

Springfield plans to eliminate library fines

Megan Banta Eugene Register-Guard
USA TODAY NETWORK

Springfield plans to join dozens of other libraries across Oregon in eliminating late fines.

And as part of a five-year levy renewed in 2020, Eugene has eliminated late fees for children and teen books as it seeks to increase access and deliver on other promises.

Libraries have pivoted to serve the public more equitably and be a community center as the coronavirus pandemic has impacted many financially and socially, directors told officials during recent meetings.

"Since the library closed in March of 2020 because of the coronavirus, we've not been charging library fines," said Emily David, director of Springfield Public Library.

Eugene's libraries have been a "lifeline for the community," said Will O'Hearn the city's director of library services.

"On the first day we opened the library, fully, physically back in August of 2020, we had someone who couldn't access their bank account since March of 2020 ... and we also had an unhoused individual share they were so relieved to be able to check back with their family online because they'd only been able to check in once or twice since March of 2020," O'Hearn said.

Officials praised the libraries, with Springfield officials largely supporting the library advisory board's wish to go fine-free and Eugene officials giving staff a "choir of kudos" for their work during the pandemic.



Lindsay Selser checks out books she reserved in advance from the Eugene Public Library with her children Boon and Willa Jackson. LOUIS KRAUSS

Fines 'undermine a library's purpose'

A lot of libraries around Oregon and across the country have stopped charging fines, David said.

In fact, around half of the state's public libraries have gone fine-free, said Clyde Miller, a member of the library advisory board who served as chair until the beginning of the year. That includes the Fern Ridge library district, the Lane library district in Creswell and the Siuslaw public library district.

One fundamental characteristic of libraries is to create equitable access to basic information, Miller said.

Because of that, he said, while fines are common, they "actually undermine

a library's purpose."

Fines cause inequity and loss of patrons, materials and availability of items and lead people to have antagonistic relationships with the library, he said.

There's a higher risk of people not returning items with fines, he said, and "even when items are returned, fees make them come back slower, not faster."

Fines account for less than 1% of the library's budget, Miller added, and it actually costs more in staff time. It takes the equivalent of one-quarter of a full-time staff position in time to deal with fines, he said.

See FINES, Page 2C

Adam Duvernay Eugene Register-Guard
USA TODAY NETWORK

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Portland District will host an informational session next week on changes to its system of dams to better preserve endangered species while maintaining the dams' operational missions.

Engineers are considering major changes that may impact operations and maintenance of the Willamette Valley System, a series of flood control dams and reservoirs regulating local river systems. The changes would correct some of the issues caused by the dams, such as blocking the spawning grounds of Chinook salmon and other fish.

The Corps is developing an environmental impact statement, a document outlining the impacts of a proposed project. The Corps is inviting the public to a listening session on its progress ahead of a public input period when the draft document is ready in the fall.

The Corps is required by court order to adjust operations at its dams on Willamette River tributaries in order to better facilitate fish passage up- and downriver. In 2020, a judge ruled the Corps' dam and reservoir operations violated the Endangered Species Act.

A ruling in September required the Corps to take immediate action at Cougar and Foster dams, including a deeper-than-normal winter drawdown of Cougar Reservoir. The ruling also required the Corps to study and take further steps to alleviate fish migration issues.

Corps Portland District spokesman Tom Conning said developing an environmental impact statement is a process separate from court injunctions but tackles related issues.

See DAMS, Page 2C