

Peterborough Public Library

To: Library Board

From: Mark Stewart, Library Services Manager

Meeting Date: May 11, 2021

Subject: Report PPL21-009
Fine Free Library Service

Purpose

A report to seek direction from the Library Board on the elimination of Library late fines.

Recommendations

That the Library Board approve the recommendations as outlined in Report PPL21-009 dated May 11, 2021, of the Library Services Manager as follows:

- a) That the report to inform the Library Board on the status of fine free library services be received for information,
- b) That the Board direct staff to implement the operational change to offer fine free library service, and
- c) That the Board direct staff to prepare an information report to Council to advise them of this change and its implications.

Budget and Financial Implications

There is a financial implication associated with the recommendations of this report.

The annual Library operating budget includes approximately \$55k to \$60k in late fine revenues each year while expending roughly \$45k in related staffing costs for fine collections and administration.

Background

To prepare this report for the Board, Library staff have reviewed relevant literature (see Appendix A), examined our policies and those of other libraries, considered the financial impact of this proposal, and reflected on our observations of patron behaviour.

There is a growing movement in North American libraries to eliminate late fines. Revenue from late fines is often perceived to originate from a negative place. Though initially intended to be a deterrent to returning items late, it is often viewed as a punitive measure for bad library behaviour.

Over the past several years, more than 100 Canadian public library systems have eliminated late fines for some or all types of library materials. In our surrounding area, many library systems have eliminated late fines, including Ottawa (Jan. 2021), Vaughan (Jun. 2020), Barrie (Jul. 2020), and Ajax (Jul. 2020), among others.

Library fines are significant barriers for many members of the community. As a community with an unemployment rate that tends to run higher than the provincial average, there is the potential for a large group of people in Peterborough to greatly benefit from fine-free library service. For many people with low incomes or experiencing financial insecurities, the genuine possibility of accruing debt on their library cards or their children's cards is an ample deterrent to keep them from using the Library altogether.

Most libraries that have chosen to move to a fine-free model have found that late fines do not increase material return rates and that eliminating fines does not result in an increase in late returns. Conversely, due to increased access to library materials, the fine-free model has been shown to increase borrowing rates while also increasing the number of new and returning borrowers.

Moving to a fine-free model would allow us to embody our Strategic Values of:

- Access, inclusion and intellectual freedom – through the exchange of information, ideas, knowledge and culture, we create safe and welcoming learning environments that inspire freedom of thought.
- Literacy, discovery and learning – we encourage literacy in all its forms to stimulate discovery and advance learning.
- Service Excellence – we provide accessible and inclusive services that anticipate and respond to the diverse needs of the Peterborough community
- Innovation – through our programs and services, we are committed to exploring innovative ways to encourage discovery.

Fine-free library service would also advance several of our Strategic Initiatives:

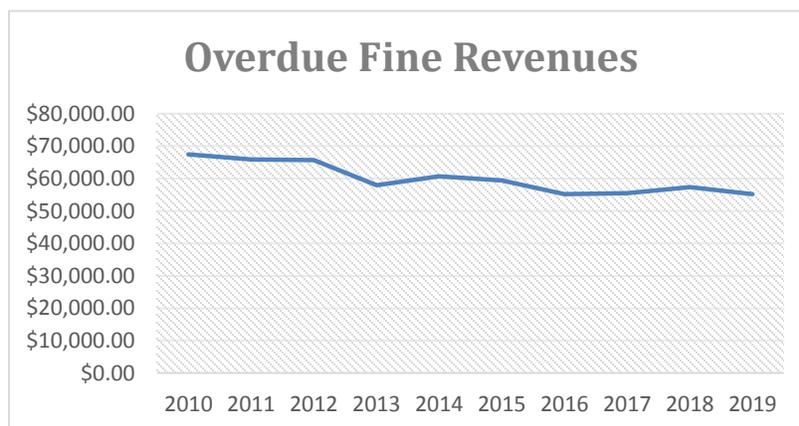
- A2 – Identify new ways our collections, programs and services can assist with life-long literacy and discovery

- B4 – Develop marketing and outreach initiatives to target difficult-to-reach and underserved individuals within the community.
- C3 – Ensure safe spaces and remove barriers for those with diverse needs.
- C5 – Investigate innovative and alternative service delivery models.

Business Case

Under a fine-free model, the Library's lost and damaged item fees would remain in place. Patrons still have the responsibility to return materials promptly. Items considered to be long overdue would be marked as lost, and replacement fees would be billed according to current practices. Damaged items would also continue to have repair/replacement fees billed as appropriate.

Late fines have become a shrinking revenue source for all libraries as people move toward online resources which do not incur late fines. At Peterborough Public Library, from 2010 to 2019, there has been an 18.25% decrease in Library fine revenue. As this downward trend continues and staffing costs continue to trend upward, the cost for the Library to collect late fines will exceed fine revenues within the next several years.



In 2020, the Library budgeted \$60k for late fines revenue, approximately 1.83% of the total operating budget. With the impact of COVID-19 and the waiving of late fines during the pandemic period, fine revenue for 2020 was far less than budgeted.

While late fines as a source of revenue are included in the Library's operating budget, the Library is not solely dependent on late fee revenues to operate. The potential exists to find alternative revenue sources, such as fundraising activities, to supplement the operating budget if the Board wishes to proceed with a fine-free operational model.

Studies in other libraries have found that the costs associated with collecting and processing late fines often negate or even exceed the revenues from the fines themselves.

An internal analysis was conducted to assess the total staffing costs required to process fines and manage account collections at Peterborough Public Library. Approximately \$45k was spent annually in staffing costs in recent years while collecting just under \$56k in fine revenues. A breakdown of the staff cost calculation can be found in Appendix B.

The pandemic effect

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 provided an unexpected opportunity to pilot a fine-free service model. To ensure as few barriers to access as possible during a time of significant change and uncertainty, Library staff agreed to suspend charging late fines.

While there have been many fluctuating variables during this time, Library items have been returned regularly over the last year. There have been little to no indicators of changes in patrons' returning habits with or without the late fines. This supports the anecdotal evidence in the commentaries from other public libraries prior to the pandemic, acting as a catalyst for them to adopt a fine-free model.

The pandemic effect has also resulted in a marked decrease in Library print material circulation, further reducing the possibility of future late fine revenue.

In 2020, the Library circulated 218,465 physical books and audiobooks vs 124,047 e-books and e-audiobooks. During the two weeks of March 22 to April 4, 2021, the Library circulated 2,650 print books vs. 5,982 digital e-books in Hoopla and cloudLibrary.

While this particular data from our library was gathered during an exceptional period in library services, prior trends also support that overall borrowing of physical materials has decreased. The increase in online usage indicates a continued shift in future behaviours towards the digital environment being the more popular option.

Council Consideration

While the Library Board does have the authority to implement this change, it is a decision that will impact the broader Peterborough Community. Due to the importance of this issue in the community and the potential budget implication, staff are recommending that an information report also be provided to council to ensure they are made aware of this change.

Summary

While there has been no public consultation or targeted data collected as part of the 2020 Library Service review on the topic of Library late fines, the preliminary research that has been undertaken by staff indicates that the community benefits of a fine-free library service outweigh the continuation of our current practices.

A fine-free model would allow us to redirect valuable staff time toward pursuing other Strategic Plan initiatives while also reducing staff stress levels associated with collecting fines.

By charging late fines, we create financial barriers for at-risk community members and a library that is not inclusive or accessible for everyone. By eliminating late fines, libraries can continue to support literacy for at-risk people, families, and youth, eliminate unequal barriers to access, and significantly improve the patron-library relationship within their community.

It is being recommended to the Library Board that staff be directed to take the necessary steps to implement a fine-free service model.

Submitted by,

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Attachments:

Appendix A – Further Reading List
Appendix B - Staffing cost breakdown calculations

Appendix A – Further Reading

American Library Association. (2019, Jan 28). *Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity*.

http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/council/council_documents/2019_ms_council_docs/ALA%20CD%2038%20RESOLUTION%20ON%20MONETARY%20LIBRARY%20FINES%20AS%20A%20FORM%20OF%20SOCIAL%20JUSTICE%20Revised%201_27_0.pdf

Delamont, Kieran. (2020, October 30). *Long Overdue: Why More Ontario Libraries are Going Fine Free*. TVO. <https://www.tvo.org/article/long-overdue-why-more-ontario-libraries-are-going-fine-free>

Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. (2020, July 7). *White Paper: Are Library Late Fees a Barrier to Equity?* <http://fopl.ca/news/white-paper-are-library-late-fees-a-barrier-to-equity/>

Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. (2020, May 15). *Is it Time to Re-Open Ontario's Public Libraries as Fine-free Public Institutions?* <http://fopl.ca/news/is-it-time-to-re-open-ontarios-public-libraries-as-fine-free-public-institutions/>

Innovative. (n.d.). *Are Library Late Fees a Barrier to Equity?* Proquest. https://2gak752fc8ct3pek1q1k9kh9-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WP_Fine-Free-Final.pdf

Kramer Bussel, Rachel. (2019, December 30). *Why Many Libraries are Eliminating Late Fees*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rachelkramerbussel/2020/12/30/why-many-libraries-are-eliminating-late-fees/?sh=585bf7c17696>

Librarianship.ca. (2021, April 10). *Fine Free Libraries in Canada*. <https://librarianship.ca/features/fine-free-libraries-in-canada/>

Urban Libraries Council. *Fine Free Libraries Map*. <https://tinyurl.com/y9py2x4o>

Wacek, Dawn. (2018, Feb). *A Librarian's Case Against Overdue Book Fines* [Video]. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/dawn_wacek_a_librarian_s_case_against_overdue_book_fines?language=en

Appendix B – Staffing cost breakdown calculations

Front-line staff, Fine Free Calculation

Average circulation desk staff wage:

	per hour
Clerk	\$27.26
Customer Service Specialist	\$31.36
Facility and Collections Support Supervisor	\$29.05
Avg:	\$29.22

Shifts at normal hours (front-line circulation staff working directly with the public, excluding check-in room shifts):

Main Branch				
	Shifts	length (h)	# of days	Total hours
Monday-Thursday	5	4	4	80
	2	3	4	24
Friday-Saturday	2	3	2	12
	3	4	2	24
Sunday	2	4	1	8
				148

DelaFosse Branch			
	Hours/week	# of staff	Total hours
	15	2	30

Total hours for Library System per week	178
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Staff hours spent on fines per week*:

29.6548

multiplied by average hourly pay:

\$866.61

Cost per week

We are closed about 9 days per year or 1.2857 weeks

We are open 50.714 weeks per year

Total front-line staff cost dealing with fines:

\$43,949.37

Cost per year

**Estimatimating 10 minutes of staff time spent per hour explaining/collecting/debating with patrons about fines*

Account Collections

Full Time Clerk hourly staff cost:

\$34.56

(Estimate of 2h/week spent on Account Collections)

Weekly staff cost:

\$69.12

Yearly staffing cost:

\$3,505.35

Paper/envelopes:

\$50.00

Postage for overdue letters:

\$100.00

Total staff cost for Account Collections

\$3,655.35

Grand total staff cost annually:

\$47,604.72
