

# Request for Decision – Elimination of Fines

**October 2020**

## **Goal**

## To eliminate fines for overdue library materials.

## **Rationale**

There is a growing trend among public libraries to eliminate charging patron overdue fines on items returned late. Library fines for overdue materials conflicts with our mission to provide equitable access to information, which allows citizens to educate themselves. Fines create a barrier to access, disproportionately so for low-income and vulnerable people who most benefit from library services, and they can result in adversarial relationships between patrons and staff. In many cases, patrons who are ashamed of overdue fines or unable to pay them stop using the library entirely, not only removing their access to written information, but also to the information they receive while participating in library programs. Ultimately, fines are a form of social inequity that hurts our most vulnerable patrons.

GPPL has taken small steps to minimize the impact of fines on our vulnerable patrons, including amnesty days (which resulted in many patrons who had not been using the library feel that they could return) and waiving or collecting partial payments to make them less onerous.

The Library’s values contain inclusion and being a safe space for all. Implementing a fine-free model connects our values statement to practice, and is a part of our role in community development.

Most recently in Alberta, the Edmonton Public Library, Calgary Public Library, Strathcona County Public Library, and Sylvan Lake Public Library have all stopped charging overdue fines during the summer of 2020 as a result of the economic impacts of COVID-19 and to permanently reduce barriers to service.

**Poverty Reduction**

The Library should be conscious of its role in social justice and human rights, striving to open its doors wider and making programs and services more inclusive by reaching out to most adversely affected by poverty and the financial burden of being poor. Library users living in poverty experience libraries and library workers as providers of a safe space~~s~~ and vital conduits to countless social programs. Public libraries can be the foundation in the journey out of poverty for marginalized populations.

Fines are often a financial and psychological barrier. Some people find it too expensive and too risky to borrow materials, and fines specifically target our poorest demographics, who also experience difficulty accessing the library easily, due to accessibility issues, or life requirements of multiple jobs, childcare, and more. Library staff can waive fines on a person-by-person basis, but self-identifying as poor is itself a barrier, as it leaves a negative impact on a person’s self-esteem, or results in the library taking funds that could be better used for necessary essentials, such as food. The barrier of fines may result in patrons not using the library, missing out on the benefits of the shared social space and community that the library builds.

**Cost of Collecting Fines**

The collecting of fines can cost more in staffing resources than what is earned from those fines. In 2019, GPPL collected $11,743 in fines through a collection agency. This resulted in an expense of $19,405 in staffing resources and 10% in service charges ($1,174.30), for a total loss in revenue of $8,836.30.

We currently have 2,208 memberships with borrowing restrictions in place due to fines in excess of $10. That is 2,208 members who cannot borrow from the Library. Those restricted memberships are equivalent to $158,040.88 in outstanding fines.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Age of Member** | **Number blocked** | **Outstanding Fines** |
| Preschool | 141 | $7,369.03 |
| Juvenile | 363 | 17,160.90 |
| Young Adult | 142 | $7,898.02 |
| Adult | 1562 | $125,612.93 |

When fines have been eliminated, we will continue to charge for lost and damaged items.

**Fine Revenue by Year**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** | **2020 YTD** |
| **$** | $58,436.64 | $56,009.31 | $59,484.51 | $57,439.99 | $51,246.12 | $9,861.24 |
| **% of Revenue** | 2.4% | 2.5% | 2.3% | 2.0% | 2.0% | <1% |

Fine revenue is not sustainable with increased use of fine-free digital materials, such as eBooks, eAudiobooks, etc., which are automatically returned at the end of each borrowing period.

**Lost Revenue**

The 2021 budget has been balanced without the fine revenue.

Loss of revenue in larger libraries in Alberta has been recovered through a variety of methods, including replacing unreturned or damaged items less frequently, encouraging donations, fundraising through Friends of the Library groups, and reallocating budgets. GPPL has eliminated the position responsible for administering fines for a savings of almost $9,000 annually.

Fines have been decreasing as a reliable source of revenue as digital materials become more popular. Fines have been especially unreliable in 2020 as libraries across the country waived them during the pandemic lockdown.

The Management Team at GPPL proposes that we adopt a model that includes charging for items not returned to the library, which removes the overdue fine but continues to hold patrons accountable for borrowed materials.

**Process:**

Effective January 1, 2021:

* Set fine codes to $0.00 so no new overdue fines accumulate
* Update notification and billing schedules
* Continue to charge for lost and damaged materials
* Waive any outstanding overdue fines charged before March 13, 2020
* Advertise and promote that the Library is going Overdue Fine Free
* Cards would be blocked if lost and replacement fees are greater than $10
* Cards will only be charged $10 if the item is considered lost (which is a loan period and two renewal periods)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Now | January 2021 |
| Notifications | |
| * 3 days before due date * 1 week past due date * 3 weeks past due date | * 3 days before due date * 1 week past due date * 3 weeks past due date |
| Billing | |
| * 7 weeks past the due date  (billing notice sent) * If items returned, charge a maximum overdue fee of $10.00 | * 7 weeks past due date  (billing notice sent) * If items returned, do not charge a maximum overdue fee of $10.00 |

## **Final Recommendation**

It is evident in the experiences of other libraries that fine free status has increased circulation, enhanced good will among patrons, and incentivized new and inactive users to return to the library. The Management Team at GPPL proposes that the Library Board consider eliminating the collection of overdue fines in order to remove barriers for patrons in accessing library services.

The minimal revenue generated by library fines is vastly outweighed by the membership benefits. While it might seem like removing fines would discourage members from returning items, the opposite has been found to be true. In a study of nine libraries that eliminated fines, there was no marked increase in late returns, longer wait times for holds, or gaps in their collections. Instead, they saw an increase in the number of borrowed items and more active library members (CULC).

Based on evidence that fines are a barrier to accessing library materials and services, and that eliminating fines leads to increases in library use, levels of patron independence, and returned materials, the Management Team of the Grande Prairie Public Library would like the Board’s approval to eliminate fines.

**Resources:**

* CUPE BC Submission to the Poverty Reduction Task Force
* Fine Free Model, Calgary Public Library (page 16 to 22): <https://calgarylibrary.ca/assets/About-the-Library/Library-Board-Documents/Library-Board-Meeting-Agendas/2020-March.pdf#page=16>
* Fine Free Materials – EPL: <https://www2.epl.ca/public-files/board-agendas/docs/2020/June/2020.06.01%20EPL%20Fine%20Free%20Report%20Board.pdf>
* Fine Free Initiative – Burnaby: <https://www.bpl.bc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/general/200521-LibBoardRegAgenda.pdf#page=3>
* San Francisco Public Library. *Long Overdue: Eliminating Fines on Overdue Materials to Improve Access to San Francisco Public Library*. The Financial Justice Project, 2019. <https://sfpl.org/uploads/files/pdfs/commission/Fine-Free-Report011719.pdf>

**Fine-Free**

More than 270 North American libraries have either gone fully or partially fine free. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/member-resources/fine-free-map> (not up to date)

In Canadian libraries, the era of late fees may be headed to the history books: <http://www.pentictonherald.ca/life/national_life/article_e248d9a5-d39b-5382-88e1-b5dfdb44294f.html?fbclid=IwAR1cyLiYEuY93t87oIcWfZgS51x5XBhcRr_rmhiFS_1XM5z2G7i1hxCsLZI>

**Canadian Libraries**

Barrie: <https://www.barrielibrary.ca/about-bpl/library-news/~461-Barrie-Public-Library-Goes-Fine-Free->

Burnaby: <https://www.bpl.bc.ca/goodbye-late-fines>

Calgary: <https://libraryfoundation.ca/fine-free-yyc/>

County of Brant: <https://www.brantlibrary.ca/en/news/fine-free.aspx>

Creston: <https://www.crestonvalleyadvance.ca/news/creston-valley-public-library-eliminates-overdue-fines/>

Cumberland:

Edmonton: <https://www.epl.ca/news/edmonton-public-library-eliminates-late-fees/>

Edwardsburgh Cardinal: <http://www.edcarlibrary.ca/?page_id=43>  
Ft. Saskatchewan: <https://www.fortsaskatchewanrecord.com/news/local-news/fort-saskatchewan-public-library-eliminates-late-fees?fbclid=IwAR13Lg8GwAnOajouk5GjUWRYl58t11b10IbXGNZ7Vmn0qmpeZxYfGgZ83LU>

Halifax: <https://www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca/news/goodbye-fines-hello-library/> *Entire Province of Nova Scotia adopted fine-free status this summer. They are the first province in Canada to adopt fine-free status.*

Innisfil: <https://barrie.ctvnews.ca/innisfil-idealab-and-library-permanently-nixes-overdue-fines-1.5004574>

<https://www.barrietoday.com/local-news/innisfil-library-explains-reasons-for-dropping-fines-on-overdue-books-2703459?fbclid=IwAR0LmMgFxsfO-zw9znPQJIiCyfAxgfd8QwfnLg0HE_NyGPR_Te-uLFsVNAo>  
Kawartha Lakes: <https://lindsayadvocate.ca/kawartha-lakes-library-system-eliminates-late-fines/?fbclid=IwAR3qb0b9VvBro6lDE99Qu3qgnXIoxZaEEBhhf_EcrmOEyC0h3n0cuIdr268>  
Newmarket: <https://www.newmarkettoday.ca/local-news/newmarket-library-cancelling-overdue-fines-for-childrens-items-1879076>  
North Vancouver: <https://www.nsnews.com/community/north-vancouver-city-library-is-no-longer-fining-people-for-overdue-materials-1.24135258>   
PEI: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-libraries-end-late-fees-1.5747925?fbclid=IwAR01nUzJZ93Mcn-0RIQj74i4tQ3mzT8gMQVkNxvoUvWuitt2DlBGWUicb4w> *The second province in Canada to adopt a fine-free model*Pemberton: <https://pemberton.bc.libraries.coop/using-the-library/policies/loan-periods-late-fines/>  
Smithers: <https://smithers.bc.libraries.coop/search-tips/using-the-library/policies/loan-periods-late-fines/>  
Strathcona County: <https://www.sclibrary.ca/content/no-more-overdue-fines>  
Sylvan Lake: https://rdnewsnow.com/2020/09/15/sylvan-lake-library-turfs-overdue-fines/  
Vaughan Public Library: <http://www.vaughanpl.info/services/fees_charges>  
Whistler: <https://www.whistler.ca/media/news/whistler-public-library-discontinue-late-fines>