



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

AGENDA SECTION	WORK SESSION ITEMS
MEETING DATE	JANUARY 3, 2022

ITEM:	Library Board recommendation to eliminate overdue fines for library customers in 2022	
DEPARTMENT:	Library	BY/DATE: Renee Dougherty, Library Director
CITY STRATEGY: <i>(please indicate areas that apply by adding a bold "X" in front of the selected text below)</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Safe Community <input type="checkbox"/> Diverse, Welcoming "Small-Town" Feel		
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent Housing/Neighborhoods		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Equity and Affordability <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strong Infrastructure/Public Services		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Opportunities for Play and Learning <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged, Multi-Generational, Multi-Cultural Population		

BACKGROUND:

On June 23, 2021, the Columbia Heights Library Board recommended the elimination of overdue fines effective January 1, 2022. The 2022 Library Budget anticipates no revenue from fines.

Overdue fines are a monetary penalty imposed on people who return a borrowed library item after its due date. There is no actual cost to the library when an item is returned late. Once a borrowed item is 30 days late, it is considered "lost" and the borrower is billed for the replacement cost of the item. Borrowers are also assessed fines for damaged materials. Fines for lost and damaged items will continue to be assessed to borrowers.

Fine revenue collected has been in decline for the past 10 years. In 2020, fine revenue represented less than one-half of one percent of the total library budget.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Fine Revenue Collected	\$15,521	\$14,786	\$14,391	\$14,459	\$13,118	\$12,277	\$12,049	\$10,661	\$9,344	\$4,403

Fines, and the fear of incurring fines, create a barrier to using the library for some cardholders. The goal of the Board is to increase utilization of the city library. The Board also suggested that the library take an active role in getting books and learning resources to students in a district with low reading proficiency, limited access to libraries in school buildings, and no professional school library/media specialists on staff.

In suggesting that the Library go overdue fine free, the Board also cited the difference in median household income between the city and the county as a whole. According to the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, median household income for Columbia Heights (2015 -2019) was \$57,882 compared to \$82,175 for Anoka County.

As of September 10, 2021, there were 13,721 active Columbia Heights library cards. Of those cards, 3,580 adults or organizations had bill balances on their accounts and 1,110 of those cards were "blocked." Cards that are blocked cannot check out materials when their balance exceeds \$10. There were 1,121 juvenile cards with balances and 402 of them were blocked.

Libraries throughout Minnesota have eliminated overdue fines including Duluth, Hibbing, Stillwater, Brainerd, Rochester, Worthington and all of the cities in Hennepin, Ramsey, and Washington counties. In addition, St. Cloud, Elk River, Northfield, Red Wing, Owatonna, and all cities in Dakota County have eliminated fines for youth. In 2019, there were almost 3 million people with library cards in the state of Minnesota; half of them use libraries that have eliminated

overdue fines. More cities and counties are eliminating fines every day; in December, Dakota County announced the elimination of fines for juveniles.

On November 17, 2021, I met with Anoka library staff and a consultant from Sirsi Dynix, the integrated library system software vendor, to determine how to allow Columbia Heights to eliminate fines while the county retains them. Sirsi Dynix confirmed that Columbia Heights could eliminate fines independently of the county and outlined the steps necessary to enable this functionality, namely changing the system map and circulation rules within the software and defining the libraries, user profiles, and item types to be excluded from fines.

The Library Board requests Council consideration of the recommendation to eliminate overdue fines at the January 10, 2022, meeting.

ATTACHMENT(S):