



City of Tualatin

CITY OF TUALATIN Staff Report

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
THROUGH: Sherilyn Lombos, City Manager
FROM: Jerianne Thompson, Library Director
DATE: August 24, 2020

SUBJECT:
WCCLS Fine-Free Proposal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Tualatin Library is a member of Washington County Cooperative Library Services (WCCLS). WCCLS and its member library directors recommend the elimination of overdue fines for library materials and the waiver of past overdue fines. WCCLS currently charges \$.25 per day fine for adult and teen materials that are overdue. Fines and fees are not charged to punish patrons but to encourage the on-time return of materials. However, no current data shows that overdue fines achieve this goal. Instead, evidence from the past decade shows that overdue fines keep people away from the library.

WCCLS and its member library directors propose the elimination of overdue fines for library materials to enhance equity in our communities. Taking this action supports the Council's 2030 Vision of "an inclusive community that promotes access, diversity, and equity in creating a high quality of life for everyone," as well as the Washington County's Board of Commissioners' resolution "to [dismantle] long-standing systems, programs, policies, and practices that may have historically created obstacles to the success of people of color, members of ethnic communities, and any marginalized group," and strategic goals for WCCLS and Tualatin Library.

Fines disproportionately affect communities that have income insecurity or individuals with low income. Research shows that communities of color are more likely to be impacted by unpaid library fees and more likely to have a suspended library card because of unpaid fees. Studies also show that patrons accrue overdue fines at similar rates but those experiencing economic hardship have a harder time paying. The mission of the public library is to provide equitable access to everyone. By eliminating overdue fines we are removing a significant barrier to library access.

- When San Francisco conducted analysis of the impact of late fees, they found that neighborhoods that exhibited the highest level of economic stress were also the locations impacted the most by library fines.
- In San Diego, nearly half of patrons whose accounts were blocked by late fees lived in two of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

Other benefits of eliminating overdue fines are that it increases access to library materials, improves staff efficiencies, and improves libraries' relationships with patrons. Many library systems throughout the country have taken the move to eliminate overdue fines in recent years. From their experiences, we can learn the following:

- Patrons will still return their library materials on time. Some systems saw late returns decrease after fines were eliminated.
- Eliminating overdue fines may lead to increases in library card adoption and library usage. Other library systems which have eliminated overdue fines have experienced these positive results.

Library patrons will still be responsible for materials not returned to the library and will be charged for the replacement cost.

The Tualatin Library Advisory Committee voted at their August 4, 2020, meeting to support this proposal. The WCCLS Executive Board will vote on this proposal at their September meeting. The proposal requires the approval of the Washington County Board of Commissioners, who will consider it this fall.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Because of the COVID-library closures, WCCLS temporarily stopped assessing overdue fines in March. This will continue at least through the end of September.

Library fine revenues have been decreasing in recent years. Part of the reason for this is that WCCLS discontinued fines on juvenile items in June 2017. Additionally, the growth in ebook users has led to a decrease in fines charged.

In consultation with the Finance Director, we believe we can absorb the loss of revenue caused by this proposal. Last fiscal year, Tualatin collected approximately \$17,500 in library fines. This represents less than 1% of our budget.

This proposal also calls for waiving overdue fines currently on patron accounts. For Tualatin, 9,233 people would have \$119,796 in fines waived from their accounts. The Library is excited about the possibility of welcoming back 845 patrons whose accounts are currently blocked by fines.

At the countywide level, 111,487 people would have \$1,481,920 in fines waived from their accounts. 12,200 people will have library access restored.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Fine-free fact sheet
- Recommendation to Eliminate Overdue Fines
- Presentation