



# Ajax Public Library Board

**2022–2026 Legacy**

# Our Board

## Legacy & Succession Planning

The 2022-2026 Library Board recognizes the importance of succession planning and created this Legacy Document to guide future Boards.

This document has been created using feedback from Trustees and the accomplishments of the Board's Strategic Master Plan. The Legacy Document will assist in the recruiting and onboarding of new Library Board Trustees. Recording our accomplishments, challenges, and visions for the future of the Library and Board will aid successors in their own achievements and help ensure continuity.

Library Board Trustees Deborah McDougall and Doug Miller congratulate a SPARK! Art Show winner, 2024.



## Boards Ends

1. The Library exists to further the leisure, educational, and professional endeavours of Ajax's communities.
2. The Library exists to foster a sense of safety and inclusion in its diverse community through programs, services, and collections.
3. The Library exists so that customers will have a hub for their creative, innovative, and technological pursuits.
4. The Library exists so that customers have community for connections, civic engagement, and belonging.
5. The Library exists so that there is equitable access to information and resources for its customers, upholding intellectual freedom, enabling an informed citizenry.

# Our Board

## Board Members 2022-2026

**Voytek Bialkowski**

**Sepelene Deonarine**

**Mallik Fernando** (joined September 2023)

**Rebecca Hayes**

**Pia Kaukoranta Vahabi** (joined September 2023)

**Sterling Lee** (Regional Councillor, Deputy Mayor)

**Deborah McDougall**

**Douglas Miller**

**Eesha Chaudry** (until June 2023)

**Piyali Correya** (until May 2026)

**Sandy Taylor** (until July 2023)



Voytek Bialkowski



Sepelene Deonarine



Mallik Fernando



Rebecca Hayes



Pia Kaukoranta Vahabi



Sterling Lee



Deborah McDougall



Douglas Miller



Board Trustee and Council Representative Sterling Lee with members of Council and CLEO Sarah Vaisler at the Makerspace Grand Opening, October 2023.

# Our Library

## Our Community Sees Us As...



### A Valuable Resource

The Library offers extensive resources for both learning and leisure across a variety of formats. As access to online content is increasingly moved behind subscriptions and paywalls, the Library offers free alternatives during challenging economic times. Using the Valuing Ontario Libraries Toolkit (VOLT), it was identified that the Library returns over \$65 million in social value to the community through its free services, programs, and resources.



### Important Access to Services and Supports

The Library helps reduce barriers to services, partnering with local organizations to help build connections in the community for newcomers, employment, housing, and other government benefits. Offering a wide range of traditional, digital, and social service connections, the Library is a one-stop shop for assistance. For example, access to computers and WiFi, free printing of government forms, and resume assistance help vulnerable populations get the support they need without cost.



### Integral Community Partner

The Library is recognized as a prestigious partner. This is seen through major initiatives such as the opening of the Grandview Kids Express Branch and the Ajax Rotary Club's sponsorship of the Library's NovelBranch. These unique service points act as community connectors, bringing Library services to non-traditional places. The Library contributes to the completion of the Town of Ajax's strategic initiatives.

Library Board Trustee Rebecca Hayes with past Trustee Sandy Taylor and CLEO Sarah Vaisler at Drag Queen Storytime, 2023.



# Our Term

## Our Board is...

### Committed to Supporting Intellectual Freedom

In February 2024, the Library Board approved its statement on Intellectual Freedom, cementing its dedication to “safeguarding access to and expressions of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinions.” In an effort to entrench itself in its values, the Library Board invited the Centre for Free Expression to educate the Board and hosted a screening of the film “The Librarians” for Durham Region library leaders. Further, the Board expressed its strong disagreement with Alberta’s Bill 28 in May 2026. Bill 28 erodes local board’s governance autonomy in exchange for provincial oversight.



Ajax Public Library hosted Durham Region library leaders and Board Trustees for a screening of “The Librarians” at the St. Francis Centre in March 2026. The documentary follows recent censorship efforts against schools, public libraries, and their staff in the United States.

### Supportive of Ajax’s Diverse Community

The Library Board affirmed its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through an approved position statement in March 2024. The Library reflects Ajax’s diverse community through collections, programs, and services. The Library Board is also a diverse group, both in its demographic makeup, and in background and experience. Mirroring the Ajax community ensures the Board is a sound governing body and it is hoped that diversity is maintained in future appointments. In April 2026, the Board reviewed and approved its Recruitment Matrix to guide the selection of a diverse slate of candidates for appointment recommendations in the next term.

### Proud of the Library

Supporting the social and economic well-being of Ajax residents has been an ongoing priority for the Library. Efforts have included introducing a Coordinator of Safety and Operations role, modernizing its online service delivery, increasing security presence at Main Branch, and introducing new collection types (such as WiFi hotspots, new attraction passes, and GoPro kits) to reduce economic barriers. The Board is proud to support the Library as it consistently seeks opportunities to improve the lives of Ajax residents and encourage lifelong learning.

# Our Term

## Our Board should...

### Continue to Defend Intellectual Freedom

Libraries across North America continue to be faced with challenges to intellectual freedom and the right to read, including attempts at censorship here in Canada. The Library Board needs to ensure that its dedication to intellectual freedom remains firm despite external pressures and demonstrate support for other systems or organizations facing these challenges.

### Be Engaged

Board engagement is a key indicator of Board health. It is reflected in participation at meetings, contributions to committee work, providing feedback for significant Board documents (ex. position statements and legacy documents), and/or attendance at Library events and programs.

In addition, the Board may wish to be more active in advocacy, participating in industry training, and networking with other Library Boards or industry professionals. The Board's effectiveness is impacted by its ability to participate in meaningful conversations.

Board self-assessments also ensure the Board meets the needs of its Trustees. A new Board may wish to expand its evaluation work to include meeting organization, policy and process review, and regular training.

Library Board Trustee Mallik Fernando acts as a volunteer judge at the Ajax-Pickering Science Fair, 2026.



### Plan Effectively for the Future

Library services have a history of evolution and adaptability. Significant changes across the world (ex. rapid adoption of artificial intelligence, or challenges to intellectual freedom) demonstrate that rapid responses may be required to align with legislation or to maintain relevance. The Library must be ready to support its staff and operations as it responds to external pressures.

Locally, Ajax continues to see rapid intensification. Ensuring the Library can meet the needs of a growing population is vital to community health. To ensure Ajax residents have access to Library services, future Boards will need to advocate for new, expanding, or unique service points like the Grandview Kids Express Branch or NovelBranch.



# Our Term

## Challenges Faced

### Increased Incidents and Conflicting Space Use

The Library has seen the number of incidents increase consistently over the term of the Library Board. Individuals experiencing mental health, substance use, and other socio-economic and health challenges seek refuge in community spaces like the Library. While reported incidents have increased, successful incident management strategies have been implemented.

This relates to ongoing competing needs for space within the Library. Individual users seek out the Library for a variety of reasons: to quietly work or study, to connect with others through programs or play, or to shelter from the elements. Each use of the Library is valid but can conflict with another user. Balancing these conflicting space needs requires advocacy and support to re-affirm all community members as being welcome in the Library.

### Trustee Turnover

It is vital that the Library Board consider strategies to ensure future Trustees are aware of the commitment and expectations of participating on the Library Board. Recognizing life changes may affect a person's ability to remain on the Library Board for the entire appointed term, the Board has navigated mid-term onboarding and governance challenges to minimize the loss of momentum.

Library Board Trustee Deborah McDougall with staff member Jason Tooral and past Board Trustee Piyali Correya, with winning Battle of the Books team from Duffin's Bay, April 2026.



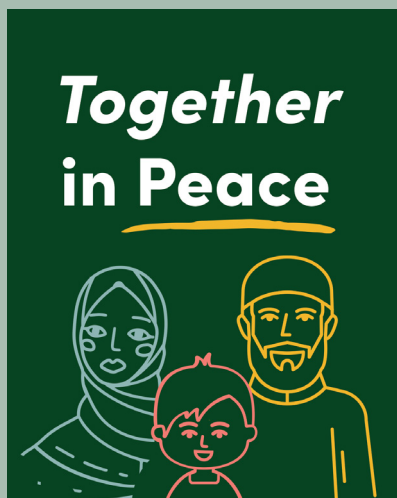
# Our Term

## March 2025 Incident

In March 2025, a Muslim woman was subjected to an unprovoked attack by another person while in the Main Branch. The horrific incident deeply impacted the community and the Library experienced scrutiny from Ajax residents, Muslim community partners, and broader news media. In partnership with the Town of Ajax, the Library Board demonstrated leadership and support and have been working to rebuild trust with the Muslim community and other Library users.

Ajax Public Library, the Town, and the wider community demonstrated support and care for the Muslim community after the horrific attack in March 2025. The Town of Ajax hosted a Community Healing event on April 4, 2025, with speakers from Durham Regional Police, the Muslim Women of Durham Region, and the National Council of Canadian Muslims. On April 7, 2025, the Library hosted a panel discussion on Gendered Islamophobia and Public Spaces, with speakers with lived experience from York University, Trent University, the Town of Ajax, and the National Council of Canadian Muslims (image below).

Meaningful conversations and demonstrations of support took place across the community, and the Library is proud to continue to foster a community where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected.



# The Future

## Advocacy Opportunities

### Libraries as Third Places

Public libraries are some of the last “third places,” where people can build community without expectations for their existence in a space (ex. making a purchase). It is important that the Board continues to advocate for the Library’s ability to fulfill this role, while balancing the unintended consequences of gap-filling for social service needs. Libraries will always act as connectors to services for all members of the community but cannot absorb services outside its core mandate.

### Celebrating 75 Years

In 2027, the Library will celebrate its 75th anniversary. This milestone should be celebrated throughout the year, reflecting on its history and potential for the future. The Library Board may wish to participate in ongoing events or other celebrations.

### Future Strategic Planning

The Library’s current Strategic Master Plan is set to expire in 2028 and a new strategic planning process will occur during the next Board term. Trustees should use the opportunity to build effective plans for the future, considering growth and intensification, economic challenges, and modern library service expectations.

### Municipal Relationship Building

Library Board terms coincide with those of the Town of Ajax Council. Approaching the 2026 Municipal Election, Ajax Council is anticipating significant change in its own membership. As both a new Board and Council begin their terms, developing strong relationships with the Town of Ajax Council and its staff teams is vital to providing the best services for Ajax residents.

Library Board Trustees Sepelene Deonarine and Pia Kaukoranta Vahabi with members of Council, CLEO Sarah Vaisler, and art show judges at HeARTbeat Reception, 2026.



# The Future

## Challenges Ahead

### Building Safety and Security

The intersecting challenges of housing, mental health, and addiction will continue to effect public libraries in the near future. Ensuring that the Library is building capacity to support our most vulnerable customers, employees, and other Library users is vital to ensure all feel welcome when visiting Library spaces.

### Board Leadership, Policies, and Practices

Future Library Board Trustees must challenge themselves to develop a strong understanding of governance policies and procedures and their obligations under the Public Libraries Act. Participation on the Library Board is a significant commitment and requires leadership and advocacy work (ex. acting as Library Board Chair or representing the Library Board at local events). Trustees should expect to build positive relationships with the Town of Ajax, local organizations, and Ajax residents.



Supported by the Ajax Rotary Club, the Library opened NovelBranch in the Ajax Community Centre in the summer of 2025. Library Board Trustee Voytek Bialkowski attends the ribbon cutting with members of Rotary Club, CLEO Sarah Vaisler, and past Board Trustees.

### Continued Threats to Intellectual Freedom

Censorship and challenges to intellectual freedom are expected to continue throughout North America. A future Library Board must be prepared to defend intellectual freedom and provide meaningful engagement that promotes the right to read and the Library's position in providing free and open access to ideas, opinions, and information.



## Our Vision

A welcoming and exceptional Library empowering success within our diverse community.

## Our Mission

Ajax Public Library designs experiences and connections where community, discovery, and innovation intersect.