



438 Park Avenue
Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 1W1

Email: npl@newmarketpl.ca
Website: newmarketpl.ca
Phone: 905-953-5110

Library Board Report

To: Newmarket Public Library Board
From: Tracy Munusami, C.E.O.
Date: November 19, 2022
RE: Fines Free 2023

Key Issue

Newmarket Public Library temporarily suspended fines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many public library boards have permanently removed overdue fines to break down barriers to access.

Recommendation

That the Board receive the report for information;

And That the Library Board approve management's recommendation to eliminate overdue fines on Library material starting in 2023.

Strategic Implications

This initiative aligns with the current strategic plan under Strategic Goal 2: Review policies and procedures to reduce physical and psychological barriers.

Background

The movement in North American public libraries to go fines-free started several years ago. Still, it accelerated in 2020 as most Library Boards removed fines as part of their COVID-19 response to remove barriers to accessing library services. Close to home, the list of libraries in York Region joining the movement is getting longer, including Vaughan, King, East Gwillimbury, and Richmond Hill. These systems are all proudly fine-free. Though an early adopter of eliminating fines on children's material, Newmarket Public Library has not formally gone fine-free.

Discussion

Library staff are reviewing policies and procedures and looking for ways to reduce customer barriers. One way that the Newmarket Public Library can support the community, especially as a recession threatens the Canadian Economy, is to provide equitable access to Library material, regardless of financial situation.

Fines go against the core library value of inclusivity and providing equitable access to Library resources. Library fines disproportionately affect those who cannot access our Online Library from

home. People are not charged overdue fines on the Online Library, but you must have the technology at home to be able to access our Online Library. Those that do not have the luxury of a tablet or smartphone have no option but to check out physical items from the collection and may be subject to fines if they are overdue.

Library fines have slowly decreased yearly because user borrowing trends have shifted to using our Online Library. As a result, the Library has yet to hit its fines revenue targets since 2015. Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, Newmarket Public Library average revenue generation due to fines decreased by 5.3% annually since 2015. Over the last three years, the Library has yet to generate any revenue from fines. As a result, it is becoming increasingly challenging to depend on fines as a source of revenue.

Research suggests that eliminating fines can increase circulation and active cardholders. “Checkouts rose 10% at Salt Lake City Public Library, and the number of new cardholders rose 3.5%. Getting rid of fines brought new people into the Library and allowed previous users to return” (Imagining A Fine-Free Future. Users to return” (Imagining A Fine-Free Future. <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/imagining-fine-free-future/2018>). Close to home, our neighbouring libraries of East Gwillimbury and Bradford West Gwillimbury have seen a decrease in lost library material and an increase in active library card holders since permanently going Fine Free. Six months after going Fine Free, EGPL saw a 41% decrease in lost material and an increase in the circulation of the physical collection.

Removing fines will make the Library a more welcoming space. The punitive system of fines and being blocked can result in negative customer experiences that can impact a person for life. In the survey results from our strategic plan, one customer noted that they had been wrongly charged fines in 1990 and, as a result, is no longer a Library customer today. Another customer said the fines impact their experience because they are on ODSP. Of the 96 survey responses from people who say they experience barriers to accessing the Library, ten say that the fines keep them from coming back.

Financial Implications

Library Staff have been planning on going Fine Free over the past five years and have started slowly reducing revenue expectations from fines. The plan moving forward is to recover the cost of fines through increased revenue from room rentals and a more robust planned giving campaign. The Library will also introduce a “Pay-it-Forward” campaign for people who feel like their fines help to contribute to the Library. They will have the option to make a monetary donation at the service desks. It is also important to note that if the Library no longer collects overdue fines, there will still be replacement costs charged to the customer for lost items.

Final Remarks

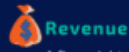
In summary, the impacts of eliminating fines will include growth in active cardholders and circulation and result in a more inclusive and positive customer experience. People will associate taking out library material with a positive experience without the anxiety-inducing weight of punitive fines. Fines represent social inequity issues, and the social impacts outweigh the loss of revenue.

Organizational Costs of Fines



Hidden Costs

While fines are a revenue source for public libraries, the cost of collecting those fines can easily outweigh those revenues.



Revenue

A fine might appear to be a simple source of revenue, but there are **hidden costs** below the surface.



Staff Time

A 10 minute conversation between a frontline library staff member and a patron regarding fines **costs a library \$4.17** in staff wages (based on a pay rate of \$25 an hour.)



Overdue Notices

Paper, envelope, and postage for an overdue notice could **cost as much as \$1.78** a notice. There is also the **staff time** to call patrons with verbal notices, or to generate email notices.



Mental Health

A challenging fines negotiation could require staff to need **time away from the desk** to recover.



Cost of Collecting

Digital fine payments mean **interac fees** for the library. Physical fine payments mean **staff time** to collect and complete deposits.

To collect a **\$5 fine**...

...a 10 minute interaction would cost **\$5.95** in staff wages and a mailed notice alone.

\$5

\$5.95



Staff Morale

Customer Loyalty



/ola

the ontario library association

accessola.com/fines-free-libraries