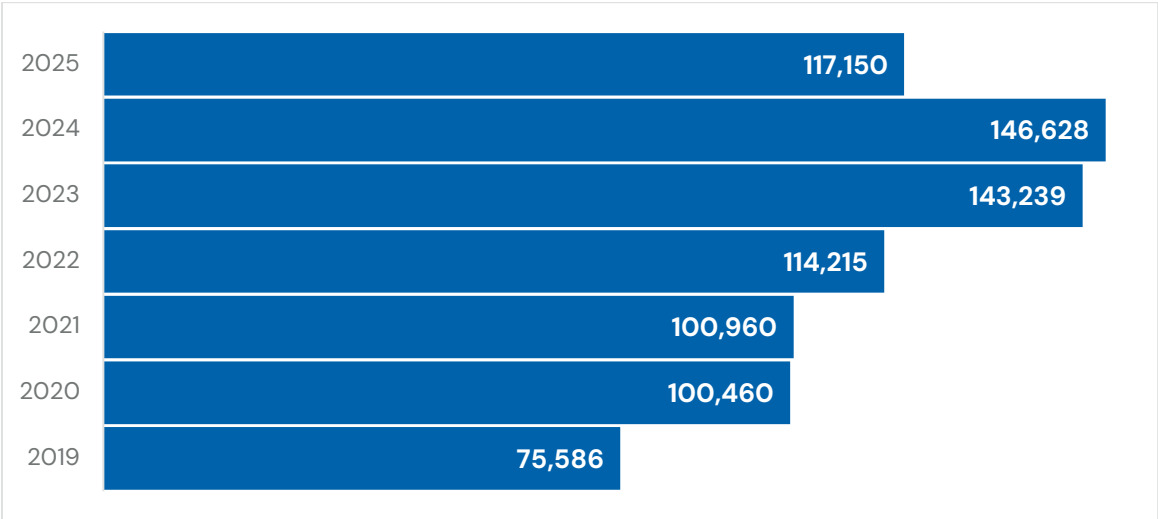
WPL’s physical circulation has surpassed pre-pandemic levels by 4%, with over 213,000 borrowed in 2025, showing a growing demand for physical library materials. Electronic circulation has been growing ever year since 2019, with a slight decline in use in 2025. While electronic resources are a good complement to physical resources, the growing usage of physical materials suggests electronic materials are not replacing the need for physical library materials and spaces.

Figure 7. Annual WPL Physical Materials Circulation, 2019 to 2025



Source: WPL CEO’s Annual Report

Figure 8. Annual WPL Electronic Circulation, 2019 to 2025

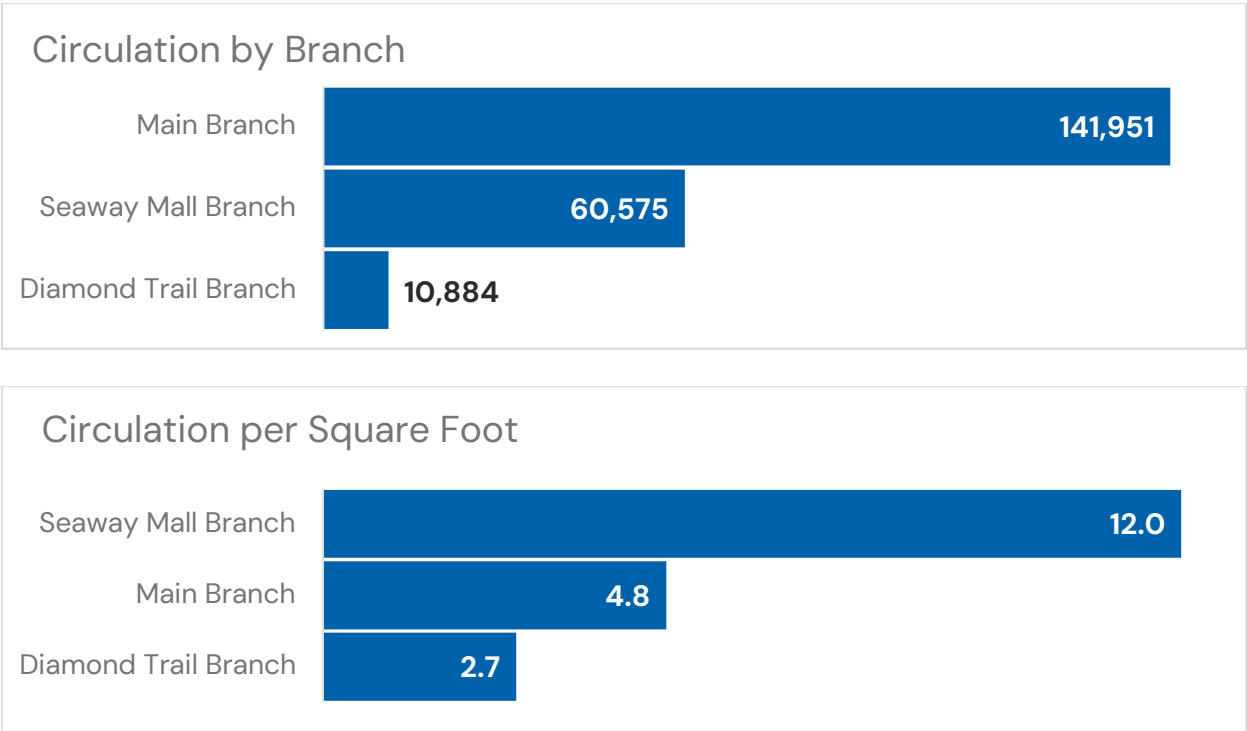


Note: PressReader data is excluded from electronic circulation data for 2021 to 2025 as its reporting format differs from how other electronic borrowing is counted. PressReader was not subscribed to in 2019 or 2020.

Source: WPL CEO’s Annual Report.

Main Branch has the highest physical circulation, more than double that of Seaway Mall Branch. When looking at physical materials circulation per square foot of branch space, Seaway Mall had the highest circulation (12.0), followed by Main Branch (4.8), and Diamond Trail Branch (2.7).

Figure 9. Physical Circulation Indicators, 2025



WPL regularly reviews and updates its collections to ensure they meet community needs and interests. Table 6 shows annual WPL physical materials circulation by collection from 2023 to 2025 and can provide insight on which collections are growing in use and may require more space, and which collections are decreasing in use and may require less space. Physical materials with decreasing circulation rates may not necessarily reflect a lack of interest in that collection type but could reflect that newer and more relevant materials are needed in that category. Other inputs should also be considered when evaluating collections to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the usage trends.

An interesting trend observed in Table 4 is that non-book collections, such as sound recordings, electronic devices, video games, and non-traditional collections are among the collections with the highest percentage increase in circulation from 2023 to 2025, highlighting the evolving role of the library at providing services beyond books.

Table 6. Annual WPL Physical Materials Circulation by Collection, 2023 to 2025

Format	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2023 to 2025)
Sound Recordings	3,380	3,932	4,993	48%
Electronic Devices	1,519	2,011	1,791	18%
Juvenile Fiction	16,877	21,653	19,771	17%
Video Games	5,330	5,397	6,196	16%
Non-Traditional Collections	4,108	4,543	4,632	13%
Young Adult	5,092	5,297	5,730	13%
LiNC Materials	20,411	21,538	22,532	10%
Juvenile Picture Books	27,544	27,836	30,184	10%
Juvenile Non-Fiction	10,949	11,099	11,816	8%
Juvenile French	5,103	6,143	5,436	7%
DVDs	23,024	21,575	23,140	1%
Adult Fiction	50,927	52,504	50,641	-1%
Magazines	3,230	2,981	3,143	-3%
Adult Non-Fiction	22,645	23,817	20,962	-7%
Interlibrary Loans	758	648	665	-12%
Multilingual	960	819	758	-21%
Adult French	1,332	1,010	1,012	-24%

Community Programming

WPL embraces its role as a community hub by focusing efforts to offer space for creation, collaboration, outreach, and programming. In 2025, WPL offered a wide variety of quality virtual and in-person programs for users of all ages including painting classes, book clubs, technology instruction, interest-based workshops, and programs presented in partnership with community organizations. The Little Free Pantry at Main Branch and Good Food Initiative at Diamond Trail Branch continue to support local food security and sustainability, helping vulnerable populations in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Program attendance at WPL has surged since the pandemic, with 45,447 participants in 2025, representing a three times increase from 2019 (15,060 participants). Main Branch offered the most programs (742), followed by Seaway Mall Branch (713), and then Diamond Trail Branch (276).

Figure 10. Annual Program Attendance at WPL, 2019 to 2025

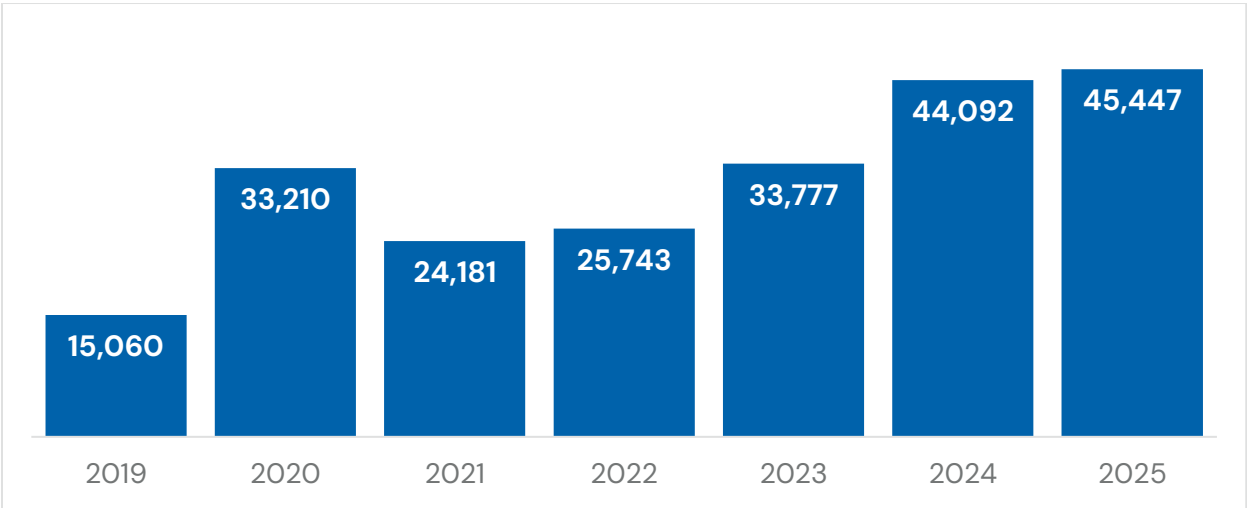
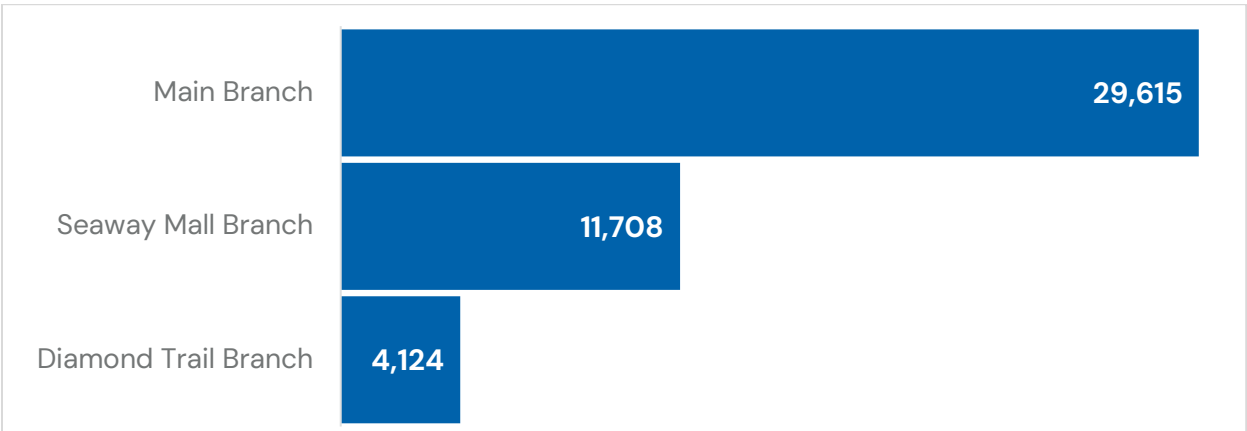


Figure 11. Annual Program Attendance at WPL by Branch, 2025



2.3. Selected Design & Amenity Trends

INTEGRATED LIBRARIES: Many new libraries constructed in Ontario over the past 15 years have been integrated with other uses with the emergence of community hubs, multi-use community centres, and creative approaches to partnership. Integrated models offer convenience, opportunities for cross-programming, higher foot traffic, and cost sharing. Depending on the nature of co-located services or the partnership, a library that is integrated with another amenity can create a “one-stop” destination for library users and non-users alike to benefit from the availability of different services in the same location. An integrated library may benefit from higher foot traffic than it would from a stand-alone branch if the other use or uses found onsite draw a large participant base. A successful example of a co-located library in Welland is the Seaway Mall Branch, which had a notable volume of visitors per square foot due to the high foot-traffic it obtains in the mall.

MAKERSPACE & CREATIVE EQUIPMENT: Makerspaces typically provide patrons with emerging technologies and machinery. Interest in recent technologies and creative equipment can often be unaffordable and inaccessible to the regular person. Offering opportunities for use of emerging technologies allows users to develop technological literacy skills, explore new interests, and create projects for school, work, or personal interests. Examples of makerspace equipment may include 3D printers, laser cutters, sewing machines and sergers, button makers, digitization stations, recording equipment and studios, green screens, and more. WPL has some makerspace equipment in its Main Branch and is looking to expand this space. 3D printers are available at all WPL branch locations.

FLEXIBLE SPACES: Public libraries are moving toward flexible, reconfigurable spaces that support programs, socializing, events, and core library services. Moveable shelving, furniture on casters, and modular partitions allow spaces to shift between open programming areas and smaller rooms as needed. This flexibility helps libraries maximize space, increase program capacity, and respond to changing community needs. WPL has selected moveable shelving at all branches which help provide programmatic flexibility and provides opportunity for some floor areas to adapt to emerging trends or space-related challenges that may arise in the future.

LIBRARY OF THINGS: Library systems are providing users with collections of things beyond books. These non-traditional items can be items such as hiking kits, kitchen items, park passes, etc. The “Library of Things” is a term used to describe an initiative that public library systems are doing to offer their users with community-based lending. Many libraries have challenges with displaying their library of things on the floor due to the size of objects. Rotating photo walls of seasonal items and promotions of items in the Library of Things can help raise awareness for available items. WPL has a growing Library of Things collection that patrons can borrow.

OUTDOOR SPACES: Public libraries are increasingly extending their presence outdoors in response to growing community demands. Patrons are seeking spaces that connect them to nature or simply get fresh air, such as patios and reading gardens. This growing need is also influenced by the growing recognition of health and social benefits of access to green space. Outdoor library spaces promote mental wellbeing, encourage longer visits, and attract new users who may not otherwise use traditional library services. While WPL does not currently have outdoor spaces, the Civic Square outside of City Hall and Main Branch has seating areas that can be used by residents for outdoor reading and fresh air. WPL's Bookmobile has also begun making stops in Welland's parks, creating outdoor opportunities for reading, and other literacy-based activities.

ALTERNATIVE ACCESS POINTS: Many library systems have introduced holds lockers, vending machines, and drop-off bins to expand access points and complement their branches. These solutions are used by larger systems like Oakville Public Library and Vaughan Public Library, as well as smaller systems such as Oxford County Library who serve a large rural geographic area. In the case of lockers and kiosks, library users scan their library card and enter a PIN to open a kiosk or locker.

STUDY PODS: One of the biggest challenges for existing libraries is inadequate study spaces or acoustically separate rooms for meetings. Open floor plans can suit large collections or mobile furniture, and provide great sight lines for shared monitoring and flexibility for different activities; however, they may lack quiet spaces and smaller scale rooms which help with conversations, concentration and focus. All-in-one privacy pods are prefabricated rooms which can be placed in a space like a piece of furniture. Complete with walls, a floor and a ceiling, the pods offer acoustically isolated space for up to 4 people. Built-in furniture, data and power hook-ups and mechanical ventilation make the pods connected and comfortable, while the glass front helps staff with maintaining safety. Delivered as a fully functional room, they can provide a simple solution with minimal operational disruption. WPL currently has rooms and workstations at some branches that provide places for people to study. Seaway Mall does not have dedicated study rooms and staff regularly receive feedback that sound carries from the children's area to the workstations. Study pods could present a potential solution to the need for quiet, study spaces in this smaller branch.

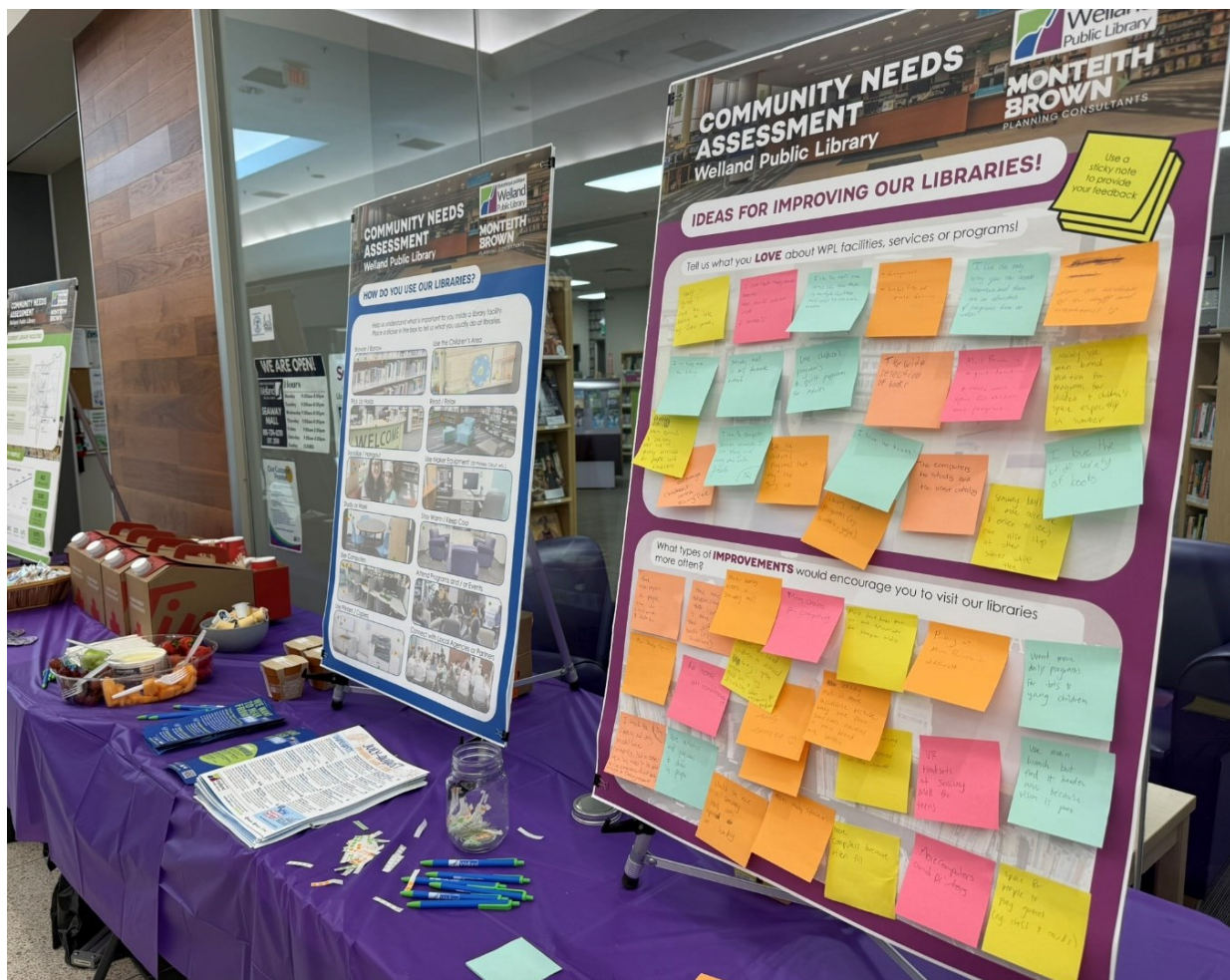


Meeting / Study Pod, Middlesex
County Library

FOOD SECURITY: Modern library systems are increasingly embracing roles in food education, nutrition, and food security, while also promoting food justice. Through these efforts, libraries not only inform but also promote “farm to table” concepts and bring their communities together using a combination of space, programs, and initiatives through a common language of food. Some library systems, such as New Tecumseth Public Library and Kitchener Public Library, have garden spaces outside their branches that are used to teach nutritional literacy and provide access to healthy fruits and vegetables. Other libraries offer ‘seed libraries’ as part of their food security and food literacy initiatives. WPL has food security initiatives its branches, including seed libraries, pop-up “Pay What You Can Market” for fresh produce, the “Good Food” initiative for snacks at Diamond Trail, and the “Little Free Pantry” at Main Branch.

3.0 Community Engagement

Community input is critical for ensuring the CNA reflects the needs and priorities of residents and WPL partners. A variety of community engagement opportunities were provided to gather input regarding strengths, barriers, and potential improvements for WPL facilities and services. The engagement findings summarized in the following sections have been considered alongside other inputs to inform the CNA's recommendations.¹⁶



¹⁶ The findings included in this section reflect the opinions of the public and have not been fact-checked.

3.1. How We Engaged

Community outreach and engagement for Phase 2 of the CNA took place during Spring 2026. A variety of in-person, digital, targeted, and broad-based engagement tactics and outreach methods were used to ensure a diverse range of voices were heard.

Outreach Methods



Project Webpage

WPL's project webpage shared information and engagement opportunities for the CNA, receiving 345 unique visitors.



Rack Cards & Posters

Rack cards for the project were printed and distributed at the circulation desk and during programs. Posters about the project were printed and distributed throughout the branches.



E-blasts

An e-mail blast was sent out to 3,437 people on the WPL mailing list, as well as 16 community partners.



Social Media Campaign

Promotional information for the project was posted on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, generating 13,214 views, 746 post reactions, and 167 clicks.



Project Rack Cards



Project Poster

Engagement Tactics

The following tactics were used to engage residents, community partners, the library board, and staff.



Community Open Houses

Open houses were held at each of WPL's branches, where 95 people were directly engaged in total.



Community Feedback Form

A community feedback form was available online on the project webpage. Hard copies of the survey were also printed and distributed throughout the branches. 236 people completed the community feedback form.



Community Partner Interviews

Targeted interview sessions were held with 10 community partners to discuss opportunities to improve WPL's facilities and services.



Library Board Workshop

A workshop meeting was held with the library board to discuss a range of topics related to improvements and enhancements to WPL's facilities and services.



Library Branch Tours with Staff

WPL Management Team and Library Staff accompanied Monteith Brown on branch tours to share their insights and opportunities to enhance the library spaces.

236

completed
community surveys

95

open house
participants

10

community
partners
interviewed

3.2. Community Feedback Form

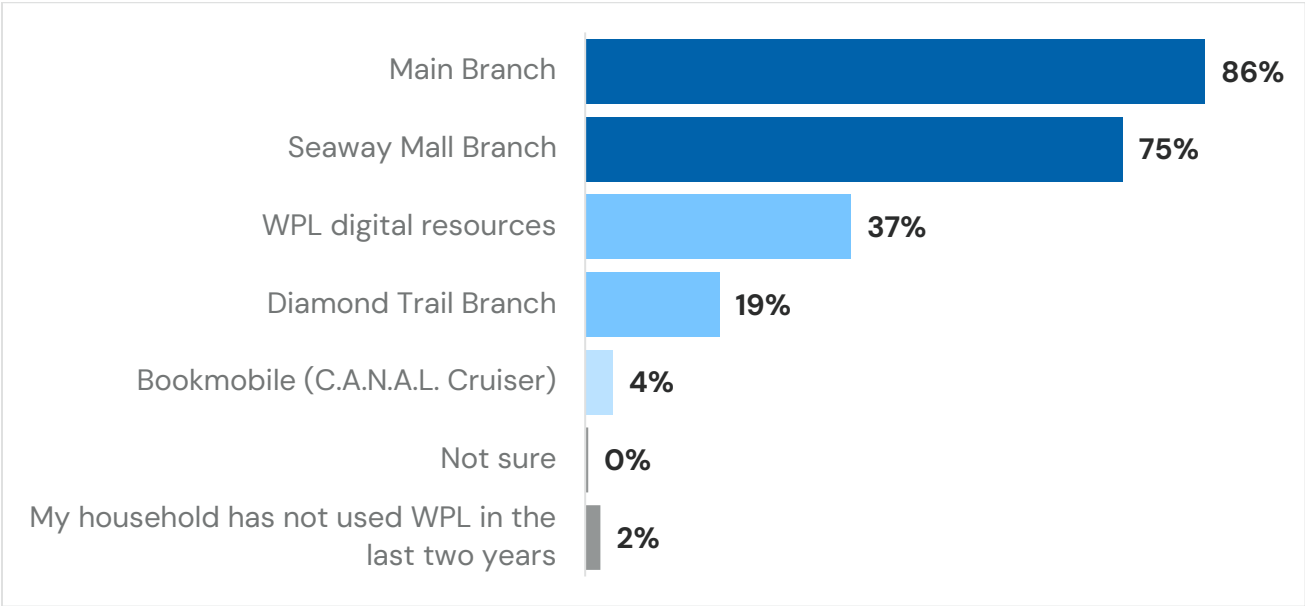
To support the development of the CNA, a community feedback form was available for four weeks in Spring 2026 to engage residents on topics pertaining to library participation preferences, barriers, service gaps, improvements, satisfaction levels, and more.

A total of 236 respondents completed the feedback form. Being a voluntary survey, the sample may be impacted by self-selection bias. As only 2% of survey respondents identified as non-library users, the results primarily reflect those who already use the library. Further, WPL’s Bookmobile had not launched until after the feedback form had opened, and as a result, respondents may not have had an opportunity to use the Bookmobile yet. To mitigate these biases and provide a strong basis for future planning, the survey findings will be considered alongside other consultation tactics and data inputs (e.g., utilization data, growth forecasts, etc.) when creating the CNA. The key findings from the survey are summarized below.

Location & Digital Service Use

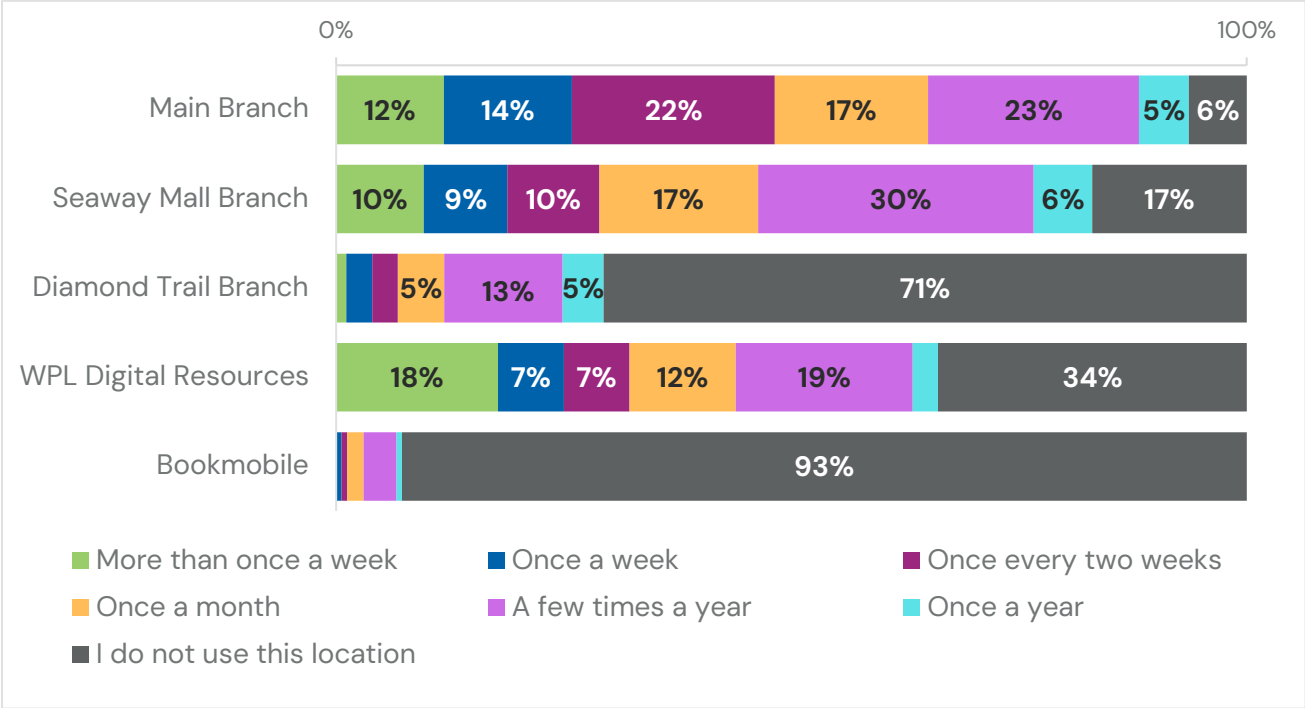
Main Branch was the most used library location amongst survey respondents (86%), followed by Seaway Mall (75%). Diamond Trail branch was the least used location amongst respondents (19%). WPL digital resources were used by 37% of respondents. Only 4% of respondents reported using the Bookmobile, likely because it launched after the survey opened.

Figure 12. WPL location and digital service use



For many Main Branch users, visiting the library is part of a regular routine, with nearly half of respondents visiting this location at least once every two weeks while WPL’s digital resources and Seaway Mall Branch also received frequent levels of use.

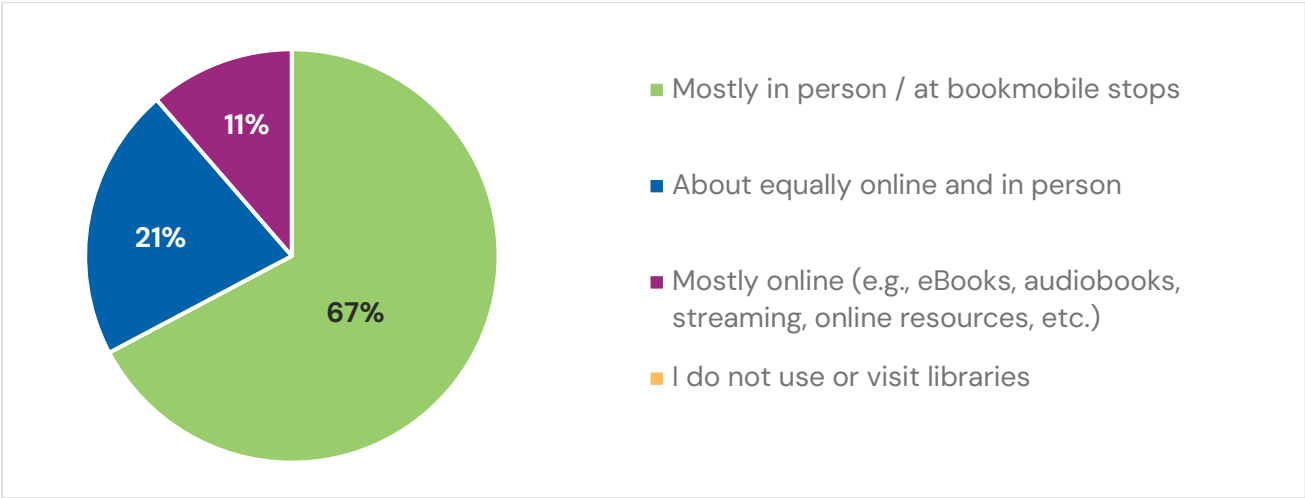
Figure 13. WPL location and digital service frequency



Note: Percentages under 5% are not shown due to space constraints.

In-person use of libraries was the most common way survey respondents accessed WPL services (67%). 21% of respondents accessed WPL services online and in-person equally, and only 11% of respondents mostly accessed WPL services online.

Figure 14. In-person vs digital library use



Travel to Branches

Most survey respondents drive to access the library (89%), followed by walking (30%), taking public transit (9%), and cycling (9%). Most respondents (61%) indicated they are willing to travel between five and 15 minutes to access a library branch, showing that a strong geographic distribution of library facilities is important to drawing in and supporting users.

Figure 15. Typical mode of travel to the library

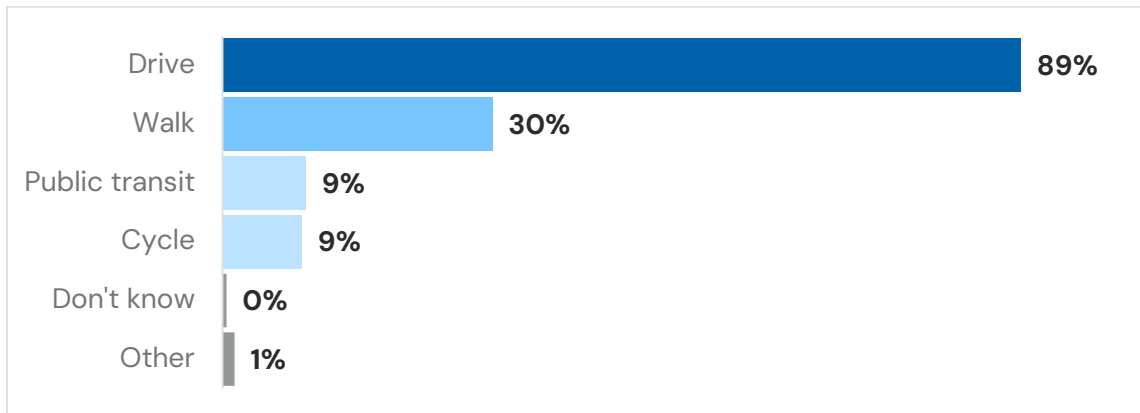
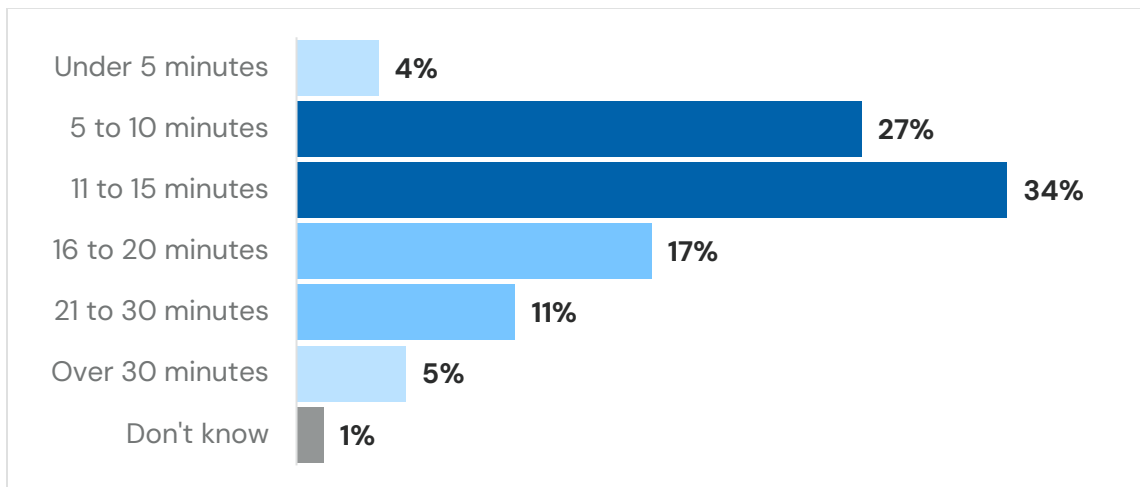


Figure 16. Time willing to travel to a library branch



Library Services, Programs & Collections

The top three things respondents liked to do at WPL branches were:

- 1) Take out books (80%);
- 2) Look through books and other materials (64%); and
- 3) Pick up holds (57%).

While most respondents still use the library for traditional uses such as browsing and borrowing books, between 20% and 30% report using WPL for programs, work and study, printing and photocopying, the children's area, the computers, and Wi-Fi.

When respondents were asked which library programs were important to them, responses were relatively evenly distributed across a variety of categories, suggesting a diverse mix of programming is needed to meet the needs of the community. The top library programs of importance were arts and culture, community events, age-specific programs, and STEAM programs.

Bestsellers or popular titles were by far the most important collection to respondents (77%), followed by eBooks / eAudiobooks / eMagazines (43%), and the Library of Things (37%).



Figure 17. What respondents like to do at WPL branches

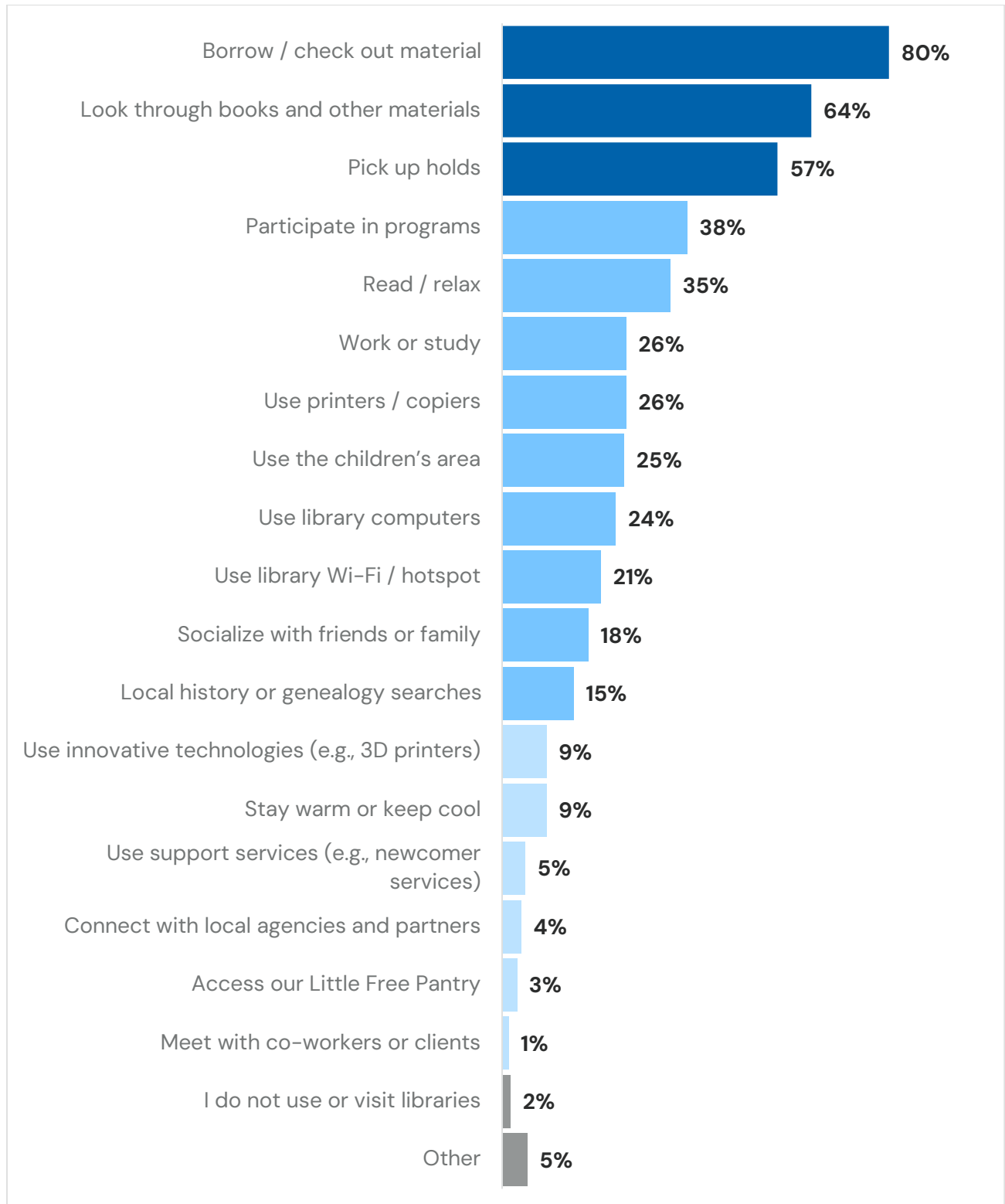


Figure 18. Library programs that are important to respondents

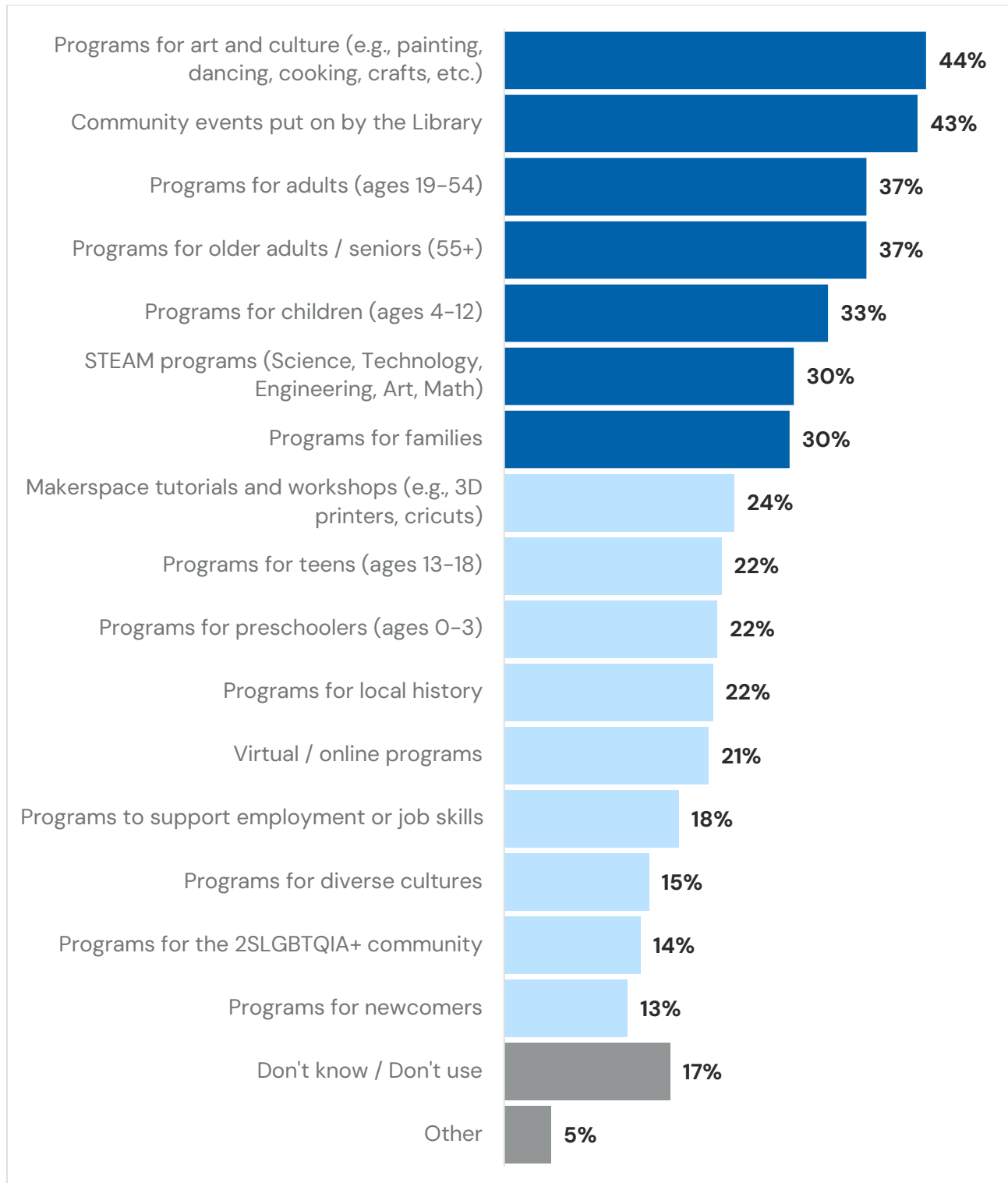
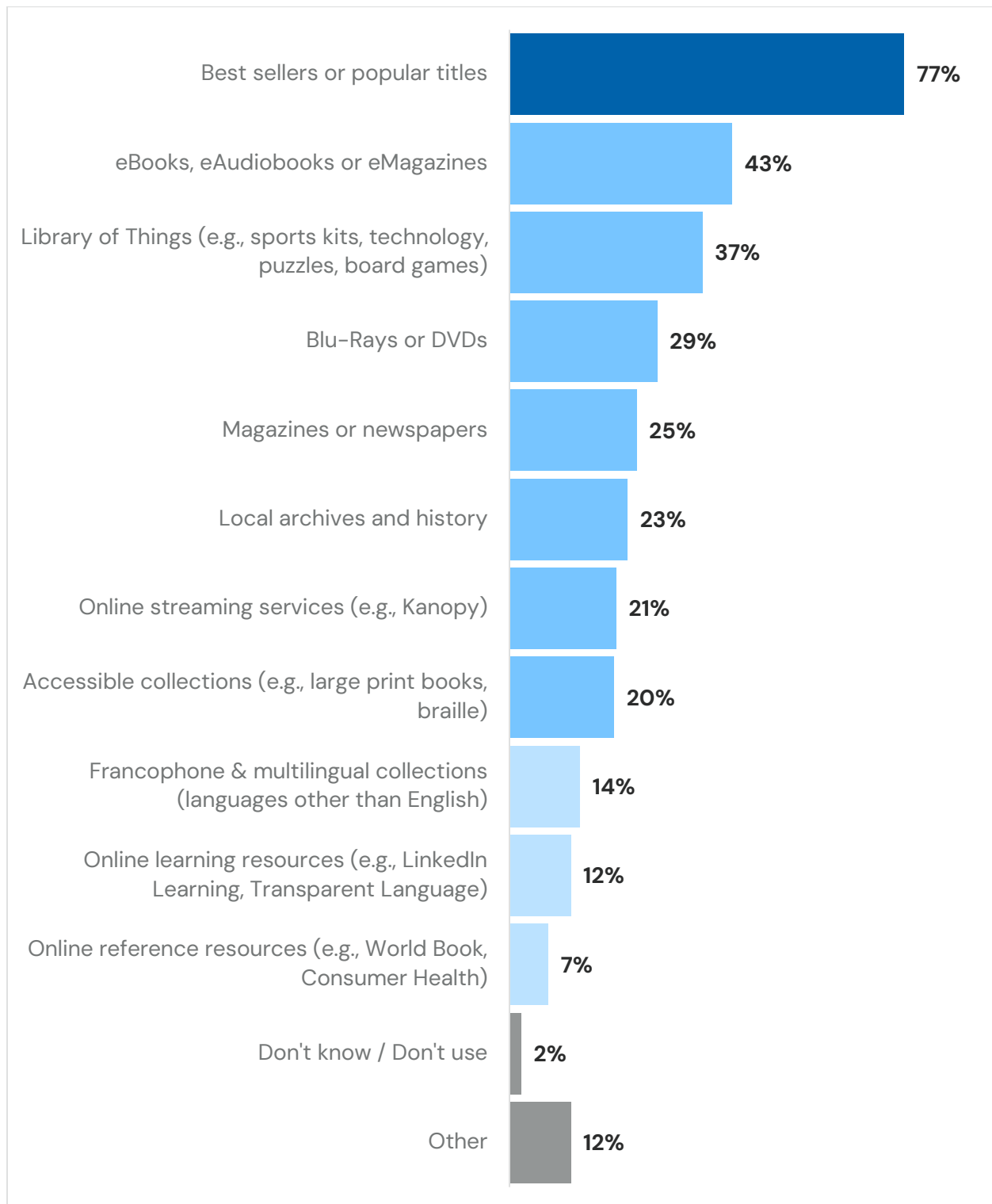


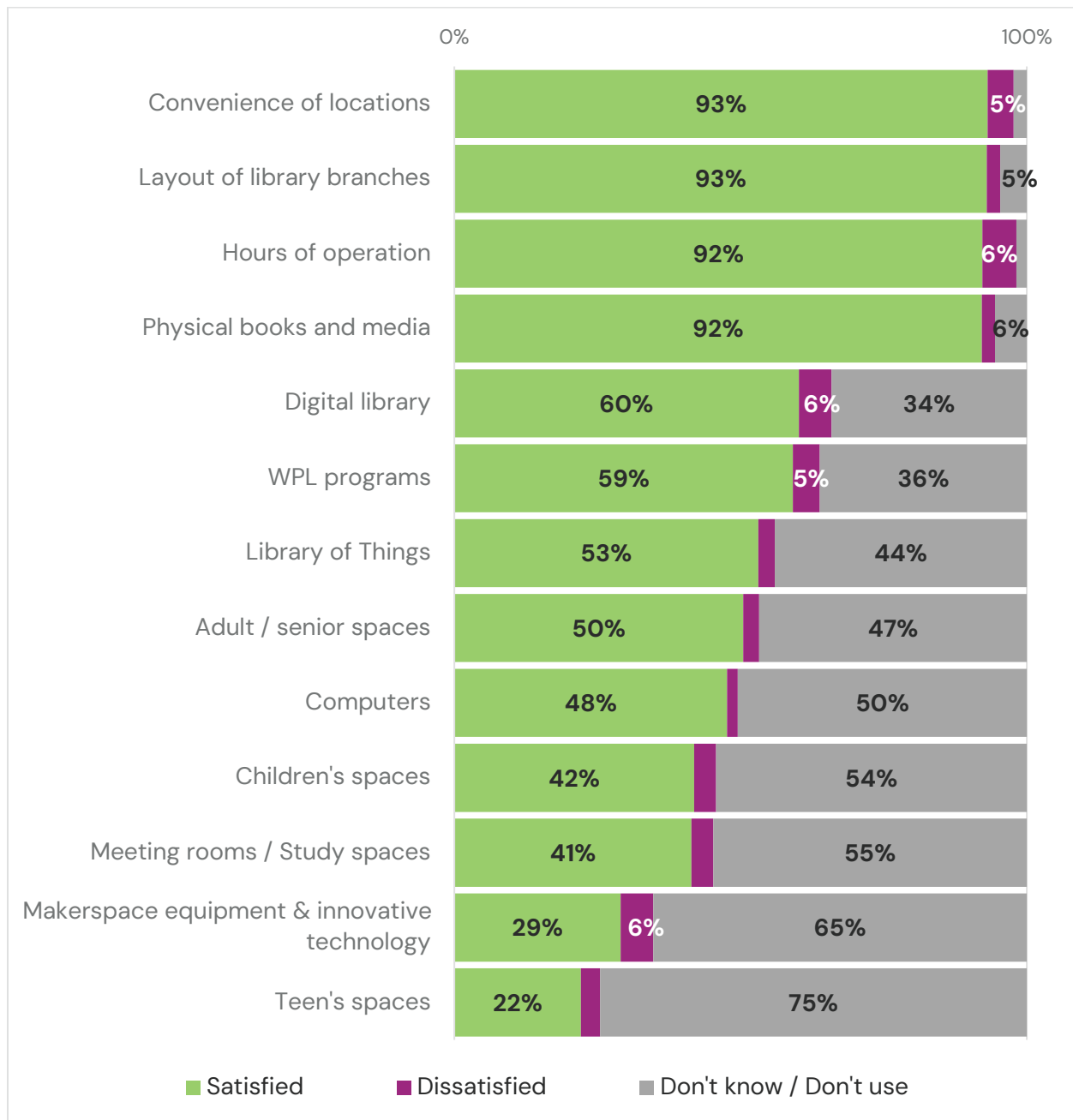
Figure 19. Library collections that are important to respondents



Satisfaction

Survey respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with WPL services and spaces across the board. Factoring out the large number of “Don’t know / Don’t use” responses, all library services and spaces included in the question received satisfied responses from over 90% of respondents, except for teens spaces (87%) and makerspaces (84%).

Figure 20. Satisfaction with WPL services and spaces

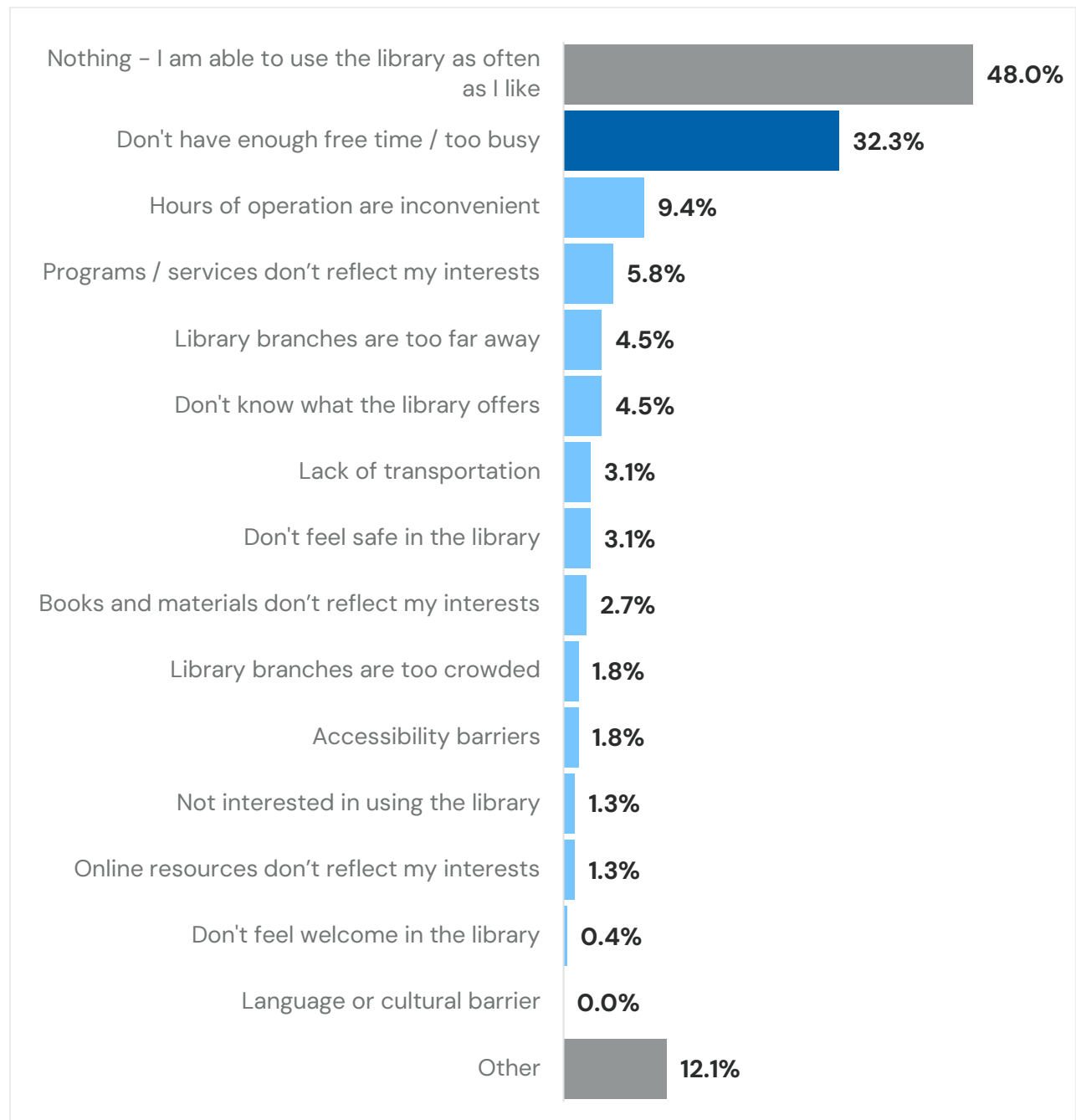


Note: Percentages under 5% are not shown due to space constraints.

Barriers

Nearly half of respondents (48%) reported that they are able to use WPL as often as they like, suggesting the library is a barrier-free place for many users. The most common barrier to using WPL was a lack of free time (32%). Open-ended comments revealed desires for the library to be open on Sunday to provide more opportunities for users with weekday jobs to access WPL.

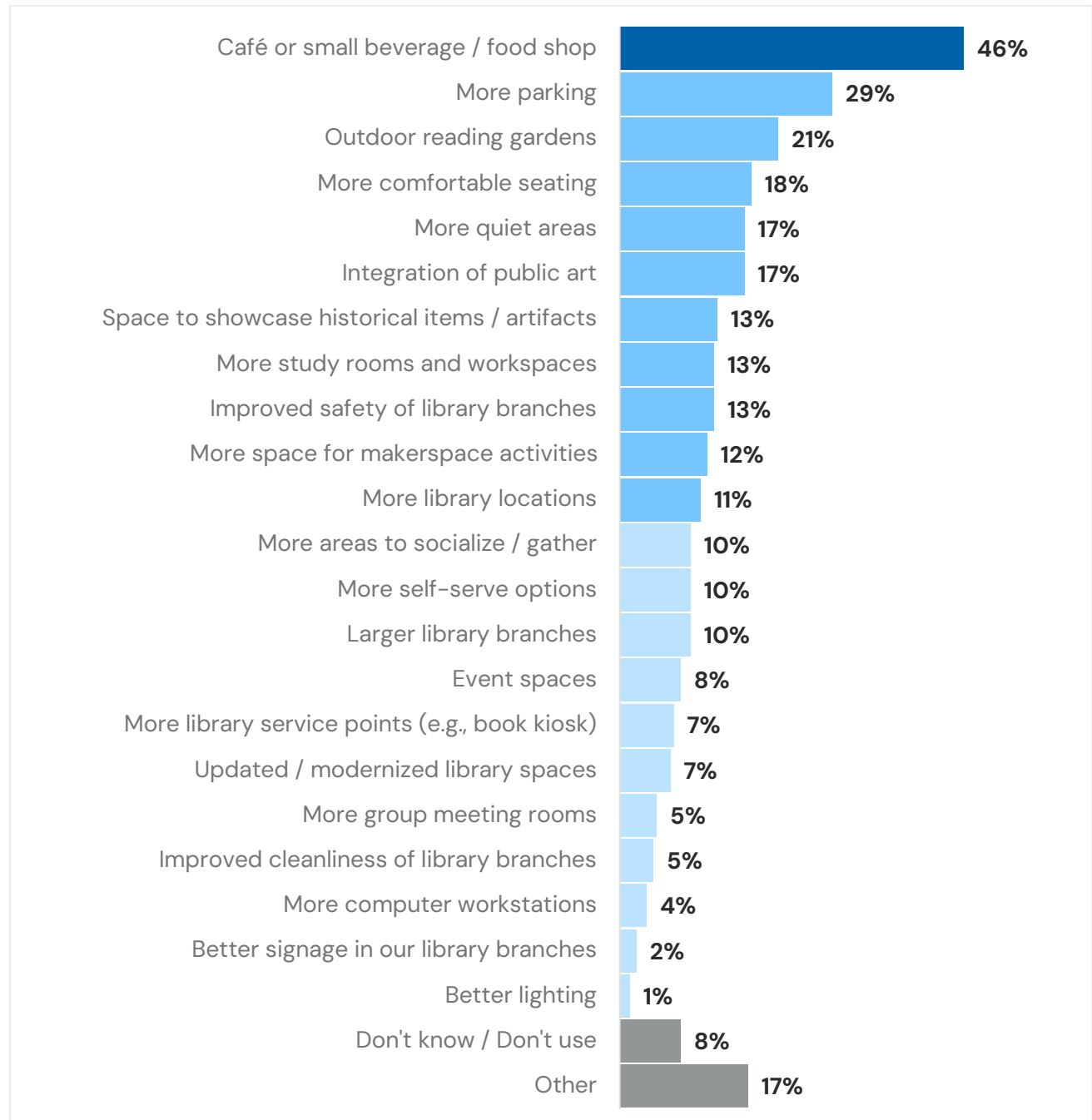
Figure 21. Barriers to using WPL



Improvements

The top improvements that respondents desired to see in WPL branches were a café (46%), more parking (29%) and outdoor reading gardens (21%). Responses were relatively evenly distributed across all improvement options, suggesting a variety of improvements may be needed across the branches. Open-ended comments identified desires for free parking at Main Branch, which have been captured under the “more parking” option.

Figure 22. Desired improvements at WPL branches



Open-Ended Comments

Upon review of the open-ended responses on the WPL Feedback Form, the following themes emerged:

- Many respondents shared their appreciation for WPL spaces, programs, services, and staff, emphasizing the positive benefit of the library in their lives.
- A number of respondents shared concerns over parking at Main Branch. Many found that the lack of free parking is inaccessible to them and diverts them from using the library at all.
- Respondents shared the need for more work or study spaces generally at library branches, with Main Branch and Seaway Mall Branch mentioned most frequently.
- Respondents mentioned wanting more books and materials, with specific mention of French books arising more frequently.
- Requests for a variety of different programs and more program room space were noted.
- Generally, the lack of Sunday operating hours for the library was mentioned, especially in regard to children’s programming and availability of people who work during the week.
- A handful of respondents shared safety concerns about the Main Branch location and washroom conditions.

3.3. Community Open Houses

Three public open houses were held at each library branch to gather community input on the CNA. Approximately, 95 individuals participated in these open houses from a variety of age groups and backgrounds. Information boards provided an overview of the project and key research findings. Open house attendees asked questions and shared their feedback verbally with the consultants. Sticky notes were also available for people to provide written responses to prompts on the information boards. A sticker voting activity was also offered to engage participants.

Figure 23. Open House Opportunities



Seaway Mall Branch
June 18, 2026
11:00 am to 1:00 pm



Diamond Trail Branch
June 18, 2026
4:00 pm to 6:00 pm



Main Branch
July 7, 2026
3:30 pm to 6:00 pm

The top five activities that open house participants reported using at the library included:

- 1) Browse / Borrow
- 2) Use computers
- 3) Read / Relax
- 4) Socialize / Hangout
- 5) Use the children's area

The top things people valued most about WPL included:

- Library programs, collections, and spaces
- Welcoming, helpful, and approachable staff
- Convenient and accessible locations for people with disabilities
- Computers for work, studying, and playing video games
- Children's programs and activity areas

The top enhancements that would encourage more visits to WPL included:

- More study spaces and study pods, particularly at Seaway Mall
- More of the following programs: family events, movie nights, exercise classes, guest speakers, AI workshops, coding, makerspace tutorials, English language circles, children's and seniors' programs, and daily tot programs.
- Option for participants to share their disability needs when registering for programs to make instructors aware of potential accommodations, where feasible.
- Improved awareness and display of Library of Things materials
- Teen hangout spaces
- Free parking at Main Branch
- Outdoor spaces for reading and programs



3.4. Community Partner Interviews

The following summarizes notable points emerging from discussions with community partners while specific details of these conversations were considered as part of the library space assessments.

- The City of Welland is contemplating a new community centre in the east that could contain multiple services, and articulated that the City's needs for administrative and recreational space are growing.
- Welland Museum emphasized the success of their partnership with WPL for borrowing material and collaborating on programming.
- Diamond Trail school staff indicated that the library is important to elementary school students and the south Welland community as a whole.
- Brock University and Niagara College refer people to WPL for archival content, makerspace equipment, and popular non-fiction books.
- Social service agencies identified interest in potential partnerships on programming and outreach support for vulnerable populations and youth.
- Library services are integral to Welland's newcomer population.
- There is value in the Bookmobile bringing library services to underserved areas, schools and places where people are restricted in their ability to travel.
- Paid parking at Main Branch can be a limitation for organizations wanting to offer volunteer services.

Organizations Engaged:

- City of Welland
- Community Addiction Services of Niagara
- Community Living Welland
- Brock University
- Diamond Trail Public School
- Niagara College
- Niagara Catholic District School Board
- Welland Heritage Council & Multicultural Centre
- Welland Museum
- Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario

3.5. Library Board & Staff Engagement

A workshop with the Library Board was held on June 22, 2026, to share an overview of the research findings to date and to provide the Board with an opportunity to share their opinions on the top priorities to be considered within the CNA. Selected WPL staff working in each branch also shared their thoughts as part of the process, all of which have been considered through this CNA.

4.0

Library Needs Assessment

4.1. Library Facility Hierarchy

Recognizing that WPL's library branches operate with different sizes, functions, ownership models, and amenities, a Library Facility Hierarchy is established for the purposes of the CNA. While largely oriented to facility-related considerations, this Hierarchy may be expanded or guide organizational and service delivery elements such as staffing, hours of operation, collection sizes, and more. The Hierarchy reflects WPL's historical centralized model anchored by the Main Branch which is the administrative centre of the library system, along with smaller libraries whose function are scoped to deliver public-facing services. The Hierarchy also considers Welland's urban structure, future developments, community feedback received through the CNA and recent Library Strategic Plan consultations, and evidence-based best practices adopted throughout the provincial public library sector.

The Library Facility Hierarchy presented in Table 7 consists of "bricks and mortar" buildings along with alternative access points recognizing WPL's recent introduction of the Bookmobile which is not a physical or fixed branch. Both are equally necessary in the context of Welland's forecasted population growth, the changing ways in which residents interact with WPL services, and application of equity-based principles to extend access to all populations.

The four-tier Hierarchy contains Main Branch, District Branch, Neighbourhood Branch and Alternative Access Point classifications. At present time, WPL library branches function using the Main Branch and Neighbourhood Branch typologies while the Bookmobile is characteristic of an Alternative Access Point. As Welland's population grows towards 100,000 people in the future, it is reasonable that larger library branches servicing a broader "District" catchment will be needed and supplemented by Alternative Access Points that expand WPL's reach into the community using emerging technologies such as extended access / Open+ branches, express / retail-format libraries, self-serve kiosks, and holds lockers. Together, the Hierarchy continues to allow WPL to deliver the requisite spaces for library materials, programs and events, branch-specific and corporate-wide staff, etc. for the community to work, study, play, learn, and interact.

Table 7. Library Facility Hierarchy

Main Branch

A core institution in downtown Welland contributing to core area regeneration, revitalization, and vibrancy. Main Branch serves a number of vital functions such as providing community programs, activities and events (including those in tandem with the City of Welland), along with reference and resource collections, and access to a range of technology. As the administrative centre of the entire library system, Main Branch provides space for WPL's corporate staff and centralized functions such as Collections Management, Program and Outreach Service, and others. As the largest library in the system, Main Branch offers specialized services for the entire City but also meets the library needs of the immediate community in its catchment area.

Minimum Gross Floor Area: 34,000 square feet

Service Catchment Area: City-wide

District Branch

District Branches provide a range of collections, services, and programs to meet the needs of the immediate community but also serve a broader catchment area. They are sometimes curated to the characteristics and preferences of the people living in the communities that surround them; however, more diverse community needs may need to be considered if the branch is co-located with complementary, destination facilities that draw in users City-wide, such as high-traffic community centres or malls. District Branches should be located in medium- to high-density areas.

Minimum Gross Floor Area: 10,000 square feet

Service Catchment Area: 1.5 kilometres

Neighbourhood Branch

Neighbourhood branches serve lower-density communities to supplement gaps between the Main and District Branches. They may provide a more limited range of services and programs due to their smaller size and may rely on system resources to a greater extent to service their customers. Where feasible, Neighbourhood Branches should be co-located with complementary facilities.

Minimum Gross Floor Area: 5,000 square feet

Service Catchment Area: 1 kilometre

Existing Facilities: Diamond Trail Branch, Seaway Mall Branch

Alternative Access Point

Consists of mobile and stationary self-serve access points that supplement Main, District and Neighbourhood Branch typologies in recognition of the need to cost-effectively serve future growth areas with a range of service options that improve access and outreach to WPL. Alternative Access Points support walkable neighbourhoods, can offer programs, and support events, and provide a convenient way for people looking to pick-up or drop-off library materials through extended access technologies, kiosks, holds lockers, bookmobiles and library vehicles, and other alternative means to the traditional library branch model.

Existing Facility: Bookmobile

Minimum Gross Floor Areas are not applicable while catchment areas will depend on the type of alternative access points employed.

4.2. Library Ownership Arrangements

In addition to characteristics such as branch sizes and amenities, WPL operates its facilities under three different ownership arrangements with respect to the type of space provided:

1. Integrated Library
2. Shared School Library
3. Leased Library

Consultations with WPL staff point to a constructive working relationship with the City, School Board and Mall Owner. Like all partnerships and operating agreements, there are areas of strength along with opportunities for improvement. For example, the Main Branch benefits from being integrated with City Hall and Civic Square to form a strong institutional campus that offers convenience to the public while enabling joint participation in community events. Notwithstanding an operating agreement that allows for a limited number of publicly open hours at Diamond Trail, WPL was able to share capital costs of construction with the School Board which improved the business case of providing a library there. The Seaway Mall Branch benefits from the shopping centre's foot traffic but also is a draw that supports mall businesses, though this branch operates in a smaller square footage and is subject to a commercial lease that requires renewals based on the specified term; the ability for WPL to meaningfully invest in this branch carries a degree of risk due to its private ownership and provisions of the lease agreement.

The varying ownership model has allowed WPL to distribute branches across Welland in a manner that shares overall costs of construction and operation. With land scarcity growing as Welland's urban area continues to develop, it is envisioned that the current model of owned, shared, and leased library space will continue to be appropriate moving forward, albeit with potentially certain adjustments to lease and partner agreements. For example, integrated libraries could form part of future community centres or other municipal buildings, and may be pursued with schools using different operating agreements or parameters; in addition, the continued presence of libraries in retail or commercial areas may take the form of future leases or municipal ownership models.

4.3. Determining a Provision Target

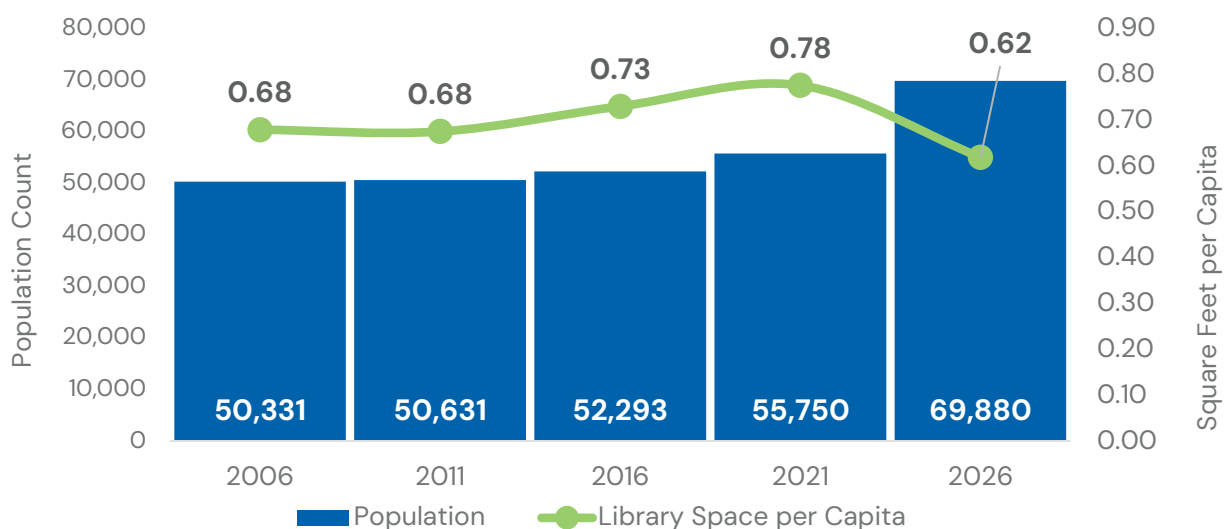
A number of library systems in Ontario assess their community needs through the total amount of square footage they provide relative to their population size. Applying a per capita standard is a practical approach for projecting future needs at a high-level infrastructure planning level. Library usage continues to be strong and growing in Welland, which reinforces the notion that demand for library spaces will increase with population growth.

A metric of 0.6 square feet per capita was traditionally used for system-wide library space assessments although higher measures – up to 1.0 square feet per capita – have been promoted within the library sector due to the added space required to make libraries compliant with AODA legislation for lower shelving, wider aisle widths, etc., to accommodate persons with disabilities.

Library systems also need to provide sufficient space for collections, seating, program rooms, computer workstations, staff areas, compliance for modern safety and security requirements, and more compared to library designs of the past. Expanded library uses, combined with the evolving role of public libraries as community hubs and gathering spaces, are creating a need for more space as opposed to less. The demand for individual and group study areas, comfortable seating options, places to connect to Wi-Fi, flexible activity space and barrier-free spaces (including wider aisles, shorter book stacks and accessible washrooms) are other reasons why demand for library space is increasing.

Over the past twenty years, WPL’s average library space provision is 0.7 square feet per capita (rounded). Figure 24 shows how the amount of library space per resident has changed over the past 20 years. After the opening of Main Branch in 2005 and Diamond Trail Branch in 2013, provision rates were in the order of 0.7 square feet per capita while the addition of Seaway Mall Branch in 2017 increased the provision rate closer to 0.8 square feet per capita. Over the 15-year period, those library additions were proactive and well founded in relation to the degree of residential growth in Welland. As the population dramatically increased after 2021, the provision rate eroded considerably from historical levels and presently sits at 0.6 square feet per capita illustrating the impact of growth in the past five years combined with no further additions to the supply of library space in Welland.

Figure 24. Welland Public Library Branch Space per Capita, 2006 to 2026



Source: Historical population is from the Statistics Canada Census Profile. Projected population is from the City of Welland’s 2022 Development Charges Background Study and By-law(s).

Table 8. Library Space Among Niagara Region & Selected Library Systems, 2024

Niagara Region	Population	Total Library Locations	Total Library Space (sq ft)	Square Feet per Capita
Fort Erie	36,601	3	22,000	0.60
Grimsby	31,264	1	16,000	0.51
Lincoln Pelham	48,249	4	26,000	0.54
Niagara Falls	110,804	4*	57,416	0.52
Niagara-on-the-Lake	20,153	1*	10,000	0.50
St. Catharines	152,000	4	85,000	0.56
Thorold	31,328	1	10,700	0.34
Wainfleet Twp	7,321	1	4,280	0.58
West Lincoln Twp	16,531	3	21,073	1.27
AVERAGE	50,472	2	28,052	0.56
WELLAND	64,578	3	43,269	0.67

Ontario	Population	Total Library Locations	Total Library Space (sq ft)	Square Feet per Capita
Aurora	67,618	1	44,560	0.66
Belleville	61,558	1	36,000	0.58
Cornwall	53,295	1	23,300	0.44
Georgina	53,258	4	40,000	0.75
Halton Hills	68,491	2	42,287	0.62
North Bay	61,665	1	35,000	0.57
Quinte West	50,436	2	21,883	0.43
Timmins	45,085	2	28,100	0.62
AVERAGE	57,676	2	33,891	0.59
WELLAND	64,578	3	43,269	0.67

Sources: Library space and branch data is from Ontario Public Library Statistics, 2024;

*Note: Vending machines are not included in library locations for Niagara-on-the-Lake. Niagara Falls opened a temporary branch in 2025 that is included as it replaces a closure in 2024; however, its floor area is not known and thus excluded.

Population data is from the Statistics Canada population estimates for 2024, accessed June 2026.

Table 8 benchmarks library systems in Niagara Region along with those in selected parts of the province that WPL compares itself to using the most recently published data from the Ontario Public Library Statistics Dataset.¹⁷ The benchmarking shows that WPL achieves a higher rate of provision relative to the average of selected library systems in Niagara Region (noting that Niagara Falls' square footage is higher than reported in the 2024 dataset) and the selected provincial comparators.

Many library systems across the Greater Golden Horseshoe are facing challenges with developing new and maintaining existing library infrastructure to keep pace with population growth and aging facilities. As a result, these benchmarking values may reflect the challenges other communities face in expanding library infrastructure in step with population growth, rather than representing best practices for provision. It also bears noting that the dataset used for benchmarking captures a snapshot in time from 2024 and does not reflect recent decisions made by a number of libraries to build new libraries in response to recent growth nor does it reflect libraries that have been opened/expanded in the past two years. In addition, space provision targets from selected public library systems are shown in Table 9).

Table 9. Library Space Provision Targets Among Select Library Systems

Library System	Provision Target (sq ft per capita)	Source
Caledon Public Library	0.85	Comprehensive Growth Plan, 2023
Cambridge Public Library	0.70	Library Facility Master Plan, 2026
Kingston–Frontenac Public Library	0.80	Library Facilities Plan, 2022
Oakville Public Library	0.50	Parks, Recreation and Library Master Plan, 2024
Vaughan Public Libraries	0.61	Community Spaces Plan (Draft), 2026

These findings show that recent library planning documents from other Ontario library systems are recommending provision targets within the range of 0.6 to 0.85 square feet per capita, with an average of 0.66 square feet per capita. A provision of target of 0.7 square feet per capita for WPL falls within this range and is close to the average recommended provision target.

¹⁷ Ontario Public Library Statistics, 2024

It is recommended that WPL target 0.7 square feet per capita on the basis that:

- This represents a historical rate of provision per person that is closer to the 20-year average in Welland;
- The target falls within the range endorsed by provincial library bodies (0.6 to 1.0 square feet per capita) which have rationalized service level standards using evidence based approaches;
- Aligns with the provision targets set out by both comparable and progressive library systems;
- Keeps pace with growing population and needs;
- Ensures sufficient space to comply with accessible / universal facility design and customer service standards;
- Development Charge funding is tied to historical level of provision thus decreasing the rate of provision would effectively reduce the amount of growth-related funding available (thereby shifting a greater share of construction costs to the existing tax-base and is not deemed to be in the interests of WPL nor the City of Welland); and
- There is no compelling reason to reduce the rate of provision unless the WPL Library Board directs doing so.

4.4. Library Space Assessment

To meet a provision target of 0.7 square feet per capita, WPL would require an additional 30,914 square feet of space by the year 2041. Nearly half of this amount (14,400 square feet) would be required in the next five years based on projected population growth.

Table 10: Projection of Library Space Needs, 2026 to 2041

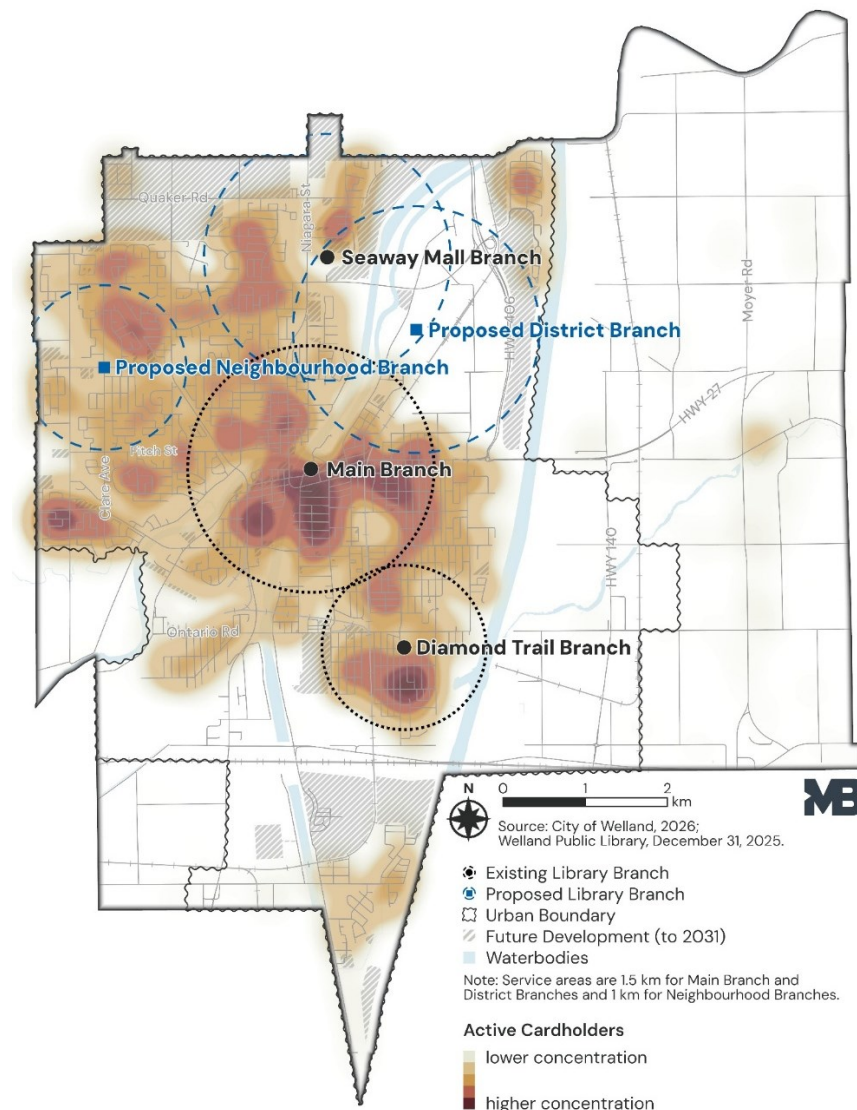
	2026	2031	2036	2041
Population Forecast	68,880	82,428	94,201	105,975
Provision Target	0.7 square feet per capita			
Space Needs (sq. ft.)	48,916	57,700	65,941	74,183
Existing Library Space	43,269 square feet			
Needs Less Existing Supply (sq. ft.)	5,647	14,431	22,672	30,914

The pages that follow provide the recommended strategy to addressing the needs for future library space in Welland:

- Position Main Branch as an Anchor & Catalyst of Downtown Revitalization;
- Construct a District Branch located east of the Welland Recreational Canal;
- Construct a Neighbourhood Branch in northwest Welland;
- Expand the Seaway Mall Branch;
- Increase access to the Diamond Trail Branch; and
- Prepare for library service needs in Dain City.

Map 4 illustrates the implementation of the above noted approach, yielding stronger geographic distribution of library space in northwest Welland and east of the recreational canal, improving access to sizeable concentrations of active cardholders.

Map 4. Proposed Facility Development Strategy



Main Branch is an Anchor & Catalyst for Downtown Revitalization

Located in the heart of downtown Welland, Main Branch is an important anchor situated in close proximity to municipal administration services, recreation and cultural spaces, the Welland Canal Parkway Trail, and core area businesses. Main Branch is a strong complement to the City Hall and Civic Square which collectively form an institutional campus defined by prominent architectural character in conjunction with the courthouse across the street. Main Branch also has strong connectivity to all modes of transportation including vehicular and active modes of travel, which links to areas in north and south Welland as well as the regional trail network.

Experiences across Canada and the United States demonstrate that public libraries play a critical role in urban renewal and downtown revitalization. Across the country, cities such as Halifax, Saskatoon, Calgary and Mississauga are but only a few examples where investments in central / main libraries have provided quantifiable benefits to people living and working in downtowns through enhanced quality of life, community and cultural vibrancy, and economic development and tourism. Since the reopening of Calgary's reimagined Central Library, the 1.1 million visits are double that of its previous and outdated facility, and the library has become an anchor for surrounding businesses and transit-oriented development. After Halifax's Central Library reopened in 2014, annual visits increased from 400,000 visitors to 2 million visitors. The Urban Libraries Council finds that one-third of downtown library visitors to major cities also participate in other economic or leisure activities, which further reinforces the libraries role as a vital downtown anchor.¹⁸



The social challenges facing downtown libraries are also well documented. Certain consultations expressed concerns about library users who are – or may appear to be – experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness, addiction, and/or mental health challenges. While all types of libraries can face such challenges – including suburban and rural branches – social service issues tend to be more visible and prevalent in urban cores. As a core principle to be free and welcoming, social challenges have led to a reliance being placed on Canada's libraries to serve in a social services capacity and to an extent that libraries are not resourced to provide. Concerns from people who may feel unsafe and uncomfortable are valid but there are also residents that are not afraid to use a space. Public libraries are attempting to address issues through progressive and empathetic operational practices; examples include staff training, collaboration with health and social

¹⁸ Urban Libraries Council. *New Analysis Shows Downtown Libraries Are the Anchors Cities Need*. 2025, August 27. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org>

services providers, and even providing dedicated spaces for people in need to temporarily seek respite. However, the need for security, surveillance, and constant police support is a reality that many urban libraries must face.

Main Branch, whether in its current form or through enhancements, is an important part of the City's plans for downtown Welland. Section 3.1 of the new City of Welland Official Plan states that *"The Downtown is the City's primary strategic growth areas, which is identified as a regional Growth Centre, and where the greatest amount of infill and intensification will be directed."* As such, thousands of new residents could be directed to the downtown which reinforces the need for a Main Branch that is at least the same size if not larger in order to serve a greater number of people living within it's catchment area. In addition, Section 4.1 of the new Official Plan speaks to: enhancing the downtown as a mixed-use node; being a healthy, attractive and pedestrian-friendly; and attracting public, private and institutional investments. Main Branch can be part of each of these objectives.

The following facility and service improvements would benefit the Main Branch:

- Adding prominent library signage on the south-east corner of the building (facing Main Street, at Cross Street) where there is a blank wall with a small banner sign for a private tenant. Given that Main Branch entrance is at the rear of the building where the façade faces The Boardwalk – which is a low-traffic road largely used to access the rear parking lot – signage at the front of the building will increase visibility and awareness that the Main Branch exists (a number of people consulted for the CNA did not know that a library was co-located with City Hall). With Civic Square already having a strong landscaped focal point at this corner, a more engaging library sign would add considerable urban design value.
- Paid parking is a major concern for reported by many patrons over the years, and more concerning is a barrier to others. Many downtown libraries in other municipalities provide free parking either through on-street spaces or parking validation up to a certain time limit. The provision of free parking is likely to considerably increase the number of visits to Main Branch.
- Work with the City to formalize an outdoor reading garden and/or program area on the cement pad immediately adjacent to the building, the west "alley" and/or across The Boardwalk. Doing so would leverage the City's past investments in the outdoor public areas from Civic Square and the viewing deck above the aqueduct.
- Reimagine the children's area to provide added opportunities for play-based learning, programming and expanded collections given that many new residents projected to arrive over then next 15 years are anticipated to be young families.
- Increase the amount of program space through expanding the existing program room or adding a new program room, the latter of which would require existing space to be re-allocated to this new use.

- Integrate between at least two study pods which would alleviate demands placed on the existing lower-level study/meeting rooms.
- Modernize and expand the makerspace area, while recognizing there may be requirements for ventilation and other mechanical systems.
- Addressing washroom safety and layout challenges as part of future renovations.

The above noted ideas could improve the functionality of the library and potentially draw more people into the branch, particularly if feelings of safety can be enhanced. The Main Library can be an important institutional destination to assist the City in achieving its vision for the core as it provides space and services to populations living and working downtown. People from other parts of the city need to be provided a reason to visit, whether to admire architectural excellence, access unique collections or services available in their neighbourhoods, or to use high quality equipment and amenities. Ultimately, the City of Welland and WPL would have to make a decision as to the scale of investment directed into a Main Branch rejuvenation. An architectural master planning and conceptual design process could provide an initial indication of how Main Branch could be reimaged to support downtown revitalization objectives and the needs of people living there, as well as the cost implications of doing so.

An Alternative Scenario

It is understood that the City of Welland is facing similar pressures as WPL for staff space in the downtown as the complement of municipal administrative and support staff needs to grow. While this CNA believes that there is strong rationale to retain Main Branch with City Hall, should the need to arise to rethink space needs then this may provide a mutually beneficial opportunity.

In all circumstances, this CNA supports retention of a Main Branch in the downtown. As noted earlier, Official Plan policies are in place to attract new residential investment and build complete communities. Since expansion potential is limited at the current site, a new Main Branch could be designed to be larger than the existing building and thereby potentially shifting some of the square footage proposed for new branches in the northwest and northeast into the downtown. The added square footage would be supported given the thousands of new residents that will be living in this designated Regional Growth Centre. That being said, there would be a financial implication associated with having to acquire land and construct 35,000 to 45,000 square feet for a new Main Branch, which WPL would weigh against costs of renovating the existing library.

If looking for a new site for the Main Branch, WPL should consider the following site selection criteria:

- be located within or in reasonable walking distance to downtown Welland;

- be large enough to accommodate a 35,000 to 45,000 square foot branch with space for parking;
- be readily accessible by public transit;
- have appropriate area, shape, and topography for the proposed use while being unencumbered by major site constraints or conditions;
- be adjacent to or near compatible land uses (e.g., recreational, medium to high density residential, institutional, etc.) and away from non-compatible land uses (e.g., industrial); and
- have the potential to be a community focal point and is at a highly visible location, enabling it to enhance the “sense of community.”

Construct a District Branch East of the Welland Recreational Canal

The City of Welland is exploring the feasibility of developing a new arena and community centre adjacent to the Young’s Sportsplex at 482 River Road in northeast Welland. A Feasibility Study prepared by the City recommends the River Road site as the preferred option after conducting a review of other properties, and suggests that a potential 10,000 to 15,000 square foot library integrated with the community centre could bring benefits such as “program synergies and cost sharing.” While the Arena Feasibility Study states *“there is a possibility that Welland Public Library would like to move a Library branch to the new arena facility”*¹⁹, it should be noted that WPL did not offer a perspective that would support a one-for-one move / exchange but rather sees the benefit of co-locating future libraries with community services. To be clear, it is a finding of this CNA that WPL requires at least one additional library branch (i.e. a minimum of four branches in total) due to:

- the forecasted 15-year space needs being in excess of 30,000 square feet across the city;
- limited to no expansion potential for the three existing libraries; and
- geographic gaps across the city that should be addressed.

There is ample precedence demonstrating the benefits of co-locating libraries with community recreation facilities from a financial, functional and programmatic perspective; this has also been noted in the Arena Feasibility Study. A District Branch located in this area of Welland would be optimal to serve planned residential communities located east of the Welland Recreational Canal, including a large block of land that is a designated intensification corridor east of Highway 406. A District Branch here would also provide strong connections to established neighbourhoods – including those also designated for intensification and infill residential – to the west and south via Woodlawn Road and Creamery Road / Highway 406, respectively. While there is a geographic overlap in catchment

¹⁹ City of Welland. 2025. Welland Arena Feasibility Study. p.91.

areas is shown with Main Branch and Seaway Mall (see Map 4), it is important to note that the Welland Recreational Canal is a major physical barrier that will increase travel times by all modes of transportation among populations living on the west side.

If designed to provide 15,000 square feet, this integrated library would address the entirety of Welland's future library space needs to the year 2031, noting that the community centre timing is unknown and thus could occur after the next five years. As a District Branch, it would alleviate collections and programming pressures currently being placed on Main Branch. Growth of the city's population and the number of library branches, programs, and services will also necessitate growth of WPL's staffing complement; since there is no room at Main Branch for additional staff (without sacrificing public space), the larger square footage proposed for the District Branch is required for "back-of-house" functions including administration that are necessary for WPL to function.

Construct a Neighbourhood Branch in Northwest Welland

Areas to the west of Regional Road 54 and north of Fitch Street fall outside of the Main Branch and Seaway Mall catchments, resulting in a sizeable geographic gap that is compounded by mapping that shows large clusters of library cardholders living in these areas. In addition, northwest Welland has certain neighbourhoods with high ON-Marg material resource deprivation scores and could benefit from having a library within walking distance from residents. A designated Intensification Area along Woodlawn Road will bring potential for substantial new populations in the future.

2021 Census data recorded over 14,000 people living in northwest Welland while the City's active planning applications suggest that another 10,000 people could arrive in the next five years (based on 5,000 units). This equates to at least 24,000 people projected to be living in the northwest over the next 15 years, noting some of these populations would fall within the Seaway Mall Branch and Main Branch catchments.

A future northwest population of 24,000 persons would generate a need for 16,800 square feet at a rate of 0.7 square feet per capita. After factoring a portion of floor areas at Seaway Mall Branch and Main Branch, the CNA rationalizes the provision of a Neighbourhood Branch providing a gross floor area in the range of 8,000 square feet. WPL should identify a site for this new library branch through future planning, including along the Thorold Road designated Intensification Area where redevelopment opportunities will exist for either a stand-alone or integrated library, including through retail-format or mixed-use facilities.

In the event that the City of Welland does not proceed with its northeast community centre and/or library project, it is recommended that the proposed northwest library branch become a District Library with its gross floor increased to fall between 10,000 and 15,000 square feet.

Expand Seaway Mall Branch

As noted in Section 2, Seaway Mall is experiencing the greatest level of pressure when measured against its available floor area; this branch attracts a similar number of visitors as the Main Branch but with a fraction of the space. Pressures on this library can only be expected to be compounded as proposed future developments show that the Seaway Mall Branch catchment area population could increase by over 25,000 persons (approximately 12,000 housing units) by the year 2031.

An additional 25,000 people would generate a space requirement of 17,500 square feet (before factoring existing populations already residing in the catchment). It is recommended that WPL monitor rental availability in Seaway Mall and engage the mall operator to explore potential to increase the library branch presence here by a minimum of 10,000 square feet that is oriented primarily to providing additional programming, technology and printing, seating, study, and gathering areas. As there is minimal staff workspace and break areas, the added floor area will also address these needs.



At that time and subject to successful negotiation of a long-term lease, WPL should undertake a complete renovation to the existing branch if it is to remain in the existing section of the mall; otherwise the branch may have to be moved to another part of the shopping centre where 15,000 of contiguous space is available. Opportunity to stage a renovation between the new and added space should be explored in order to minimize service disruption. In the event that WPL cannot secure additional space within the mall, relocation of the branch may need to be contemplated.

Increasing the branch from its current 5,000 square feet to the proposed 15,000 square feet, along with the enhanced service delivery that will result from the larger floor area, will effectively change its classification in the Library Facility Hierarchy from a Neighbourhood Branch to a District Branch. This is plausible given the already high foot traffic and the convenient access by private vehicle and public transit along the Niagara Street corridor, as well as being embedded in a designated major Intensification Area.

In the interim period, WPL may consider the following temporary improvements in the existing library space until a larger branch can be secured:

- Add a study pod to accommodate requests for quiet work areas.
- Explore opportunities to improve separation or add sound attenuation measures between the children's area and study/work areas to reduce noise travelling across the entire branch.

Increase Access to the Diamond Trail Branch

The Diamond Trail community is projected to receive moderate levels of growth over the next five years, however, the northwest portion of its catchment area encompasses portions of three designated Intensification Areas (also shared with Main Branch) that could increase populations more substantially. At 4,000 square feet, Diamond Trail Branch is already limited in terms of what it can house for collections, the types of programming that can be offered, and how much seating can be provided.

In addition to space-related constraints, the operating agreement with DSBN is such that public access is restricted to after-school hours meaning that the community is unable to use the library during weekday mornings and afternoons. DSBN also makes use of the school during the summer holidays for camps and other programs, and thus community access is limited throughout the entire year. In other public library systems where branches are co-located with elementary schools, challenges have been reported to provide public access while students are also using the library due to the need for student safety. In addition, there may be adults in the public – particularly those that are not part of the school community – who are uncomfortable with entering an elementary school. All of this is contributing to a level of underutilization of Diamond Trail Branch as demonstrated through gate counts, circulation and program attendance.



This said, school representatives and certain members of the community have expressed how important it is to them to have a library presence in this area of Welland, noting that there are above-average rates of marginalization and Main Branch may be too far for some neighbourhood residents to travel. Diamond Trail is strategically located and contributes to an effective geographic distribution, however, the nature of the co-location and operating agreement combined with a small floor area collectively limit its usage potential.

Ultimately WPL must ask if the current operating agreement is providing value to the community in relation to the financial cost. With limited staff and staffing budgets, it would be more effective to provide more hours open whether at Diamond Trail Branch or a

different branch altogether. In an optimal scenario, the City and DSBN would be able to renegotiate their operating agreement to find a mutually beneficial way to gain public access during daytime hours while ensuring student safety. Other library systems that share space with an elementary school (e.g. Lambton County) reserve a portion of the daytime for public access and the school does not use it during those times; this would require Diamond Trail Public School to give up some of their noting that school staff indicate that students are in the library throughout the entire day. It also bears noting that the 10-year operating agreement was only recently renewed thus an appetite would need to exist among both parties to re-open terms and conditions.

In the event that greater public access to Diamond Trail Branch cannot be obtained, WPL could consider converting it to an Alternative Access Point. For example, a holds locker could be used to pickup and drop-off materials within walking distance or extended access technology could allow the public to access the branch when it is not staffed. It is recognized that an Alternative Access Point may not fully alleviate concerns about student safety.

Another option would be for WPL to vacate Diamond Trail Branch whereby it is dedicated to the school and a new public library branch is constructed elsewhere. Should this be the case, it may increase the efficacy of library services as a new Neighbourhood Branch would be designed to a minimum of 5,000 square feet but preferably closer to 8,000 square feet in size. The CNA would prioritize aforementioned new branch developments in the northeast and the northwest before relocating Diamond Trail Branch, which combined with the operating agreement in effect over the next 10 years and the building being relatively young in its lifecycle, would suggest that any relocation of Diamond Trail Branch would occur in the long-term.

The following facility and service improvements would benefit the Diamond Trail Branch, subject to confirmation through architectural investigations and business planning:

- Improve visibility and signage from Southworth Street as it may not be immediately clear to some people that a WPL branch exists onsite.
- Adding adult-sized furniture (many of the chairs and tables are designed to children's size) by working with the DSBN who is responsible for funding 60% of agreed-upon furniture under the operating agreement.
- Working with DSBN to explore ways to make the library more teen-friendly as there is presently little space devoted to activities and collections for this age group.

Prepare for Library Space Needs in Dain City

There are no libraries south of Townline Tunnel Road, including Dain City. Unsurprisingly, Dain City has only a modest cluster of active cardholders as it is unlikely those populations would have a strong incentive to use Diamond Trail Branch due to its limited hours of operation, collection, and programming. Dain City residents may be more likely to make a 10 minute drive to Port Colborne Public Library rather than making a similar drive to WPL's Main Branch, where parking has been reported as a barrier.

The 2021 Census data records approximately 1,400 people in Dain City although areas north of Forks Road are being developed for residential uses. The City's Planning Department currently has over 1,400 residential units in the planning application stages, which could add 3,000 persons to the population, and additional growth can be anticipated beyond units in the land use planning pipeline at present time.

Based on the existing and anticipated populations from active planning applications, a Neighbourhood Branch would not be required within the CNA planning period. WPL should monitor proposed developments south of Townline Tunnel Road recognizing it is a geographic gap and proactively determine ways to extend library services to this area over the next 15 years. A logical method would be to focus Bookmobile visits to Dain City but there may opportunities to employ other Alternative Access Points such as self-service options like a kiosk or locker, while in the longer-term, there may be merit in considering a small store-front library presence. Needs for a Neighbourhood Branch in Dain City are most likely to emerge after this CNA's planning period thus there may be merit in monitoring potential land acquisition that may be strategically located where a future branch could go.

4.5. Alternative Access Points

WPL Bookmobile – The CANAL Cruiser

WPL officially launched its Bookmobile in June 2026 having purchased and retrofitted a 2025 Ford Transit T350 Cargo van to deliver mobile library services in response to needs across the city, especially for populations with limited means of transportation. Branded as the C.A.N.A.L Cruiser, it has already visited a number of stops throughout the community with more stops planned at parks, schools, community centres, post-secondary institutions, museums, daycares, Civic Square, seniors' residences, local businesses, housing and support services, and community events.

The bookmobile offers materials, programming and interactive engagement opportunities. The impact of the Bookmobile has been felt immediately; in only its first few months, it has made 39 stops, reached 1,745 participants, attracted 1,328 program attendees, and circulated 198 materials. The initial success of the Bookmobile suggests that this will likely be an effective outreach tool for the library.

As a newly introduced service, WPL staff will be monitoring the use and reach of the Bookmobile to inform decisions regarding number of stops, types of materials and activities offered, and potentially whether an additional vehicle may be required in the future.



Express & Extended Access Libraries

Self-service options have become a convenient way to expand access to library services in high demand areas where a permanent branch is not feasible. This approach can be achieved through distributing kiosks or book vending machines in high-traffic areas such as community centre lobbies, malls, and hospitals allow residents to pick up or return materials conveniently.

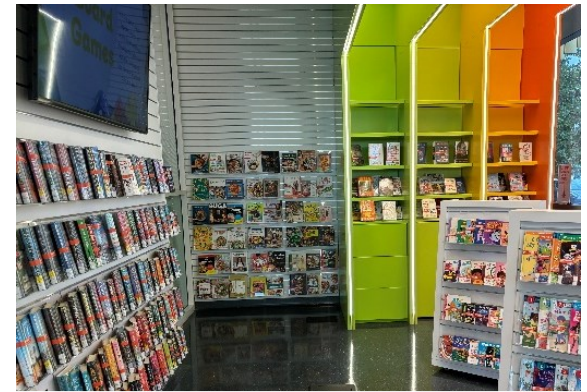
Many library systems have introduced holds lockers, vending machines, and drop-off bins to expand service points and complement their branches. These solutions are used by larger systems like Oakville Public Library and VPL, as well as smaller systems such as Oxford County Library who serve a large rural geographic area. In the case of lockers and kiosks, library users scan their library card and enter a PIN to open a kiosk or locker. Express libraries offer a convenient and cost-effective way to increase access to library services, a model that will become increasingly relevant in larger cities like Welland as residential density rises.



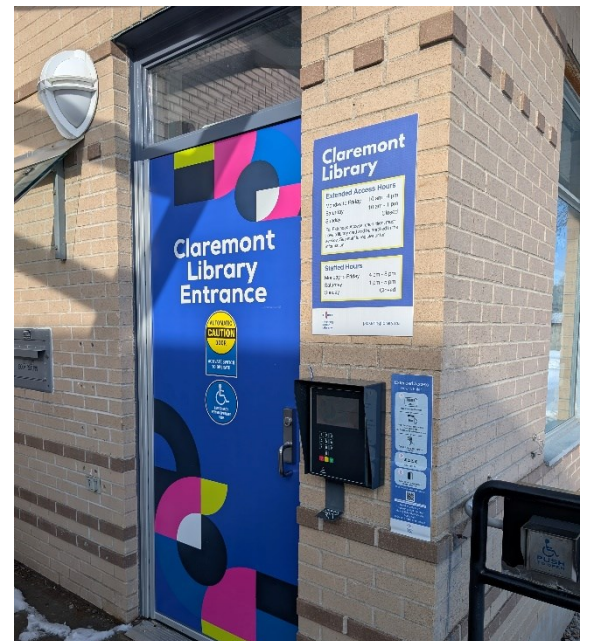
Book Vending Machine
St. Catharines Public Library

Vaughan Public Library (VPL) has partnered with others to secure library space in established neighbourhoods where land supplies are expensive and/or constrained. Working with the City of Vaughan, YMCA, and land developers in high density areas. VPL built a traditional branch on the second floor of a mixed-use residential building that also houses a YMCA community centre. Although VPL would have preferred street-level, commercial space houses the ground floor, as a compromise, VPL was able to secure a 400 ft² storefront library space on the ground floor known as the VMC Express. The VMC Express is not actively staffed, features best sellers, and allows patrons to pick-up holds without having to go into the branch on the second floor.

Extended access technologies have been introduced in libraries such as Niagara Falls, Hamilton, Kingston, Middlesex County and Pickering to improve access and convenience while working with limited staffing budgets. This model allows registered library cardholders to enter a branch outside of regular staffed hours to pick up holds, browse and borrow materials, study, use public computers, use the printer, and access Wi-Fi. The space is actively monitored by cameras for safety purposes while a direct phone line is available to an offsite library staff person to be able to respond to inquiries.



VMC Express
Vaughan Public Library



Claremont Extended Access Library
Pickering Public Library

4.6. Recommendations

1. **FACILITY HIERARCHY:** Adopt the Library Facility Hierarchy comprised of a Main Branch, District Branches, Neighbourhood Branches and Alternative Access Points to guide long-range infrastructure planning.

Timing: Ongoing over the planning period (2027 – 2041)

2. **PROVISION TARGET:** Plan for future library space needs using a provision target of 0.7 square feet per capita in alignment with governing bodies of public libraries in Ontario as well as Welland's historical provision standards. Doing so will require 30,914 square feet of additional library space to be added in Welland by the year 2041.

Timing: Ongoing over the planning period (2027 – 2041)

3. **MAIN BRANCH:** Initiate an architectural and space planning process that examines ways to optimize the current floor plan as well as opportunities for a large-scale renovation in anticipation of the significant residential growth and urban revitalization initiatives being directed to downtown Welland.

Timing: Short-Term (2027 – 2031)

4. **SEAWAY MALL BRANCH:** Subject to the ability to negotiate a long-term lease, expand the Seaway Mall Branch by up to 10,000 square feet (i.e. 15,000 square feet in total) and redevelop it as a District Branch containing sufficient areas for collections, programs, seating, study and technology.

Timing: Short-term (2027 – 2031)

5. **DIAMOND TRAIL BRANCH:** Engage the District School Board of Niagara to discuss ways to increase publicly accessible daytime hours at Diamond Trail Branch. In the event that an agreement cannot be reached, consider converting the library to an Alternative Access Point options and/or relocate the library branch to provide a new 5,000 to 8,000 square foot Neighbourhood Branch serving South Welland.

Timing: Long-term (2036 – 2041)

6. **NEW NORTHEAST WELLAND BRANCH:** Work with the City of Welland to integrate a 15,000 square foot District Branch as part of a multi-use community centre as identified in the City of Welland Arena Feasibility Study.

Timing: Medium-term (2031 – 2036) depending on City of Welland timing

7. **NEW NORTHWEST WELLAND BRANCH:** Develop an 8,000 square foot Neighbourhood Branch in northwest Welland. In the event that a District Branch is not co-located with a future community centre (see Recommendation #6), the future northwest library should be designed as a District Branch instead.

Timing: Long-term (2036 – 2041)

5.0 Implementation

5.1. Summary of the Space Development Strategy

The CNA recommends that WPL to keep pace with population growth at its historical rate of 0.7 square feet per capita, thereby requiring a total of 30,900 square feet of new library space by the year 2041. The CNA proposes the addition of 33,000 square feet to WPL's total system-wide floor area. Please note that any changes to the population forecasts directed for use in the CNA may necessitate a change in the proposed gross floor area and/or the timing of recommendations.

Library	Gross Floor Area Added	Timing	Estimated Capital Cost*
Seaway Mall Expansion	10,000 sq.ft.	2027-2028	TBD
Northeast District Branch	15,000 sq.ft.	2031-2036	\$15M
Northwest Neighbourhood Branch	8,000 sq.ft.	2036-2041	\$8M
Main Branch Renovation	not applicable	TBD	TBD
Total	33,000 sq.ft.	-	\$23M
Existing Library Space	43,269 sq.ft.		
Total Library Space with Additions	76,269		
Provision Rate based on 2041 population of 105,975	0.7 square feet per capita		

* Based on a construction cost of \$1,000 per square foot and assumes optimal site conditions. Capital costs should be treated as preliminary estimates with a high degree of variability (+/- 25%) and may vary depending on design fees, contingencies, environmental design, escalations, and other factors. Costs should be confirmed through architectural or other studies. Cost estimate for leasing existing space would need to be determined based on commercial lease rate, leasehold improvements required, and other factors to be investigated.

The CNA's Recommendations carry a preliminary capital estimate of \$23 million. Please note that this amount excludes typical asset management activities associated with lifecycle repair and renewal to ensure state-of-good-repair, nor does it include the cost for an expanded Seaway Mall Branch which would be subject to leasehold negotiations with the property owner.

5.2. Operational Implications of Added Infrastructure

In addition to capital investment, it is important to recognize that a growing public library system such as WPL will require operational supports to keep pace with the needs of the population. WPL's complement of 39 library staff has not grown at the same rate as population over the past five years, and will need to be increased moving forward. Hours of operation will also need to be considered given the high degree of need being placed on WPL to provide convenient access to collections and services, as well as to accommodate program growth.

The two proposed new library branches will require new staff to operate the facilities and deliver library services; the same is true for Seaway Mall Branch where the proposed addition will require additional staff for supervision, program delivery, and maintaining a larger collection. Using the most recent ARUPLO Guidelines and Ontario Public Library Guidelines as indicators, the proposed sizes for a new District Branch and Neighbourhood Branch would require a minimum of 10 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) professional library staff, while an expanded Seaway Mall Branch could require between 2 and 5 additional FTEs. Combined with greater executive and management oversight for corporate functions to serve a population over 100,000 persons, it is plausible that WPL could require its existing staff complement to grow by 50% over the next 15 years. A detailed organizational and staffing review would provide a comprehensive strategy to ensuring WPL has the structure and staffing to position it for the future.

A review of WPL's current hours of operation in relation to ARUPLO and Ontario Public Library Guidelines suggest that all branches meet the recommended targets based on floor area and function. Due to the high degree of pressure placed on Main Branch and Seaway Mall Branch, these two locations are on the upper end or exceed ARUPLO targets. However, Diamond Trail Branch provides the minimum number of hours due to the nature of the operating agreement with the DSBN which is a limitation noted in Section 4 of the CNA.

All WPL branches are closed on Sundays. Community feedback received through the Strategic Plan and CNA consultations revealed desires for branch access on Sundays in order to accommodate people who work during the week. As WPL expands its branches and library services, consideration should be given to having at least some facilities open on Sunday.

Beyond staffing and hours of operation, there will be other service delivery implications that WPL will be required to examine. These may include collections management, information technology, promotions, and programming to name but a few. Collectively, the growing operational needs must be supported by sufficient resources if WPL is to not only retain but enhance its already strong public satisfaction ratings and to ensure sustainability of the library system as a whole.

5.3. Recommendations

8. **STAFFING:** Prepare an organizational and staffing review to identify the number of staff along with their roles and responsibilities to provide effective services representative of a public library system serving 100,000 persons.

Timing: Short-Term (2027 – 2031)

9. **HOURS OF OPERATION:** As WPL's library services expand, explore the feasibility of opening selected library branches on Sundays. Doing so will require additional operating funding.

Timing: Long-term (2026 – 2041)

10. **MONITORING & UPDATING:** Review 2026 Census data to determine if there are adjustments required to Community Needs Assessment. Carry out an update to the Community Needs Assessment after 5 years to measure progress, re-engage the community, and align with future market conditions and new population forecasts that may be available at that time.

Timing: Short-Term (2027 – 2031)