



Agenda Report

MEETING DATE: Tuesday, September 27, 2022

TO: City Council

FROM: LIBRARY DIRECTOR MARTINEZ

THROUGH: CITY MANAGER MENDEZ

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING CITY COUNCIL TO ELIMINATE THE COLLECTION OF FEES FOR WATSONVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY MATERIALS THAT ARE RETURNED LATE AND RESCIND RESOLUTION 170-04

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the City Council adopt a resolution (1) approving the elimination of collection of fees for Watsonville Public Library materials that are returned late and (2) rescind Resolution 170-04.

BACKGROUND:

Libraries across the country are going fine-free, recognizing that overdue fines create barriers to access, have negative impacts on public relations, consume valuable staff time, and are not an effective tool to encourage on-time return of library materials.

In January 2019, the American Library Association (ALA) passed a resolution affirming that the imposition of monetary library fines creates a barrier to the provision of library and information services; urging libraries to scrutinize their practices of imposing fines on library patrons and actively move towards eliminating them; and urging governing bodies of libraries to strengthen funding support for libraries so they are not dependent on monetary fines as a necessary source of revenue.

Libraries in the tri-county that are currently fine-free: Monterey County Free Libraries system, Salinas Public Library, Santa Cruz Public Libraries system, Carmel Public Library, and Pacific Grove Public Library.

DISCUSSION:

The experiences of fine-free libraries have produced a substantial body of data regarding the impacts of eliminating overdue charges. That data supports the following outcomes associated with a shift to a fine-free model:

- Contrary to popular expectation, overdue materials are returned earlier when fines are eliminated;
- There are fewer accounts blocked from checking out materials – more patrons, particularly youth and low-income users, are able to continue utilizing library services;
- Lapsed-users return to the library;
- New cardholders numbers increase;
- First time checkouts increase; and
- Circulation overall increases.

Steps to a Fine-free Model:

- Eliminate the 10 cents per day per item to a maximum of \$1.00 overdue fine (Library Board of Trustees approved on August 18, 2022)
- Continue charging fees for lost and damaged materials
- Continue sending reminder notices
- Continue to refer accounts with unreturned items to materials collection service
- The Material Circulation Policy will be revised to reflect the removal of overdue fines (Library Board of Trustees approved on August 18, 2022).

The Library Board of Trustees approved to eliminate overdue fines at the Library Board of Trustees meeting on August 18, 2022.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

Elimination of fees for library materials that are returned late supports Strategic Plan Priorities:

- 5-Community Engagement & Well-Being

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Library services are funded by a voter-approved quarter-cent sales tax for libraries (Measure R, approximately \$3.9M) and the General Fund (\$548,686) per year.

The Library currently charges:

- All material: 10 cents per day per item to a maximum of \$1.00.

Eliminating overdue fines will result in some loss of revenue collected in regards to fines/fees (this category includes both overdue fines and payments for fees, such as lost and damaged items).

However, the fines/fees revenue has been steadily shrinking in recent years as a result of increased borrowing of e-materials (eBooks, eAudio, eMusic, etc.) and other procedural and service changes, such as automatic renewals and waiving fines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Revenue Comparison					
Fiscal Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
	\$32,892	\$25,580	\$15,854	\$2,455	\$11,156

The estimate of potential fine revenue loss as of September 1, 2022 (that would be forgiven) is approximately **\$30,069** and would affect **9,412** patron accounts (total registered patrons 36,309).

ALTERNATIVE ACTION:

The City Council can choose not to approve this proposal and the Library will continue to collect fees for materials that are returned late at the above stated fee.

ATTACHMENTS AND/OR REFERENCES (If any):

None.