

MEETING DATE: April 22, 2020

Regular Business #3

TO: Library Board of Trustees

FROM: Judy Booth, Library Director

SUBJECT: LIBRARY 2021-22 FEES SCHEDULE

SUMMARY

During the May 14, 2020 Board of Trustees meeting in a 5-0 motion, in response to considerations of social equity and staff safety during the COVID health orders, the board eliminated several fines and fees on a temporary basis for six months and reaffirmed the temporary elimination at their January 28, 2020 meeting. Library staff were concerned that patrons would be blocked from checking out materials due to such fines at a time when the resources from public libraries are needed more than ever by the public. The use of the Library was severely reduced due to the pandemic and the various health orders. Physical access to the library was ended on March 18, 2020. Curbside service began on May 11, 2020 – still no physical access by the public. Grab & Go service which began on March 16, 2021 allowed for public access with masking and social distancing with visits of 30 minutes or less.

RECOMMENDATION

As a response to considerations of social equity library staff recommend making the temporary elimination of the attached Fee Schedule permanent.

FISCAL IMPACT

The lost revenue from the elimination of Late Fines for Teen and Adult materials, New DVD Rental Fees, Holds Expired, Not Picked Up Fees, Extended Use Fees (lost processing fees) has been estimated to be \$35,080 based on pre-COVID data. However, with circulation statistics from April through November of 2020 at 84,915 which is 26% of the 2019-20 circulation and a mere 18% of the 2018-19 circulation, the expected revenue from re-implementing the fines and fees could only be estimated to be less than \$9,000 per year. This doesn't take into consideration the elevated staff resources that processing fines and fees requires. To be clear,

[The following is duplicated from the Discussion presented at the Board's May 14, 2020 meeting Agenda Memo for this Item. The reasons for eliminating fines and fees have not changed and because of the financial and other ill effects of COVID are more compelling than before.]

DISCUSSION

Fullerton Public Library strives to provide equitable and barrier-free access to information and library services. Although fines and fees may be a source of library revenue, there is much debate concerning their effectiveness in encouraging the return of materials and concerning their public relations effects. Research proves that monetary fines present an economic barrier to access of library materials and services,

and there is mounting evidence that indicates eliminating fines and fees increases library card adoption and library usage. Acknowledging these consequences, the American Library Association passed a resolution (Attachment 1) in January 2019 in which it recognizes fines as "a form of social inequity" and calls on libraries nationwide to find a way to eliminate their fines.

In addition to being on a path to greater equity, the library also must respond with ways to protect library staff and patrons during the current COVID-19 pandemic. One of the areas of concern is the passing of cash. Striving to be cashless through the use of the library's current Self-Check Kiosks can go a long way to keep staff and patrons safe. Although the public is not currently in the library, it is possible that within the next budget year patrons will be allowed into the library to complete their library transactions.

As a first step towards the possible elimination of fines and fees and striving for cashless transactions at the Fullerton Public Library (FPL), staff believe that by eliminating several of our fines/fees we can provide more equitable access and safer access to all patrons of the Library. Therefore, Library staff suggest the following fine and fee changes:

Remove the Late Fee of \$0.25/day Late Fine for Teen and Adult materials

The Fullerton Public Library has not collected daily late fines on Children's items since June 24, 1973 when the new library on Commonwealth Avenue was opened that day starting with the Children's Library (Level 2). It was then that Children's Librarian Carolyn Johnson submitted the following proposal to the Library Board of Trustees:

"In order to give all the children of Fullerton the right to read through the resources of the Fullerton Public Library, we will eliminate fines on children's materials for an experimental period of one year, beginning with the opening of the new library, June 24, 1973..."

The Board approved this on a trial basis. It was approved on a yearly basis until it was no longer mentioned in the Board minutes after 1976. This bit of history was provided by Children's Division Manager Janine Jacobs from *The Bing Bang Book Machine or 90 Razzle Dazzle Years in the Children's Room – Fullerton Public Library, 2000*. The elimination of this fee would level the playing field for Teen and Adult patrons.

Remove the New DVD rental fee (3 days) – \$1.00 per 3 days per item

Currently the Library charges patrons \$1.00 per 3 days per item to check out new DVD's. Although the rental fee is low, the \$1.00 fee is still a barrier to patrons who might check out our newly released movies, and staff believe that by removing this fee DVD circulation will increase. Other libraries that have eliminated this fee have seen a significant increase in DVD check-outs. As can be seen below, revenue from DVD check-outs has decreased over the past two years. We believe that eliminating this fee will have a minor effect on revenue.

In regards to the goal of cashless transactions while in this current pandemic – it is anticipated that for at least the next year staff will be accessing patron-requested items and patrons will pay remotely for any charges on their library account.

Fiscal Year	DVD Revenue	% Change
FY14-15	\$1,813	
FY15-16	\$1,582	-13%
FY16-17	\$1,933	+22%
FY17-18	\$1,653	-14%
FY18-19	\$924	-44%

Remove the Holds Expired, Not Picked Up Fee

This fee is charged when a patron has been notified (automatically via email) that the item they have requested is on hold and available for them to pick-up. It was put in place to encourage patrons to pick up their holds so the items would not need to be re-shelved. As we implement our Curbside Service our new protocol will be for items to be returned to the shelves after 7 days after trying to contact the patron to schedule pick-up appointment (or re-schedule a missed pick-up appointment).

Remove the extended use fee of \$5.00 per item when overdue

Another barrier for patrons is the \$5.00 processing fee for lost and overdue items, also known as an Extended Use Fee. Staff would like to eliminate this fine. We believe this monetary fine creates the largest barrier in public relations, and absorbs valuable staff time applying, collecting, and managing the fees. We anticipate that when we are eventually able to invite the public back into the library our open hours will be reduced from 61 to 34 hours. We have also had to separate 10 part-time Library Clerical Assistants who work with patrons who have questions or object to the fines on their account. These customer service interactions are difficult and time consuming. An example as to why this fine can cause public relations issues and barriers to access of materials follows: if a Library patron checks out 35 items and returns all 35 items more than six weeks late they could end up owing the Library \$175 in fines even if the books have been returned.

Change the limit for blocking patrons from checking out materials

For a mere \$4.99 in fines, patrons can have their borrowing privileges suspended and are blocked from checking out materials. Not only is this a barrier for checking out materials from the Library but patrons are unable to use the self-check machines because they are blocked from checking out materials. This can cause public relations issues and deter patrons from using our self-check machines. Staff recommend increasing the block to \$20.00 to lessen barriers to patrons checking out materials.

Adjust the Collection Agency Trigger Amount

Staff recommend changing the trigger that sends patrons to debt collection. Currently, the debt collect group setting in Horizon triggers a notice to Unique Patron Service Solutions and adds a \$20.00 fee to the patrons account when they owe \$34.99. If we remove the \$5.00 processing fee and increase the trigger to \$40.00 patrons will be sent to collections less often. By making this change the Library would benefit more than the

Collections Agency we use by giving Library patrons a better chance to pay the Library fines rather than the Collection Agency fee. Since we allow patrons to check out 35 items at a time, if items are returned late, they can end up owing the Library a significant amount of money, and blocks them from checking out materials.

Replacement Costs

Replacement costs and collection agency fees should remain unchanged. As in the past, patrons who have not returned materials to the Library will not be able to check out materials until they have returned the overdue items.

Attachments:

- Item No. 3 - Attachment 1- ALA CD 38 Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Justice Revised 1_27_0
- Item No. 3 - Attachment 2 – Proposed Library Fees 2020-21