

Neenah Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting

Wednesday, January 15, 2020, 4:00 p.m., Carpenter Conference Room

240 E. Wisconsin Avenue, Neenah, Wisconsin

1. Call to order
2. Public questions & comments
3. Library board consideration of public questions & comments
4. Minutes:
 - a. Library Board meeting 12-18-19 2 – 3 Action item
5. Library statistical reports 4 - 8 Information item
6. Bills for consideration Handout Action item
7. Director’s report 9 Information item
8. Business for consideration 9+
 - a. Monthly financial reports Information item
 - b. Election of 2020 officers Action item
 - c. Finance & Personnel Committee member Action item
 - d. Fine-free libraries Discussion item
 - e. Collection agency fee Discussion item
 - f. Transfer of Trust Funds Action item
 - g. Yekta Room furnishings Action item
 - h. Deposit collections Discussion item
 - i. Library Legislative Day Information item
9. Reports:
 - Winnebago County representative
 - Neenah City Council representative
 - Neenah Joint School District representative
10. Announcements and future agenda items
11. Next regularly scheduled meeting time and date: Wednesday, February 19, 2020, 4:00 p.m.
12. Adjournment

Inspiring ideas ♦ Enriching lives ♦ Creating community ♦ Celebrating literacy

Everyone is welcome to participate in library programs, events, and activities, attend library board meetings, and utilize library services and resources. If accommodations are needed, please contact the Library’s information desk by phone at 920-886-6315 or by email at library@neenahlibrary.org, or contact the City’s ADA Coordinator by phone at 920-886-6106 or by email at attorney@ci.neenah.wi.us. Notifying us at least 48 hours in advance will allow us time to address your request. Thank you.

Neenah Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes – December 18, 2019

Call to order

With Rickman in the chair, the Neenah Public Library Board of Trustees meeting was called to order at 4:01 p.m. in the Aylward Conference Room. Members present: Beth Irish, Carol Codner, Tami Erickson (Aldermanic representative), Randy Fieldhack, Angela Greselin (Teen representative), and Jenn McMahon (Neenah Joint School District Representative).

Members excused: Merry Whipple, George Scherck (Winnebago County representative), and Lisa Hemes.

Also present: Gretchen Raab, director, Nancy Baird, circulation services manager, Katrina Wulff, youth services manager, and Nikki Winiacki.

Public questions & comments

Introduction of Nikki Winiacki. Council will vote on Winiacki's appointment to the Library Board at the December 18, 2019 Council meeting.

Minutes

On motion of Erickson, seconded by Fieldhack, the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the library board meeting of November 20, 2019.

Statistical Reports

Annual circulation of physical materials is down 4% for November; electronic material circulation is up 14% over last year and up 43% over 2017; total circulation, which includes electronic materials, was down 3%. Reference questions are up 5% over last year. Programming is up 5% over last year; 14% over 2017. Program attendance is up 25% over last year—a record number of people attended library programs in 2019: 45,119.

Bills for Consideration

On motion of Fieldhack, seconded by Codner, the Board unanimously approved payment of the bills.

Director's report

Raab noted that donations in memory of Dr. Cullen Henshaw have reached \$5,000.

Raab informed the Board that management staff have created an Emergency Response Committee to update and streamline procedures in various emergencies. The Manager on Duty, (MOD), will carry a library cell phone and will promptly respond to all requests for assistance.

Raab noted that First Amendment Audits are being conducted in public buildings. (First Amendment Audits are a form of activism in the United States designed to test the rights of an individual to film in a public space.) Library staff have received direction on handling videotaping by individuals/organizations not affiliated with the Library.

Department Reports

Circulation Services: Baird reported that a new Circulation Services Casual employee was hired and starts January 7th. She also noted that patrons appreciate the Friends' book sale shelf.

Wulff noted that a record number of new books were donated to the "Give a Kid a Book" collection (737). The Brigade was very thankful for the donation. Wulff reported that Youth staff did an informal

play-space study Dec 2-6 and found that an average of 100 people (children/parents) per day were using the baking-themed play area.

Monthly Financial Reports

Raab went over the revenue and expenditures, which remain on target for this time of year.

Nominating Committee 2020

Rickman appointed Irish to the Nominating Committee.

Qualified Charitable Distributions

Raab reported on her findings regarding donations to public libraries vs 501(c)(3) organizations. City Attorney Godlewski advised that a disclaimer be included with acknowledgements/receipts: Donors should consult a tax advisor/attorney/accountant/IRS to confirm that a donation meets their specific needs and to ensure that the donor receives the maximum benefit of the donation.

Library Usage Study

Wulff presented a report of the library use study conducted on Tuesday evenings in September, October, and November. Graphs highlighted the popular study areas, group work at tables, and use of devices. Findings confirmed staff expectations.

Usage Statistics

Baird distributed data and graphs created from the new door counter program. She pointed out the busier times of day and days of the week for the month of November.

Next regularly scheduled meeting

Wednesday, January 15, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.

Adjournment

On motion of Erickson, seconded by Codner, the Library Board adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Raab
Library director

CIRCULATION		Dec-19	Dec-18	Dec-17	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017	YTD 2019	YTD 2018	YTD 2017	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017
Books	Adult	12,288	12,233	11,850	0%	3%	4%	166,950	166,155	163,860	0%	1%	2%
	Teen	957	1,410	1,499	-32%	-6%	-36%	16,857	21,412	21,594	-21%	-1%	-22%
	Youth	16,777	15,549	15,084	8%	3%	11%	264,603	258,486	261,549	2%	-1%	1%
Audio Books	Adult	959	1,073	1,083	-11%	-1%	-11%	13,298	14,628	15,048	-9%	-3%	-12%
	Teen	31	31	28	0%	11%	11%	490	510	830	-4%	-39%	-41%
	Youth	426	350	395	22%	-11%	8%	7,129	5,908	6,180	21%	-4%	15%
DVDs	Adult	14,850	16,014	17,922	-7%	-11%	-17%	194,338	207,671	227,835	-6%	-9%	-15%
	Teen	5	633	1,016	-99%	-38%	-100%	69	14,148	20,269	-100%	-30%	-100%
	Youth	3,225	4,038	4,234	-20%	-5%	-24%	53,031	60,561	61,311	-12%	-1%	-14%
Music CDs	Adult	1,726	1,884	2,658	-8%	-29%	-35%	21,619	27,522	36,518	-21%	-25%	-41%
	Teen	0	0	0	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	0	1	8	-100%	-88%	-100%
	Youth	213	193	246	10%	-22%	-13%	3,499	4,093	5,503	-15%	-26%	-36%
Digital Books	Adult	450	586	539	-23%	9%	-17%	7,016	7,423	7,362	-5%	1%	-5%
	Teen	16	17	12	-6%	42%	33%	268	287	417	-7%	-31%	-36%
	Youth	547	122	89	348%	37%	515%	4,304	2,425	2,395	77%	1%	80%
Magazines	Adult	1,258	1,469	1,654	-14%	-11%	-24%	20,613	22,300	22,314	-8%	0%	-8%
	Teen	11	32	34	-66%	-6%	-68%	240	496	465	-52%	7%	-48%
	Youth	65	118	86	-45%	37%	-24%	1,426	1,329	1,459	7%	-9%	-2%
Other (games, kits)	Adult	444	199	231	123%	-14%	92%	3,962	2,392	1,804	66%	33%	120%
	Teen	1	0	0	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	14	7	24	100%	-71%	-42%
	Youth	350	289	313	21%	-8%	12%	4,790	3,636	3,452	32%	5%	39%
Physical Materials Subtot:		54,599	56,240	58,973	-3%	-5%	-7%	784,516	821,390	860,197	-4%	-5%	-9%
Electronic Circulation													
	Audiobooks	3,058	2,350	1,630	30%	44%	88%	35,070	27,978	21,495	25%	30%	63%
	eBooks	3,672	3,530	3,174	4%	11%	16%	45,665	43,355	35,633	5%	0	28%
	Video	110	8	14	1275%	-43%	686%	943	85	111	1009%	-23%	750%
	Music	46			#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	394			#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
	Electronic Materials Subto	6,840	5,888	4,818	16%	22%	42%	81,678	71,418	57,239	14%	25%	43%
TOTAL CIRCULATION		61,439	62,128	63,791	-1%	-3%	-4%	866,194	892,808	917,436	-3%	-3%	-6%

WEBSITE & COMPUTER USAGE

WiFi distinct clients*	2,803	2,807	2,768	0%	1%	1%	40,046	38,946	35,452	3%	10%	13%
Pharos usage	1,315	1,400	1,732	-6%	-19%	-24%	18,496	21,472	24,209	-14%	-11%	-24%

	Dec-19	Dec-18	Dec-17	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017	YTD 2019	YTD 2018	YTD 2017	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017
Internet usage/number of	967	1,007	1,219	-4%	-17%	-21%	13,270	15,110	16,763	-12%	-10%	-21%
Website sessions	13,684	11,820	13,019	16%	-9%	5%	178,278	161,197	181,175	11%	-11%	-2%
*Daily average	206	208	201	-1%	3%	2%						

QUESTIONS ANSWERED	Dec-19	Dec-18	Dec-17	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017	YTD 2019	YTD 2018	YTD 2017	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017
Adult Dept.												
Reference/Research	2,107	2,509	2,434	-16%	3%	-13%	37,306	34,761	37,142	7%	-6%	0%
Directional/Rule/Policy	1,521	1,550	1,198	-2%	29%	27%	23,271	22,471	14,934	4%	50%	56%
Circulation Dept.												
Reference/Research	471	522	521	-10%	0%	-10%	6,953	8,129	7,387	-14%	10%	-6%
Directional/Rule/Policy	3,022	2,623	2,250	15%	17%	34%	45,102	41,801	37,292	8%	12%	21%
Youth Dept.												
Reference/Research	717	767	755	-7%	2%	-5%	16,665	15,741	17,853	6%	-12%	-7%
Directional/Rule/Policy	454	466	432	-3%	8%	5%	10,390	11,802	10,239	-12%	15%	1%
TOTAL REFERENCE	3,295	3,798	3,710	-13%	2%	-11%	60,924	58,631	62,382	4%	-6%	-2%
MISCELLANEOUS												
Book Club-to-Go Kits	13	13	10	0%	30%	30%	187	199	183	-6%	9%	2%
Bookshuttle Bags	17	28	24	-39%	17%	-29%	159	183	150	-13%	22%	6%
Customer Count	16,830	12,349	16,610	36%	-26%	1%	106,043	269,089	290,650	-61%	-7%	-64%
SelfCheck % of Checkout	45%	49%	51%	-6%	-5%	-11%	49%	51%	54%	-4%	-6%	-9%
Teacher Packs	12	14	19	-14%	-26%	-37%	275	245	234	12%	5%	18%
Volunteer Hours Worked	276077.5	423	359	65167%	18%	76802%	280,223	5,095	6,157	5400%	-17%	4451%
Meeting rooms	367	320	330	15%	-3%	11%	5,420	4,804	4,475	13%	7%	21%
RECEIPTS												
Fines & Misc. Fees	\$1,378	\$5,501	\$1,594	-75%	245%	-14%	\$27,164	\$30,049	\$27,597	-10%	9%	-2%
Copier/Printer Fees	\$1,322	\$1,167	\$1,803	13%	-35%	-27%	\$15,446	\$14,474	\$15,478	7%	-6%	0%
Lost/Damaged Fees	\$395	\$2,291	\$374	-83%	513%	6%	\$8,268	\$8,202	\$7,645	1%	7%	8%
Sale of Property	\$8	\$0	\$0	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	\$8	\$51	\$168	-83%	-70%	-95%
Coffee Sales	\$77	\$122	\$153	-37%	-21%	-50%	\$1,308	\$1,606	\$1,528	-19%	5%	-14%
Beverages & snacks	\$247	\$637	\$188	-61%	239%	32%	\$3,895	\$3,191	\$2,498	22%	28%	56%
Collection Agency Fees	\$82	\$707	\$101	-88%	600%	-18%	\$2,983	\$2,720	\$2,435	10%	12%	23%
Winnebago Co. Major Facility	\$27,628	\$27,628	\$27,127	0%	2%	2%	\$110,800	\$110,513	\$108,509	0%	2%	2%
Winnebago Co. Operations	\$191,924	\$191,924	\$189,211	0%	1%	1%	\$796,955	\$767,697	\$756,843	4%	1%	5%
Other counties	\$0	\$0	\$0	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	\$22,339	\$23,083	\$22,497	-3%	3%	-1%
TOTAL	\$223,062	\$229,977	\$220,551	-3%	4%	1%	\$989,166	\$961,585	\$945,198	3%	2%	5%

PROGRAMS	Dec-19	Dec-18	Dec-17	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017	YTD 2019	YTD 2018	YTD 2017	% Change 2019-2018	% Change 2018-2017	% Change 2019-2017
Programs given												
Adult (Ages 19+)	24	28	24	-14%	17%	0%	412	369	284	12%	30%	45%
Young Adult (Ages 12-18)	2	3	3	-33%	0%	-33%	45	55	47	-18%	17%	-4%
Youth (ages 0-11)	31	25	21	24%	19%	48%	635	617	626	3%	-1%	1%
TOTAL	57	56	48	2%	17%	19%	1,092	1,041	957	5%	9%	14%
Program attendance												
Adult (Ages 19+)	410	582	417	-30%	40%	-2%	10,889	9,120	7,585	19%	20%	44%
Young Adult (Ages 12-18)	28	42	35	-33%	20%	-20%	1,387	1,529	1,603	-9%	-5%	-13%
Youth (ages 0-11)	1,248	963	864	30%	11%	44%	34,529	26,951	27,618	28%	-2%	25%
TOTAL	1,686	1,587	1,316	6%	21%	28%	46,805	37,600	36,806	24%	2%	27%

Program	Topic/Title/Presentation	Date	Attendees
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Adult

Adult Afternoon	Wild Animal Stories of Yellowstone	12/2/2019	39
Tuesday Night Movie	The Grinch	12/3/2019	25
Travel Series	How to Plan Your Trip to Door County	12/5/2019	6
First Friday Concert Series	Handbell Interactive Workshop	12/6/2019	23
Monday Matinee	The Farewell	12/9/2019	39
Short Story Night		12/9/2019	33
Tech Talk Tuesday	Online Security	12/10/2019	2
Memory Cafe	Holiday party	12/16/2019	31
MMBK: AM	Holidays on Ice	12/16/2019	15
MMBK: PM	Holidays on Ice	12/16/2019	3
Tuesday Night Movie	The Nutcracker and the Four Realms	12/17/2019	27
DIY Design Workshops	Winter Garland	12/18/2019	21
Kneenah Knits		2 meetings	4
Fitness Friday		2 sessions	16
Chess		weekly (4)	82
Ukulele open jams		weekly (4)	40
A.M. Investment Coffee Club			4
			TOTAL
			410

Young Adult

Library Visit	NHS CDS	12/6/2019	12
Outreach	Lakeside Packaging	12/18/2019	16
			TOTAL
			28

Youth

Library Program	Legos in the Library	12/1/2019	29
Library Program	Messy Monday	12/2/2019	65
Library Visit	Clayton School 5th Graders	12/6/2019	50
Library Program	Celebrate the Season	12/7/2019	60
Library Program	Elf-in-the-Box Escape Room	12/7/2019	95
Library Visit	YMCA 4K	12/8/2019	22
Outreach	Lake Edge Preschool	12/12/2019	24
Library Program	Footloose Fridays	12/13/2019	35
Library Program	Pooches & Pages	12/14/2019	8
Library Program	Songs of the Season	12/14/2019	45
Library Program	Legos in the Library	12/15/2019	13
Outreach	YMCA Childcare Center	12/18/2019	94
Outreach	Headstart PM Class	12/18/2019	20
Outreach	Headstart AM Class	12/19/2019	22
Outreach	A Child's Imagination	12/20/2019	28
Outreach	Stepping Stones	12/20/2019	54
Library Visit	Homeschool Friends	12/26/2019	13
Storytimes		Various	403
Library Program	Stay & Play	Various	168
			TOTAL
			1,248

Reports & Recommendations

7. Director's report

- a. Meetings/Events/Information
 - Weekly: Monday morning briefings
 - Weekly: Library department heads
 - 01/08 Neenah Arts Council
 - 01/09 Winnebago County Libraries Advisory Committee (Winneconne)
 - 01/10 Winnefox Technology Executive Committee (Oshkosh)
 - 01/14 Emergency Response Committee meeting
 - 01/14 Luncheon with City Department Heads and Mayor
 - The Library received a total of \$46,415 in donations in 2019.
 - Donations of note (since December 18): \$1,500 from Patrick and Staci Doyle; \$500 anonymous donation for programming; \$500 donation from Vee T Ly and Chou Vue-Ly; \$100 donation in honor of Marigen Carpenter; \$100 donation from Michael and Andrea Domask for children's programming/resources; and an \$1,000 in memory of Dr. Henshaw (a total of over \$6,000 has been received in Dr. Henshaw's memory).
- b. Report from Circulation Services
- c. Report from Youth Services
- d. Report from Adult Services and Technical Services

8. Business for consideration

- a. **Monthly financial reports from Finance department** (handouts at meeting)
Information item.
- b. **2020 officers**

Beth Irish served as the nominating committee for 2020 officers. Irish will present a slate of officers to recommend at the Board meeting. Additional nominations may be made from the floor. The new President immediately assumes office and chairs the remainder of the meeting.

Action item. Elect 2020 officers.
- c. **Additional Finance & Personnel Committee member**

The new President appoints one additional member to the Finance and Personnel Committee. The Committee is comprised of the Chair, the Library Board President, the Vice-President, and one additional Board member.

Action item: President appoints a fourth member to the F&PC. No official Board action is required.
- d. **Fine-Free libraries**

Public libraries across the U.S. are working to eliminate barriers to library usage, ensuring free and equitable access to materials and resources. Fines, however, can pose an obstacle for some in our communities, disproportionately affecting those who may be most in need of library services.

To address this, public libraries, including several in northeastern Wisconsin, have become "fine free"; others are discussing the possibility. Most recently, Kaukauna Public Library eliminated overdue fines.

Several articles are attached. Worth watching: [A TED Talk on going Fine Free](#) by Dawn Wacek from La Crosse Public Library.

Neenah collects approximately \$25,000 - \$30,000 in fine revenue annually, approximately 2.9% of total revenue collected by/received by the Library.

Discussion item

e. Collection Agency fee

The Library currently assesses a fee of \$15.00 when an account is referred to collections. The actual cost is \$8.95. (Menasha absorbs the full cost of the referral fee; most Winnefox libraries charge \$10; Oshkosh, Ripon, and Neenah charge \$15.00.) The Library receives approximately \$2,500 annually in collection agency fees. *(In order to minimize the possible effect on the 2020 budget, the change could be planned for 2021.)*

Discussion item. Possible action item: Reduce the fee to \$10.00 to more closely reflect the actual cost charged to the Library.

f. Transfer of Trust Funds

All programming expenses, with the exception of staff time, are funded by Trust Funds. Per Library Board policy, up to 5% of the principal, along with donations to the Programming Fund, can be spent on programming in a given year. (The Friends of the Neenah Public Library historically donate \$9,000 - \$12,000 annually for programming.)

Approximately \$25,000 - \$30,000 is spent on programming expenses annually.

The director would like to transfer Trust Funds from the General Account to the Programming Account to increase the funds available for programming. Transferring \$100,000 will provide an additional \$5,000 available for programming.

As of third quarter 2019, the Programming fund had a balance of \$365,000 and the General fund had a balance of \$635,000. The Trust Fund had a total balance of \$1,580,000.

Action item: Approve the transfer \$100,000 from General fund to the Programming fund.

g. Yekta Room furnishings

The budget for the new meeting room furnishings was eliminated in the 2020 budget. As the meeting room will be available following the remodel of Technical Services/Circulation Services and the relocation of staff workspaces, (included in the 2020 CIP budget), the director requests \$18,000 from the General Trust Fund for furnishings (tables, stacking chairs, glassboard).

(Pending approval from the family, the funds from the Yekta donation would be allocated to equipment for the room. Some possible items: Cricut machine and supplies, sewing machines, portable projector, easels, video equipment. The Friends of the Library may also be interested in funding the purchase of equipment for the Yekta Room.)

Action item: Approve the use of Trust Funds (up to \$18,000) for furnishings.

h. Deposit collections

The Library maintains collections at various facilities. Some of the facilities have circulating collections, i.e., the items are checked out to the organization and are rotated on a regular basis – retirement facilities, for example. Some collections, such as the books at St. Joe's Food Pantry, are dropped off and not expected to be returned. The items dropped off at St. Joe's, as well as some of the prizes used for reading programs, are selected from book donations.

There is also interest in maintaining collections at other facilities, e.g., ThedaCare Emergency Room waiting area. Things to consider: Availability of donated books, the facility's interest in maintaining the collection, staff time.

Discussion item.

i. Library Legislative Day

LLD will be held in Madison on Tuesday, February 11. The Director plans to attend. Any Board members interested in attending as well? Information and registration can be found here: <http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/legislative/legislative-day>.

Information item.

9. Reports:

Winnebago County representative

Neenah City Council representative

Neenah Joint School District representative

10. Announcements and future agenda items

11. Next regularly scheduled meeting: February 19, 4:00 p.m. in the Carpenter Conference Room.

12. Adjournment

Opinion | More libraries are going fine-free. That's good for everyone.

By Editorial Board

IN AN era when e-books and new forms of entertainment have threatened to [drive down](#) library use, public libraries are increasingly looking to modernize and innovate. Some have turned to [e-books](#) or [digital literacy programs](#) to reach more patrons. Others have opted for a different approach: They have gotten rid of the pesky late fees that drive borrowers away.

Last week, the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore [announced](#) it was eliminating fines on overdue books and materials. Though borrowers are still responsible for replacement costs for lost items, the Pratt erased \$186,000 in outstanding penalties for 26,000 borrowers and reinstated 13,000 users whose cards were previously blocked due to unpaid fines. In doing so, it joined a growing number of libraries [across the country](#) that have decided to go fine-free.

Eliminating these fines serves a laudable purpose: The policy can expand access to library services among groups that might otherwise struggle to return materials on time or keep up with payments, including low-income families, people with disabilities and the elderly. In some cases, as patrons return, fine-free policies can actually work to improve library circulation — and even the library's bottom line. The Pratt, for example, relies on library fines for [less than a quarter of a percent](#) of its annual budget, a figure it believes it could largely save in reduced staff time collecting and processing fines.

Proponents of library fines argue that they incentivize borrowers to return books on time and teach personal responsibility. But there is little evidence that fines have any effect on the timely return of library materials. In fact, much of the [existing research](#) suggests that they do not affect overdue rates and instead deter readers from borrowing materials in the first place. Libraries have also [found](#) that fines [heavily affect](#) low-income families and children, excluding the very patrons who rely on libraries the most.

Not every library can afford to follow in the Pratt's footsteps and jettison fines altogether. Many library systems depend heavily on income from fines to cover their regular expenses. Others might find it more viable to eliminate a subset of fines, such as fines on children's books. Regardless, the experiences of libraries that have successfully implemented fine-free programs offer food for thought for other networks. Perhaps the days of relentless overdue notices and droves of blocked users are coming to an end.

Read more:

Thank you for printing content from www.citylab.com. If you enjoy this piece, then please check back soon for our latest in urban-centric journalism.



More than 343,000 library cardholders in Chicago were barred from borrowing books because of unpaid fines. The city is now erasing all of it. // Kunal Mehta/Shutterstock

Why Libraries Are Eliminating Late Fees for Overdue Books

LINDA POON OCTOBER 2, 2019

Chicago Public Library became the largest system to eliminate late fees, a move that will increase access for low-income families. Will more libraries follow?

Chicago libraries will no longer collect late fees starting this month, becoming the largest public library system in the U.S. to do away with overdue fines. The city is also erasing all currently outstanding fees, which is good news to the more than 343,000 cardholders whose borrowing privileges have been revoked for accruing at least \$10 in unpaid fines.

Chicago is one of a growing number of cities trying to make access to libraries more equitable. Its own data revealed that one in three cardholders in the public library's south district, where many of the communities are of color and living in poverty, cannot check out books. That's compared to one in six people in the wealthier north district. It's likely that many who have unpaid fines fail to pay them because they don't have the disposable income to do so.

"Like too many Chicagoans, I know what it is like to grow up in financially-challenging circumstances and understand what it is like to be just one bill or one mistake away from crushing debt," Mayor Lori Lightfoot said a statement. One in five delinquent cardholders are children under 14, according to the city.

By imposing fines, and prohibiting people from borrowing books when the fines add up, the libraries are effectively driving away the very residents who need them the most.

Under Chicago Public Library's new policy, a checked out item will automatically be renewed 15 times as long as there are no holds on it. Afterwards, the item will be marked lost, and the library will charge the borrower its market value, though charges will be cleared as long as the borrower returns it.

The public libraries that have moved to reduce fines

Click on an arrow for more information on each fine-free library. ([Urban Libraries Council](#))

The decision to remove fines is a growing nationwide movement. Already, dozens of U.S. libraries have fully or partially eliminated overdue fines (usually for teens and children), according to a [“fine-free” map](#) from the Urban Libraries Council (ULC). Just this year, public libraries in cities like Phoenix, Dallas, and Palm Beach, Florida, have changed their policy, and Curtis Rogers, ULC’s communications director, expects more libraries and cities to follow suit.

San Francisco Public Library reformed its overdue fine policy last month. Before that, more than a third of library cardholders owed libraries money, averaging roughly \$24 per adult, according to the [city’s own research](#). Most belonged to low-income communities, African-American communities, and communities with few college graduates. Across the city, 5 percent are blocked from making full use of the library because of overdue fines, but that rate is highest at the Bayview branch, where the neighborhood’s median household income is the second-lowest of all the public library’s locations.

“Overdue fines are not distinguishing between people who are responsible and who are not,” says Rogers. “They’re distinguishing between people who can and cannot use money to overcome a common oversight.”

In San Francisco Public Library locations with lower median household income, larger shares of cardholders are blocked from borrowing due to fines. ([San Francisco Public Library](#))

He adds that research going as far back as the 1970s shows fears that eliminating fines will deteriorate people’s sense of civic responsibility to return books on time are unfounded. A 1983 study in North Carolina, for example, found that while overdue rates did increase in the short term at libraries without fines, there was ultimately no significant difference over a three-year period between public libraries that do and don’t collect late fees. In San Francisco, one library even saw its late-return rate drop from 9 percent to 4 percent after removing fines.

A majority of public libraries do still charge late fees—some 92 percent, according to a 2017 survey in *Library Journal*. And Rogers emphasizes going fine-free is not necessarily the “one single solution” for all systems. There are multiple ways libraries can break down barriers of access. Some libraries designate “amnesty” days, where all late fees are waived if residents return the overdue items. Others provide alternatives, asking for food donations or volunteer time in place of money.

For many libraries, fines make up just a small share of their operating budget. The *Chicago Sun Times* reports the Chicago Public Library system collects \$875,000 annually in fines, which is not an insignificant amount. But the city says late fines constitute less than 1 percent of the library’s total budget. “Libraries need to look at the revenue that they’re generating from fines and what is their ability to handle the risk that could potentially be involved with making this decision,” Rogers says.

He adds that so far, no library has reported large-scale negative consequences to going fine-free. In some cases, axing fines can even save libraries money by eliminating the time and cost of collecting the debt.

Dawn Wacek, the youth services manager for La Crosse Public Library in Wisconsin, argues that it isn't the library's job to collect fines or teach its patrons responsibility. "I don't think it's our task, or that it's mission-centric, any more than teaching people manners is," she says. "Our role is to provide access to information."

In 2018, she gave a [TED Talk](#) advocating for more libraries to nix fines. She admitted that she herself had gotten \$500 in late fees over several years, and was fortunate enough to be able pay them. That was a different story from many La Crosse residents who were barred from checking out books because of fines. The city has since made its libraries fine-free.

Sometimes it's political will that stands in the way, especially when members of the local governments don't see the potential gain. That's why Chicago's move is encouraging even for smaller towns.

"As more and more libraries take that plunge it looks less daunting for people," says Wacek. "There will also be some years of evidence that say, look, stuff is still coming back, more people are getting library cards, and fewer people living in poverty are blocked from having access—all good things."

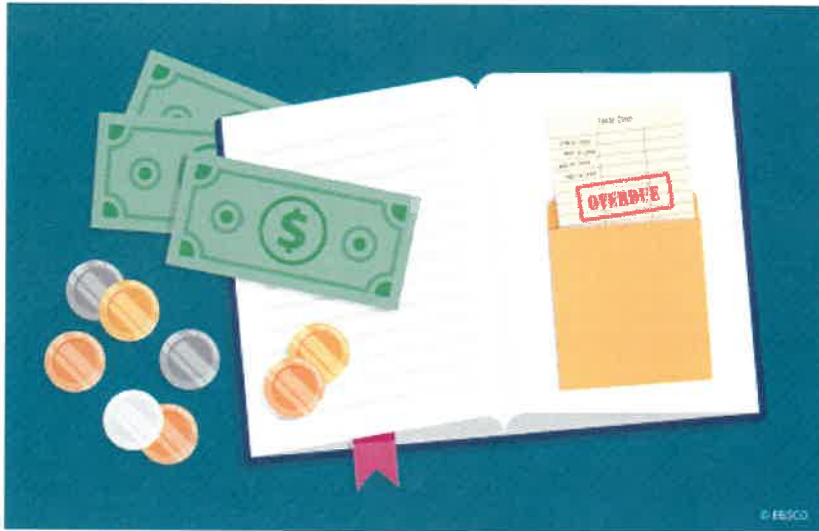
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Not So Fine with Library Fines? A Look at the Overdue Debate

EBSCO Information Services, Inc.



Learn more about the arguments for and against overdue library fines and ways to minimize the impact on patrons.

For more than a century, libraries around the world have been collecting money for overdue books and other borrowed items not returned on time. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the [world's largest fine paid](#) for an overdue library book was \$345.14, the amount Emily Canellos-Simms presented to Kewanee Public Library in Illinois after returning a book she found in her mother's house 47 years after its 1955 due date.

A January 2017 [Library Journal survey](#) revealed that 92 percent of libraries in the United States charge fines and fees. Overdue fines range from 17 cents a day to a maximum of \$5 to \$10 to cover the cost of replacement. Most libraries suspend borrowing privileges when fines reach the maximum threshold. In addition, libraries typically charge fees for printing, photocopying, faxing, scanning, 3D printing and replacing lost library cards. On average, fines and fees generate about one and a half percent of a library's operating budget.

"We use the funds — \$71,000 collected from fines annually — as part of our operating budget," Jenny Paxson, a reader's advisory librarian at Webster Public Library in New York, tells [American Libraries](#). "Without them it would be difficult to run the library."

Late fees have been said to encourage returns, thus putting library materials back into circulation for others to use. Some view fines as a small price to pay for breaking the library's social contract — gentle reminders that libraries are providing a valuable service that should not be taken for granted.

"The charging of token library fines is a way to communicate to the public that libraries matter," says Su Epstein, Library Director at Saxton B. Little Free Library in Columbia, Connecticut ([Public Libraries Online](#)). "Fines are a tangible reminder of the patron's responsibility, the library's importance, and the consideration of others."

In recent years, however, some libraries have eliminated late fees for teen and children's

materials. Others are abolishing [overdue fines](#) altogether. The Urban Libraries Council has published an [interactive map](#) showing U.S. libraries that have gone “fine-free.” These include San Jose Public Library, Denver Public Library, Nashville Public Library, Columbus Metropolitan Library in Ohio, and the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore.

More and more library professionals contend that charging overdue fines undermines the mission of libraries to provide free and equitable access to information so that all citizens may educate themselves.

An informal poll of Library Think Tank Facebook page followers showed that most librarians are not in favor of charging overdue fines. Of the 526 who weighed in, 72 percent were opposed, 14 percent were in favor, and the remaining 14 percent believed fines should be waived for children’s and/or teen materials only.

Why go fine-free? More and more library professionals contend that charging overdue fines undermines the mission of libraries to provide free and equitable access to information so that all citizens may educate themselves. They argue that fines are a barrier to access, especially for low-income families, and can create adversarial relationships between customers and library staff members. Even worse, patrons who are ashamed of their overdue fines or financially unable to pay them may stop using the library entirely.

Sarah Houghton, director of San Rafael Public Library in California, tells [American Libraries](#) that fines are especially discouraging to “those in the community who could most benefit from library services.” She argues that the library’s role is not to teach personal responsibility, as some might suggest, but “to encourage lifelong learning, exploration and innovation.”

Dawn Wacek, Youth Services Librarian at La Crosse Public Library in Wisconsin, agrees. In her 2018 TED Talk, [A Librarian’s Case Against Overdue Book Fines](#), Wacek says libraries support their communities by promoting early literacy among children of every socioeconomic background and by offering enriching programs, job-skills training, and resources to help business start-ups. She believes that charging fines counteracts this good work. Some libraries are allowing patrons to “read away” their fines or donate canned goods in exchange for late fee waivers, but Wacek says this alternative doesn’t help patrons who struggle with literacy or depend on food pantries.

“Why would we continue to operate under a model that hurts our most vulnerable patrons?” Wacek asks. “If our libraries are truly for everyone, they have to get rid of fines. Books have power, information has power. And for the powerless in our communities, being able to connect to that is even more important.”

These views are now shared by the American Library Association (ALA). At its 2019 Midwinter Meeting in January, the ALA passed a [resolution](#) calling monetary library fines “a form of social inequity” and urging libraries “to scrutinize their practices of imposing fines on library patrons and actively move towards eliminating them.”

As your library examines its policy on monetary library fines, here are two ideas for minimizing the impact on patrons in the short term:

1. Hold an Amnesty Period

Choose a day, week or month when patrons can bring back any borrowed materials, no matter how long they’ve had them, and avoid paying a fine. An amnesty period can be a great way to recover materials for your collection. In early 2017, [San Francisco Public Library held a six-week amnesty period](#), waiving fees on books, CDs, DVDs and other materials. At the end of the period, the library recovered nearly 700,000 overdue items, of which 12,246 were more than 60 days past due. One return, a collection of short stories, was 100 years past due! In all, the value of the returned items was nearly \$236,000.

2. Offer Fine Waivers to Patrons Who Share Valuable Feedback

Looking to offer new programming? Launching a new library website? Recruit patrons to share their thoughts and opinions in exchange for fine waivers. The library at St. John Fisher College developed a [pilot project](#) in which students with overdue fines tested the usability of the library's new website in exchange for fine waivers. The project was a success and resulted in a positive customer service experience.

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Libraries are eliminating fines

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Tuesday, October 22, 2019



[Check out the presentation to the Madison Public Library Board](#) (Navarre Saaf, Elias) and [the supporting data](#) (South Central Library System)

“[Library system may end fines](#),” (Rickert) appeared on the front page of the Wisconsin State Journal on Sunday morning, October 20, 2019. The Madison Public Library is the latest to capture headlines as it continues to explore eliminating late fees as a means to improve access for library patrons and Madison area residents.

In the wake of [the Chicago Public Library eliminating late fees for overdue materials](#) (Poon, CityLab), the topic is receiving increased exposure and reaching beyond library board meetings and staff conversations. Patrons and municipalities are taking notice. The move in Chicago erased the fines of 343,000 registered borrowers with revoked privileges because they accrued at least \$10 in unpaid fines.

After [looking at the data](#), the San Francisco Public Library could see that fines were disproportionately affecting people in low-income communities, African-American communities, and communities with lower college graduation rates. Public libraries can access community data to see which patrons overdue fees affect in the community and combine that information with economic and fine impact measures to paint a clearer picture of the outcomes of the library’s policies. Eliminating fines isn’t the only outcome of this self-reflection, many libraries also amend or revise policy to provide some form of amnesty or increased leniency to remove hurdles to library access.

As libraries see declining circulation of traditional materials as the use of electronic library materials that do not generate fines increases, revenues from fines are declining due to the decrease in circulation and a change in policy to reduce fine amounts (Rickert). An informal survey of Wisconsin public library system directors found that as many as 70 public libraries throughout Wisconsin may be fine free for all patrons as of 2018.

Public libraries make strong communities when every resident and potential patron has free access to informational materials and services they need. Public libraries should explore the data and find the path that meets the needs specific to their community.

For questions about this information, contact [Michael Dennison](#) (608) 266-5196

Madison Library system considers end to overdue fines

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https://madison.com/wsj/news/local/govt-and-politics/madison-library-system-considers-end-to-overdue-fines/article_829da545-eb4b-5a2f-bb3d-629e129df656.html

ALERT

Madison Library system considers end to overdue fines

Chris Rickert | Wisconsin State Journal
Oct 21, 2019

Bundle Up Sale! \$1/mo.



Madison Central Library page Adam Cohen checks in books at the Downtown library. Madison's Library Board is considering eliminating overdue fines through the nine-branch system.

STEVE APPS, STATE JOURNAL

With circulation declining, the Madison Public Library system is considering joining the

growing list of library systems around the country that are eliminating late fees as a way to expand access to library materials. **Madison Library system considers end to overdue fines** SHARE THIS

The system already doesn't charge for children's materials that are returned after their due dates, but borrowers are charged 25 cents per day for overdue adult materials and \$1 a day for materials from outside the South Central Library System — a regional system of libraries including Madison. Accumulate more than \$20 in fines and your account is put on hold; \$50 or more and you could be sent to collections.

The Library Board heard a **presentation on going “fine-free” in September**, but board president Jaime Healy-Plotkin said it's still gathering information, and no decisions have been made.

“Overdue fines are a revenue item for the library budget,” she said, but other considerations in whether to eliminate fines are patrons' responsibility to return materials on time and the need to remove barriers to library access.



Matt Lamb, a library page at Central Library in Madison, checks out a book for a patron on Friday. Public libraries across the country have been eliminating overdue fees as a way to remove barriers to library access. The American Library Association in January approved a resolution in support of the trend.

STEVE APPS, STATE JOURNAL

As of Sept. 3, some 17 library systems in the South Central Library System — which covers 54 public libraries in Adams, Columbia, Dane, Green, Portage, Sauk and Wood counties — had gone fully fine-free, and another six did not charge fines for overdue juvenile materials, according to SCLS director Martha Van Pelt. Among Madison-area libraries, Middleton has been fine-free for some 20 years and Monona for about nine.

Eliminating overdue fines is a “national trend” that’s gained steam over the past 18 months in the area covered by the SCLS, Van Pelt said, and she could see about half of the system’s members being fine-free within the next few months.



More youth, opioid epidemic seen as factors in increase in police calls to Madison libraries

Chris Rickert | Wisconsin State Journal

There’s been no one cause, she said, but “access has always been a hot topic in libraries.”

In line with that thinking, the American Library Association in January **passed a resolution** calling fines “an economic barrier to access of library materials and services” that hurt the public’s perception of libraries and are onerous to administer, and it called on libraries to “actively move towards eliminating them.”

Consideration of eliminating fines comes as Madison libraries have seen their number of borrowers decline slightly during the past seven years to about 159,000, while total circulation declined by some 35% between 2009 and 2018, according to the library system’s September report.



Madison City Council seeks money for 'mini-park,' library cameras, 'less-lethal' police tools

Chris Rickert | Wisconsin State Journal

Library digital services and marketing manager Tana Elias said the circulation decline has been seen “particularly in materials for adults” and “in part due to streaming services for movies, TV shows and music, as well as more magazine content being online for free or low-cost.”

It’s been a somewhat different story at the fine-free libraries surrounding Madison — Sun Prairie, Middleton, Monona, Verona and Fitchburg — where the number of items borrowed and the number

of borrowers have remained mostly stable during the past five years or so.
Madison Library system considers end to overdue fines



Madison's new Pinney Library will be 'cultural, civic and social center' for East Side

Dean Mosiman | Wisconsin State Journal

Sun Prairie Public Library Board president Rex Owens said the system went fine-free about two years ago after librarians said there was no evidence the fees encouraged people to bring materials back on time and over worries about limiting access to the library to low-income residents.

“If you’re worried about a fine, then maybe people aren’t going to come to the library,” he said.

He said the system has seen no change in the number of late returns or lost materials, but there is some evidence that people are more willing to bring back a long-overdue item rather than just keep it if they know they won’t face a big fine.

Fine revenue down

Fine revenue has also dropped in Madison, although even more precipitously, from 2009 to 2018, according to the library system, from about \$480,000 to about \$220,000.

Elias attributed that to a reduction in the fine for overdue DVDs from \$1 to 25 cents a day, earlier email notification of when items are coming due, and an increase in e-book and e-audiobook use. E-books and e-audiobooks don’t come with fines because they simply become inaccessible to borrowers after their due dates.

Nearly 48,000 of more than 151,000 Madison registered borrowers had fines pending as of the August report, and nearly 10,000 had had their accounts blocked because of excessive fines.

Still, fines accounted for only about 1.14 percent of the library system’s \$19.25 million in revenues in 2018, Elias said.

For materials circulated among the libraries of the South Central Library System — some of which are fine-free and some of which aren't — borrowers are assessed fines in accordance to where the items were checked out, according to Van Pelt.

Check out a book owned by the Monona library at a Madison library, and return it late and you're assessed a fine, for example. Check out that same book at the Sun Prairie library, and return it late and you aren't.

Healy-Plotkin said the Library Board in September asked staff to prepare a recommendation on going fine-free and hoped to see it on the board's agenda within the next six months. She's up for re-election as president in November, though, she said, and a new president could opt for a different approach.

Eliminating fines would not require City Council approval.

Chris Rickert | Wisconsin State Journal
 Urban affairs, investigations, consumer help ("SOS")

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Oct 21, 2019

Colder air will follow, with highs only in the 40s to lower 50s for the area through the weekend, according to forecasters.



Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity

Whereas monetary fines present an economic barrier to access of library materials and services;

Whereas there is mounting evidence that indicates eliminating fines increases library card adoption and library usage;

Whereas monetary fines create a barrier in public relations, and absorb valuable staff time applying, collecting, and managing dues;

Whereas the first policy objective listed in ALA Policy B.8.10 (Library Services to the Poor) as approved by ALA Council on January 27, 2019, states that the American Library Association shall implement these objectives by "Promoting the removal of barriers to library and information services, particularly fees, and overdue charges";

Whereas ALA Policy B.4.2 (Free Access to Information) "asserts that the charging of fees and levies for information services, including those services utilizing the latest information technology, is discriminatory in publicly supported institutions providing library and information services";

Whereas in Economic Barriers to Information Access, An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, ALA states "All library policies and procedures, particularly those involving fines, fees, or other user charges, should be scrutinized for potential barriers to access;

Whereas libraries will need to take determined and pragmatic action to dismantle practices of collecting monetary fines

Whereas libraries of all types are responsive to bodies, be they school districts, boards of trustees, college and university administration, or government entities and therefore need to be able to make the case to those bodies about eliminating fines; and

Whereas monetary fines ultimately do not serve the core mission of the modern library; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the American Library Association (ALA), on behalf of its members

1. adds a statement to the Policy Manual that establishes that "The American Library Association asserts that imposition of monetary library fines creates a barrier to the provision of library and information services.";
2. urges libraries to scrutinize their practices of imposing fines on library patrons and actively move towards eliminating them; and
3. urges governing bodies of libraries to strengthen funding support for libraries so they are not dependent on monetary fines as a necessary source of revenue.

Mover: Peter Hepburn, Councilor At-Large, 773.426.8082

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kaukauna Public Library first in Fox Cities to adopt fine free policy

The City of Kaukauna and the Kaukauna Public Library are proud to announce that the Library Board has adopted a fine free policy, making them the first public library in the Fox Cities to go fine free. As of January 1st, 2020, the library will no longer have a ten cent per day late fee.

The public library fine free movement has been sweeping the nation, gaining a lot of momentum after Wisconsin librarian, Dawn Wancek, presented a [TED Talk](#) advocating for equitable library service for all in 2018. Library Director Ashley Thiem-Menning brought the topic up in early 2019 for Library Board consideration.

Kaukauna Public Library currently has 13,775 card holders, 17.1% of whom are blocked from accessing their accounts because their balance is over five dollars. Kaukauna Public Library is part of the Outagamie Waupaca Library System, where account balances over five dollars freeze access to checking out materials, using public computers, and online services that require a library card login. The data showing that fines are a deterrent to library use is further proved by the fact that in Kaukauna, expired (or non-active) library card fine amount totals are 2.5 times higher than that of the active library card fines. This directly shows that when people have fines, they aren't coming back to the library. Library fines remain on library card accounts indefinitely, unless a library chooses to purge old inactive records.

The driving force behind the national trend of going fine free is the barrier fines create for the people that need library services the most. These vulnerable populations often include people in low income situations, the elderly on fixed incomes, youth and minorities. Children in low-income situations are especially at risk, facing up to a 30-million-word gap than affluent counterparts, according to a study by Hart & Risley. When children with limited vocabularies enter school, studies indicate that they may never catch up academically, falling further behind each year. Being read to remains one of the best ways for preschool children to learn new words. Public libraries serve as a free resource to help combat socioeconomic vocabulary gaps because they offer free access to literacy programming and books.

While it sounds like a simple policy to enact, it does take planning and municipal support. Going fine free is a loss of revenue. While that revenue accounts for less than one percent of the total library operational budget in Kaukauna, it does impact municipal revenue. Nevertheless, Kaukauna Mayor, Tony Penterman, is very passionate about library services for the community and agreed that going fine free sooner rather than later was important. "As Mayor of Kaukauna, my goal is to do what is best for our community. When Director Thiem-Menning

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explained the importance of going fine free with support from the Library Board, I knew it was in Kaukauna's best interests to back them in their policy adoption. We have one of the most beautiful libraries in the state, and all our residents should be able to use it equitably and without barriers. This policy ensures a Kaukauna Strong approach to lifelong learning and education, and we are proud to be the first in the Fox Cities to adopt it," says Penterman.

There is concern that going to fine free would stop people from returning their books on time. Libraries that have adopted the practice, however, have not reported any issues with books being returned later than normal. With a fine free policy, patrons that don't return on time are just billed for the late items, but once they come back the bill is removed, and there will be no additional late fines for the tardiness. Almost all libraries that have adopted a fine free policy are reporting more library card sign ups and higher circulation rates. The Kaukauna Public Library will continue to bill for items that are never returned or for items that are returned damaged.

"Our goal is to make sure that everyone that wants to use the library is able to," says Director Thiem-Menning. Starting January 2nd, library staff will waive existing fines on accounts of Kaukauna Public Library card holders while the library system begins purging old fine records. While this is only for late fee fines, Thiem-Menning says, "Anyone with billed items on their library card that want to be able to use their account should still come in. We always do our best to work with patrons so that they can use their card if they want to."

There is a longstanding stigma about libraries and bills. Thiem-Menning recalls a patron coming in with a sizable fine that wanted library privileges restored if possible. "The patron couldn't believe that we were willing to work with them and even said a friend had told them it was crazy to even ask us if the amount could be reduced," says Thiem-Menning. The patron left that day with tears of gratitude and a valid library card and has been back each week since. As part of going fine free, the Kaukauna Public Library will also accept back any old billed materials and waive late fines associated with them. Patrons with billed items that no longer have the billed materials are also encouraged to speak with library staff about their accounts if they wish to get their library card back in good standing.

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