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County of Roanoke



Memo

To: Roanoke County Board of Supervisors

From: Laurie Gearheart, Director of Finance & Management Services

Date: April 18, 2022

Subject: FY 2023 Budget Memo #6: Elimination of Library Late Fee Fines

This memo is in response to questions from the Board of Supervisors regarding the elimination of Library Late Fees Fines during the budget work session held on April 12, 2022.

Background

Ordinance 052510-12 which was adopted on May 25, 2010 amended the Code of Roanoke County, Virginia Chapter 2, Article 1, Section 2-5 to set fees for overdue fines for library items including books and video materials. This ordinance also set fines and fees for lost and damaged items.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Roanoke County Public Library, as well as all of the libraries in the Roanoke Valley Library consortium, suspended late fees for overdue items. This decision was made due to the difficulty patrons had in returning items to libraries which were closed or offered limited service, and the realization many people in the workforce were temporarily or permanently laid off.

Current Library Late Fee Fines

Current Library Late Fee Fines are shown below:

Overdue Fines for Adult or Children's Book or Material	\$0.20 per item per day
Overdue Fines for "In Demand" New or High Circulation Books	\$1.00 per item per day
Overdue Fines for Video Materials including DVDs	\$1.00 per item per day
\$5.00 maximum fine per item. \$1.00 maximum fine per children's book or material. A person shall be denied library privileges if \$10.00 in fines, fees, or charges have accrued or if 25 or more items are overdue.	

Revenue Collected FY 2017 through FY 2022

Library Late Fee Fines are recorded in a revenue account titled Library Book Recovered Costs and includes both late fees and fees and charges for lost or damaged items. The history of revenue collected since FY 2017 is as follows:

Fiscal Year	Library Book Recovered Costs
FY 2017	\$ 164,793
FY 2018	\$ 138,170
FY 2019	\$ 119,627
FY 2020	\$ 79,346
FY 2021	\$ 8,274

As noted earlier, Library Late Fee Fines have been suspended since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in late FY 2020 which affected the revenue collected. Revenues were already trending down due to changes in borrowing habits including the increased popularity of ebooks which do not incur late fees as access is simply lost after the check-out period ends. Some revenue is still received for lost or damaged items each year which is estimated to be approximately \$20,000 annually.

Lost or Damaged Items

An item is marked lost when it has not been returned to the library on the 45th day past its due date. When an item is damaged that circulation of the item is not possible, the patron pays for the item as if it is lost. If an item contains parts that are damaged such as a DVD case or disc from an audiobook, the patron pays for the part to be replaced, which is typically between \$5.00 to \$8.00.

If a lost item is new or a high demand item, the library replaces it immediately. If the item is older, of low interest, or not otherwise critical to the collection, it may not be replaced, or it may be out of print. If a patron returns an item marked lost, they will only be responsible for paying a service fee of \$5.00. Library cards are blocked for patrons who have \$10.00 in accrued charges. This serves as an effective tool for receiving items marked as lost.

The collection rate for lost items since 2018 has improved when the Roanoke County Public Libraries reopened in the fall of 2020 as shown below

Year	Lost Item Return Rate
2018	33.35%
2019	30.30%
2020	42.15%
2021	56.28%

The suspension of library late fee fines has led to an increased rate of recovery of lost items. Since 2018, the number of patrons who pay for lost items without returning them has decreased as the collection rate of returned lost items has increased as shown below:

Year	Patrons who paid for lost items
2018	190
2019	202
2020	89
2021	98

Summary

Public libraries both locally and nationwide have reported success following the elimination of late fee fines. Libraries that eliminate late fee fines see a higher rate of returned items and fewer lost or damaged items. Many libraries have also seen increased visits, higher circulation, and increases in the number of library cards issued.

Overdue fees can serve as a barrier to library resources as vulnerable populations, including children, who have limited access to the internet, digital devices, and transportation are most at risk of accruing late fees.

Staff recommends eliminating Library Late Fee Fines. This change will be presented to the Board of Supervisors with the Budget Resolution on May 10, 2022 along with changes to other fees and adoption of the annual Fee Compendium.

- cc: Richard Caywood, County Administrator
- Rebecca Owens, Deputy County Administrator
- Doug Blount, Assistant County Administrator
- Toni Cox, Acting Director of Library Services
- Steve Elliott, Budget Administrator