



CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW

MEMORANDUM

Library Services Department

DATE: April 25, 2019

TO: City Council

FROM: Tracy Gray, Library Services Director

VIA: Daniel H. Rich, City Manager

SUBJECT: Library Services Department Potential Fee Modification

RECOMMENDATION

1. Eliminate lost or damaged Library materials \$10.00 replacement fee.
2. Eliminate overdue fines on Library materials.

BACKGROUND

The Library Services Department continually analyzes nationwide standards of Library practice and looks for ways to improve Library services to better serve our Library customers. Over the past year, the Library staff has been researching and analyzing Library fines and fees and presented the Library Board with data, statistics, and information. The Library Board discussed and analyzed Library fines and fees over the course of several meetings. Ultimately, staff recommended to the Library Board to eliminate the \$10.00 lost or damaged Library materials replacement fee and to eliminate overdue fines on Library materials. The Library Board concurred.

ANALYSIS PROCESS

- Library staff presented the Library Board with fine and fee information of neighboring cities.
- Library staff presented the Library Board with fine and fee information and statistics related to the policies of the Mountain View Public Library.
- Library staff presented the Library Board with information about nationwide and Statewide libraries who have gone fine-free and what the impact has been.

- Library staff presented the Library Board with case studies and elements in favor of eliminating overdue fines.
- One of the Library Board members attended the California Library Association in November 2018 and attended specific programs related to Library fines and fees.
- Library Board members analyzed the various choices such as:
 - Fine forgiveness programs.
 - Eliminating overdue fines on Youth items.
 - Eliminating overdue fines on all items.
 - Continuing with the current fine structure.
- Library staff presented the Library Board with the staff recommendation:
 - Eliminate \$10.00 processing fee charge for lost and damaged items. Most processing occurs with the vendor, making it a superfluous charge on top of the cost of replacement of an item.
 - Eliminate overdue fines on Library materials, recommending treating all items the same rather than having different fine structures between youth and adult items to avoid bias.
- The Library Board presented their recommendation at their December 2018 meeting.

SUMMARY OF FINE ASSESSMENT AT NEARBY LIBRARIES

Most nearby libraries do not charge fines on Youth materials, and several are considering eliminating all fines.

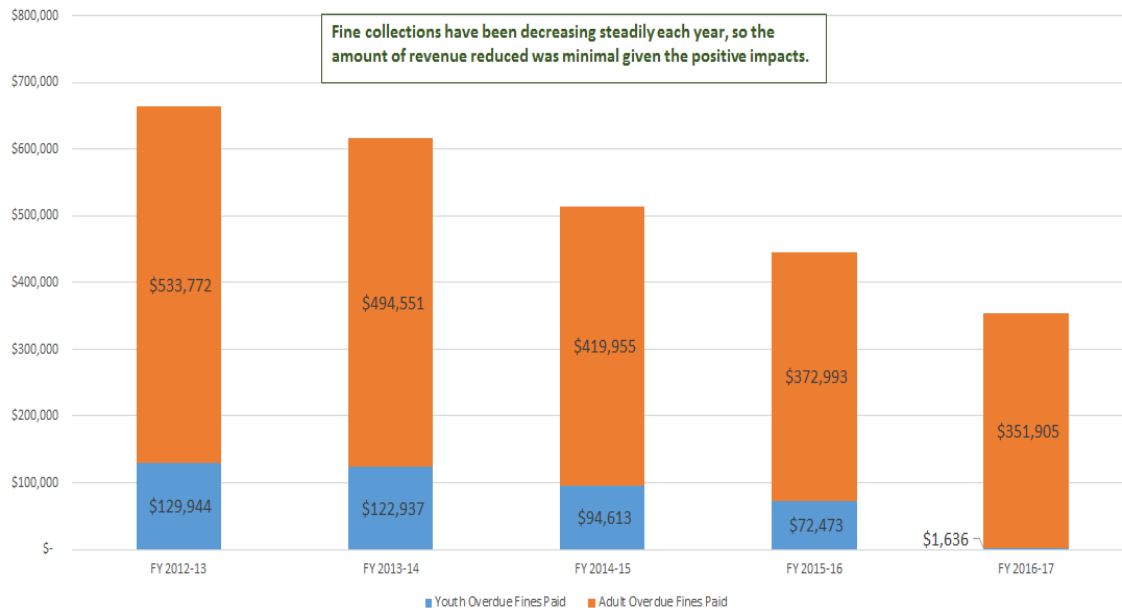
The following Northern California libraries are currently fine-free:

- San Mateo County Library
- Contra Costa County Library
- Berkeley Public Library
- San Francisco Public Library: The commission voted to go fine-free. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors needs to vote on the Library's recommendations, but Mayor London Breed has already voiced her support.

FINES OF NEIGHBORING LIBRARIES

| Library System: | MTN. VIEW | LOS GATOS | PALO ALTO | SAN JOSE | SANTA CLARA CITY | SANTA CLARA COUNTY | SUNNY-VALE |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Standard Fine: | \$0.25/day, \$10.00 max | \$0.30/day, \$10.00 max | \$0.30/day, \$9.00 max | \$0.25/day, \$5.00 max | \$0.25/day, \$8.00 max | \$0.25/day, \$10.00 max | \$0.30/day, \$10.00 max |
| Standard Fine on Youth Items: | Standard Fine | No Fine unless not returned after 6 wks, then \$5.00 per item | No Fine | 1-year pilot No Fine beginning July 2018 | No Fine | No Fine | Standard Fine |

Overdue Fines Collected
Peninsula Library System FY 2012-13 to FY2016-17



Peninsula Library System Member Libraries: Burlingame Public Library, San Mateo Community College Libraries, Daly City, Menlo Park, Redwood City, San Bruno, San Mateo City, San Mateo County, South San Francisco. Children and teen library cardholders do not accrue fines at any of these libraries. San Mateo County Library does not charge fines at all.

SNAPSHOT OF MOUNTAIN VIEW LIBRARY FINE STATISTICS, OCTOBER 2018

Number of Library customers with blocked accounts (owe \$25.00 or more) – cards are not expired:

- Adult: 889
- Teen: 35
- Juvenile: 151
- Patrons who owe over \$100.00: 153

The Mountain View Public Library annually removes Library accounts which have not been active in three (3) years. This is a standard practice to keep the database accurate, especially with vendors who charge for services by total number of Library cardholders. On average, there are typically 600 Library customers with blocked accounts because of Library fines and/or lost materials.

DISCUSSION ELEMENTS IN FAVOR OF ELIMINATING FINES

- Two fundamental Laws of Library Science: Books are for use. Every book its reader. If patrons have blocked accounts because of overdue fines, they do not have access to materials.
- Most libraries that have gone fine-free are seeing results in increased visits and circulation.
- Since Library customers in California can choose which library to use, fines may cause people to look elsewhere for their Library services, especially since other nearby cities are geographically close.
- Library fines are not meant to be a revenue generator. They were originally created because of scarcity of Library materials; however, with the age of the Internet and more access to materials, Library fines are becoming a barrier to access.
- Remove barriers and make accessing the Library easy, equitable, and enjoyable for everyone.
- It is quite possible that patrons do not return to the Library because they have blocked accounts. We want to allow all people afforded free and convenient access to Library resources.
- Electronic/downloadable materials do not have overdue fines; make all materials equitable.

CASE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

From: "Long Overdue: Eliminating Fines on Overdue Materials to Improve Access to San Francisco Public Library," January 2019.

<https://sfpl.org/uploads/files/pdfs/commission/Fine-Free-Report011719.pdf>

The study states, "It's not the unpleasantness of prodding late returners to pay up that's spurring California libraries to ditch overdue fines. Libraries are taking a hard look at overdue fines and concluding that they do more harm than good. Overdue fines accumulate and block access for low-income residents, the people who need libraries the most. And fines don't work that well to prod people to return books. Better ways exist that don't block access for people who need it. We found that approximately 5 percent of all library cardholders have their cards blocked because of overdue fines. Library borrowers regardless of income miss return deadlines at similar rates. About one-third of borrowers owe overdue fines or fees at any time. However, lower-income people have a harder time paying fines for overdue items. In the Bayview branch, which serves a lower-income area, 11 percent of people have their cards blocked. That's three times as high as at branches in many high-income areas. Numerous examples have shown that, even without overdue fines, libraries continue to experience timely returns and preserve the integrity of their collections. Several librarians said that the very existence of fines discourages people from using libraries. Patrons refuse to check out books for fear of fines. Most librarians in cities that went fine-free said their circulation increased after fines were eliminated. No library that eliminated overdue fines has experienced increases in late returns, longer hold times, or gaps in collections, according to our interviews with librarians across the country. In fact, some libraries saw their late-return rates drop following fine elimination. The Library Board also recommended going fine free."

From: "Free Your Fines and the Rest Will Follow" presentation, California Library Association, November 2018

<https://vimeopro.com/vcubeinc/cla2017>

"San Diego Public Library looked at effectiveness of fines and determined it was not a deterrent, people still accrued fines, and it is actually a barrier. The ultimate goal is to give people access to using the library. Creating a barrier is not serving patrons. San Diego Public Library also determined that there was a socioeconomic impact. The lowest geographical area had highest fines.

They wanted to have goodwill, trust, accountability, as well as more participation in library programs and services.”

From: <http://spellproject.weebly.com/uploads/1/5/3/3/15331602/spellwhitepaperfinal.pdf>

“The Colorado State Library recommends public library administrators and governing bodies eliminate library fines, and reconsider fees for lost or damaged items, on children's materials, and other items as deemed appropriate for local service. Fines are punitive, not educational incentives. The profession has little empirical evidence that charging fines results in greater circulation of library materials, or indeed the return of items in a timely manner. The administrative costs, including equipment rental, collection contracts, and staff time associated with collecting funds from patrons, often equals or exceeds the revenue earned from library fines and fees. At a time when libraries struggle to remain relevant and increase library use, it may be counterproductive to enforce policies that are punitive in nature and further the stereotype of libraries as authoritarian institutions to be feared. Librarians have an opportunity to play a meaningful role in the lives of children and families in their communities. Children's librarians are thrilled when they see families checking out a stack of picture books, and families should be encouraged to do so, rather than be fearful of the late fines and book damage fees that might accrue. Based on the research, user-friendly policies will bring more community members into the library, especially the low-income populations who need libraries the most.”

POSITIVE OUTCOME FOR ELIMINATING OVERDUE FINES

- Redirect approximately 1 to 2 hours per day of staff time to other duties: get books on shelves faster, help patrons with finding materials, answer other questions, and promote library resources and services to customers.
- Eliminating overdue fines will result in more positive customer interactions – no disagreements or arguments of items being returned on time.
- The City of Mountain View would be the leader in the South Bay for eliminating overdue fines on all materials and could be a large marketing campaign and great exposure for our Library and City and possibly bring in new users and old users who have avoided the Library because of blocked accounts.

POLICY THAT WOULD REMAIN UNCHANGED

- Lost or damaged item charges: Library patrons would still be billed for lost or damaged items. Billed notices of overdue materials will still be sent out when materials are two weeks overdue.
- Holds charge of \$1.00: Library patrons would still be charged \$1.00 if they place a hold on an item but do not pick it up within seven days.
- Link+ items late fee of \$1.00 per day: These items are items checked out from other libraries.

FISCAL IMPACT

Revenue from lost or damaged Library materials \$10.00 replacement fee:

| Fiscal Year | Fiscal Year 2016-17 | Fiscal Year 2017-18 | Fiscal Year 2018-19 July-March |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Approximate total replacement fee: | \$4,000 | \$4,000 | \$3,000 |

Revenue from Library overdue fines of Youth and Adult items:

| Fiscal Year: | Fiscal Year 2016-17 | Fiscal Year 2017-18 | Fiscal Year 2018-19 July-March |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| Approximate overdue fines: | Total: \$68,000 Youth: \$36,000 Adult: \$32,000 | Total: \$56,000 Youth: \$29,000 Adult: \$27,000 | Total: \$43,000 Youth: \$24,000 Adult: \$19,000 |

RECOMMENDATION OF THE LIBRARY BOARD

1. Fee modification: Eliminate lost or damaged Library materials \$10.00 replacement fee.

The Library Board voted 5-0 to recommend the elimination of this \$10.00 processing fee charge at their meeting on December 17, 2018.

2. Eliminate overdue fines on Library materials.

The Library Board voted 4-1 to recommend the elimination of overdue fines on Library materials at their meeting on December 17, 2018.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Update of Integrated Library System to allow for automatic renewals. Libraries that have changed to automatic renewals have found that fine revenue has decreased significantly.
2. Eliminate only Youth overdue fines.
3. Continue with the fee and fine structure as is.
4. Provide other direction to staff.

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