

## **Fine Free - Plum Borough Community Library**

*Approved: February 16, 2021*

### **Rationale**

Libraries throughout the country, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and libraries in Allegheny County have moved to a fine free system. In the library, fines disproportionately affect economically disadvantaged residents who cannot afford to pay them. Due to their inability to pay, patrons who have accrued fines are less likely to return. Additionally, fines impact users who have barriers to transportation as well. Removing fines, removes a barrier of access for patrons to use the library.

The expected outcome of removing fines is more customers will check out items, more users will sign up for library cards and the library will welcome back people to using the library who may have previously used the library. This will allow the library to regain old patrons and gain new library card holders. Additionally, it will be a way for the library to engage with the community in a positive way.

In Allegheny County about one third of the libraries are fine free and many have not charged fines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two of our direct neighbors in Penn Hills and Monroeville are fine free libraries, along with many libraries in the East Region of the county.

Nationally libraries in Salt Lake City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland and countless others have moved fine free. At the Chicago Public Library, when they announced they were moving toward a fine free system, returns of items increased 240%, as the stigma of having late fees was removed.

It is expected for staff to have more positive interactions with patrons, improving the library's customer service.

### **FAQs about fine free**

#### **If there are no fines, can people keep their items forever?**

No, all items will still have a due date. If items have a hold on it, they will not be automatically renewed. All items will be renewed automatically up to 6 times if they do not have a hold on it. Patrons who have not returned items will be charged for the cost of the item.

#### **Won't this negatively impact the library's budget?**

For 2021, fines will generate less than 1% of annual budget and fine revenue has been decreasing each year with the increase of eResources and automatic renewals. The library will explore additional fundraisers to help supplement the operating budget.

This year, the library has \$1,000 budgeted for fines which will be supplemented by additional fundraising revenue.

### **If patrons are not charged overdue fines will items still be returned in a timely manner?**

It is the expectation that the majority of items checked out will still be returned within a few days of the due date, regardless of an overdue fine. Most library patrons are responsible users and will continue to return items on or near the due date. Other libraries that have made this change have not seen a significant change in the rate of items that are overdue.

### **What is the difference between a fine and fee?**

Fines: Funds owed for overdue items

Fees: Funds owed for replacement items, collection agency charges and other manual charges.

### **How will people be notified if they have items that are overdue?**

- Three-day advanced courtesy email
- First overdue notice is sent at two weeks via email
- Second overdue notice is sent at four weeks
- A paper bill for material replacement is sent at six weeks

### **Will the library continue to use a collection agency to receive billed items?**

No, we will no longer use the collection agency. Once a month the library will send out letters encouraging patrons to return their billed items and explain that it is the priority of the library to have our items returned to us and there will be no fines charged on these items.

### **How will this impact other libraries?**

We will waive fines that have accrued at other libraries, but if patrons borrow items and return items at Plum Library, they will not accrue fines. Fines are generated at the point of check out. Many libraries in the East region are already fine free, including our two direct neighbors – Penn Hills and Monroeville.

### **Will we refund patrons who have paid fines?**

We will not refund patrons and cannot retroactively apply to paid fines.

### **When will items be due?**

We will change our loan rules to allow all items in the library will circulate for three weeks. Previously DVDs and Launchpads were one week. This is designed to make it easy for patrons and staff to know when items are due back.