



Camarillo Board of Library Trustees

AGENDA REPORT

Date: October 23, 2024

To: Honorable President and Trustees

From: Greg Ramirez, City Manager

Submitted by: Mandy Nasr, Library Director

Subject: Library Board of Trustees Policy 13.03 – Circulation Policy

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, due to the State of Emergency (COVID-19), Camarillo Public Library temporarily stopped collecting fines and fees. Since then, all peer local libraries in Ventura County, including Moorpark, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Oxnard and Ventura County, have eliminated overdue fines permanently. Throughout the United States, libraries are recognizing that fines for overdue materials returned late are a barrier to the public accessing library materials. The Camarillo Public Library prides itself in creating a comfortable and safe environment for life-long learning at no cost to patrons. On July 25, 2024, the Policy Committee provided direction to the Library Director to eliminate overdue late fines permanently and eliminate outstanding balances for previously accrued late fines. On September 26, 2024, the Policy Committee recommended sending the revised Circulation Policy to the Camarillo Library Board for approval.

DISCUSSION

Recommended edits to Library Board of Trustees Policy 13.03 - Circulation Policy are provided in Attachment 1. The proposed edits remove all references to fines being collected for overdue materials, as presented to the Policy Committee on July 25, 2024, and with any additional revisions directed. At the September 26, 2024, meeting, the Policy Committee reviewed and recommended the proposed revised policy for the Board's adoption.

In Fiscal Year 2018-19, Camarillo Public Library collected a total of \$75,966 in fines and fees, including \$66,926 in overdue fines. These funds represent 3.5% of the library's budget. To date, no action has been taken to reimplement fines since the State of Emergency (COVID-19). Camarillo Public Library has been operating for three years without benefit of this revenue and has an outstanding balance of \$216,299 in late fines. The balance has been incurred over the years, with the oldest dating back to 2010. It is

not uncommon for libraries to have outstanding balances that remain unpaid for many years and it will be difficult to recoup this balance after a long hiatus. Additionally, fines are increasingly becoming a less reliable source of revenue especially as patrons seek out more offerings from digital platforms, such as Libby and Hoopla, which have grown in popularity at Camarillo Public Library and do not have fines associated with them due to their automatic return.

Recent studies have shown that fine free libraries are more likely to recover items, thereby minimizing the need to expend funds on replacement items. Chicago libraries reportedly saw a 240-percent increase in book returns within the first month of going fine free and observed an increase of 400 more card renewals compared to the year before. When Los Angeles Public Library gave an amnesty to patrons with overdue materials, they saw the return of 64,633 items and 8,000 new library cards. During that campaign, around 13,700 delinquent library users had their cards unblocked.

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

Overdue ***fines*** are the daily charges applied to items not returned by their due date.

A library ***fee*** represents the charges applied for lost, damaged or unreturned materials.

Although fine free will do away with overdue library fines, it will not eliminate fees for lost or damaged materials. Once an item is deemed lost (after 42 days), the library user account associated with the lost item becomes blocked and a replacement fee is charged to the account. The library user is then unable to check out any materials until the item is returned or the fee is paid.

According to the 2020 Census, Camarillo is made up of 24,122 households with an estimated total population of 72,848 people. In Fiscal Year 2022-23, Camarillo Public Library issued 5,756 new library cards and checked out 469,333 physical items. Implementing a Fine Free Library Program at Camarillo Public Library may achieve the following benefits:

Strong and healthier communities: Eliminating fines creates strong and healthier communities because people can access the materials needed to pursue educational, career, family and life goals. A fine free policy will encourage prior library users to return and attract new users to experience library materials and programs.

Late fines are not effective: The American Library Association fundamentally opposes the creation of economic barriers to access services and resources by publicly funded libraries. According to research from Urban Libraries Council, fines do not encourage patrons to return materials. In many cases, people simply stop using the library altogether, which distracts from the overall community benefit of having a library. In addition, fines discourage use of the library materials and tend to disproportionately impact the most vulnerable populations. It also has an unintended consequence of patrons not attending

library programs and events.

Staff engagement: Staff at fine free libraries have reported that they spend more time engaging with their patrons and strengthen their community impact by focusing on programs and customer service. According to City of Camarillo's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Year 2023-24, it is the goal of the City Council to increase community engagement and effective communication with the community. Instead of spending time discussing an overdue fine that could lead to a negative interaction, staff could instead spend time engaging with community members through quality outreach programs which in turn leads to more positive interactions with library users.

Positive Image: Camarillo Public Library users have become accustomed to not paying any late fines for three years. Camarillo's cost of living has gone up to 2.5% since 2023 in Camarillo. Implementing overdue fines now for library patrons could create a negative public image for Camarillo Public Library and the City of Camarillo. Camarillo Public Library patrons may prefer to visit other local libraries in Ventura County that have implemented fine free policies. The Camarillo Public Library Director has spoken to several local libraries that have been fine free for over two years, including Simi Valley, Ventura County Library, Thousand Oaks Public Library and Calabasas Public Library. Each library director reported that their fine free program has been successful at their location, and they have had no concerns with the return of materials.

Although going "fine free" eliminates overdue library fines, it does not eliminate fees for lost or damaged materials. The Library will send up to three courtesy overdue notices to a patron, via email or text message, in the following sequence: 7 days, 14 days, and 21 days after an item is due. A patron's account is blocked from checking out materials if the item is not returned 28 days after an item is due. At 42 days, the item is considered lost, and a bill is sent to the patron requesting that the item be returned. The account remains blocked until the fees are paid, or the materials are returned.

Pre-pandemic, the City of Camarillo used a collection agency, Unique, to recover overdue fines and lost materials. The library would send accounts to Unique for lost and damaged items when accounts reach over \$50 after 60 days. Between March 2019 – February 2020, Unique helped to recover \$29,423.21 in cash and materials. Currently, Unique has pricing of \$9.85 per account submitted to their system.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact because the City has not received this revenue for the past three years, it was not budgeted.

CEQA DETERMINATIONS

Not applicable

RECOMMENDATION

Recommend approval of the revised Circulation Policy.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Library Board of Trustees Policy 13.03 - Circulation Policy (Redline)

REFERENCE MATERIALS – AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW AT CITY HALL

None