

City Library eliminates overdue fines

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The North Vancouver City Library is excited to announce the elimination of fines for overdue materials effective immediately.

The move was approved by the Library Board of Trustees in late 2019 and incorporated into City Library's 2020 budget. City Council approved the library's annual budget in their meeting April 27.

"Libraries are accessible, welcoming, community hubs where residents of all ages can go to learn, connect and share experiences," said City of North Vancouver Mayor Linda Buchanan. "The library's decision to reduce financial barriers supports Council's work to make our City a vibrant, inclusive and connected community for everyone."

City Library is one of the first in the Lower Mainland to adopt the practice of removing overdue fines.

"We know charging fines disproportionately affects our users, especially families with lower household incomes and those with young children," Chief Librarian Deb Hutchison Koep said.

The move comes at a critical time for the community, she added.

"The ongoing pandemic has really highlighted the need for libraries to be at the forefront of combating social isolation by providing access to information and technology," she said.

The Library Board of Trustees said the overwhelming trend and supporting research published in the last few years made the decision relatively straightforward.

"Naturally we were worried that people would just not return books," Board Chair Leane Neufeld said.

"But research has shown that this is not the case — most libraries that have implemented this

practice see materials returned within one week of the due date."

The total revenue from fines was less than 1 per cent of the library's annual operating budget last year. Revenue from fines has also been steadily decreasing with the availability of electronic resources, such as ebooks, and tools like automatic due date reminders.

Libraries operate in a unique sphere of equitability and mutual respect between neighbours. It was vastly more important to support that idea than collect money originally intended to be a deterrent for lateness, Neufeld said.

"We don't want the stigma of owing fines to affect how people use library services. Our library is central to the community in so many ways, that eliminating one more barrier to equitable access was an obvious ethical and strategic decision."

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— Mayor Linda Buchanan

Frequently asked questions

Why is City Library going fine-free?

Studies show that overdue fines are a barrier to access and have a disproportionate effect on low-income households, especially those with children, and other vulnerable populations.

Elimination of overdue fines is an international trend. Libraries in Canada, the United States and internationally are moving to eliminate overdue fines. Most recently, Chicago Public Library became the largest U.S. public library system to go fine free Oct. 1, 2019. In British Columbia, 15 library systems are already fine-free, and at least 11 other systems are actively moving in this direction.

Studies and practice show that libraries that eliminate fines see an overall increase in material circulation and library membership.

How will you get materials back on time?

While the purpose of overdue fines is to encourage timely return of library materials, evidence suggests fines are not effective, and libraries that have eliminated overdue fines have experienced no discernible change in overdue rates.

City Library will promote timely returns with email reminders and notifications instead of daily fines. Should items become significantly overdue, the system will block additional borrowing and issue bills for replacement.

What is the financial impact?

There is a misconception that fines represent a significant percentage of a library's annual operating budget. In fact, revenue from overdue materials and fines represents about 1 per cent of NVCL's annual operating budget. Further, fines are expensive to collect and process: for every \$1 we collect, it costs us 66¢ in direct costs.

Revenue from fines has been decreasing steadily due to changing use and improved online services; the City Library's budgeted revenue from fines has dropped by nearly 50 per cent since 2013.

The Library will continue to charge for lost or damaged library materials as well as services like public printing and copying, faxing and private room bookings.

Will due dates for materials change? What about holds?

There will be no changes to due dates. There are no fees to place holds, but the \$1 charge for non-pickup of holds will continue to be charged (this \$1 fee is currently waived during the closure of the library due to the pandemic).

What about interlibrary loans?

There will be no changes to charges for interlibrary loans.

What if I have outstanding fines?

We want you back! If you have overdue fines on your account, come talk to staff and we will help you make a clean start. Staff help is available by calling [604-998-3450](tel:604-998-3450) or emailing info@nvcl.ca.