

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Hemminger and members of the Chapel Hill Town Council

FROM: Chapel Hill Public Library Advisory Board

SUBJECT: Chapel Hill Public Library Fines

DATE: October 10, 2019

On behalf of the Chapel Hill Public Library Advisory Board, we present the following petition to the Town Council concerning late fees and fines at the Chapel Hill Public Library.

The Board met on Monday, September 9, 2019, and unanimously approved the following recommendation to the Town Council:

*“The Chapel Hill Public Library Advisory Board recommends that the Town Council adopt a fine-free model for the Chapel Hill Public Library as part of the 2020/2021 Budget.”*

Recognizing that the Town Council is committed to social equity, and recognizing that the Board has considered this issue over multiple meetings and agrees with the American Library Association that Library fines represent a social equity issue, we present this petition for your review. Please find below several reasons that have led the Board to this recommendation.

First, while the initial motivation for library fines was well-considered, over time those same fines have become a barrier to equal access to Library materials. Fines have a disparate effect on citizens who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, by limiting borrowing privileges and access to those who cannot pay overdue fines.

Second, fines represent a meager portion of the Chapel Hill Library and total Town budget, limiting the impact of moving to a fine-free model. In fact, revenue from fines at the Library has dramatically decreased over time. Cities moving to the fine-free model are seeing a neutral financial impact, along with increases in circulation and library usage, as well as an improvement in the morale of Library staff<sup>1</sup>.

Third, we offer that the fine-free model is being adopted by both national and North Carolina libraries, because fundamentally, fines do little (if anything) to deter people from returning Library materials late. New York, Chicago, Detroit and many others have moved to the fine-free model. Within in our own state, Wake, Hickory, Robeson County and Gibsonville are already (or about to be) fine-free. Libraries across the country have found that late fees and fines are not incentives to bring materials back but do serve as major barriers to access. These same libraries who have gone fine-free have seen a positive impact on borrowing.

The Board appreciates your consideration of our petition and feels this request is in alignment with town goals for the fiscal year. We look forwarding to joining the growing list of progressive cities and towns who are adopting the fine-free model.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Library Advisory Board,

Tiffany Allen  
Chair

Blaine Schmidt  
Vice Chair

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<sup>1</sup> <https://slate.com/culture/2017/02/librarians-are-realizing-that-overdue-fines-undercut-libraries-missions.html>