


TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Honorable Mayor & City Council Initials: 

FROM: Shawn Hart, Acting Assistant City Manager File #: MGR25-215

DATE: April 11, 2025 Mtg. #: 04/17/25 NBb

RE: **Discussion of Ketchikan Public Library Lost and Damaged Item Charges on Student Accounts – Mayor Sivertsen and Councilmember Zenge**

At the March 20, 2025, City Council meeting, Library Director Pat Tully provided an informational memorandum at the request of Mayor Sivertsen and Councilmember Zenge, outlining the Ketchikan Public Library's current policy regarding charges for lost, misplaced, and damaged materials. While the Library eliminated overdue fines in 2022 to promote equitable access and encourage continued use, fees for lost or damaged items remain in place, consistent with national trends following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The attached memorandum from Director Tully responds to several concerns raised during the March 20 meeting. As emphasized in the memo, clear and consistent communication of Library policies—particularly regarding the waiver process for lost item charges—is critical to ensuring equitable access for all patrons.

Staff recognizes that charges leading to blocked accounts may prevent individuals, especially children, from utilizing Library services. Accordingly, fees are routinely waived when circumstances warrant. Additionally, if a lost item is later returned in good condition, the associated charges are removed. In cases where the item cannot be returned, staff may still waive the charges, provided the patron communicates with Library personnel.

At the April 9, 2025, meeting of the Library Advisory Board, a discussion was held to explore strategies for ensuring that children with lost items—especially those unable to return or locate the materials—can continue to access Library services. While several constructive suggestions were brought forward, staff will evaluate their feasibility before implementation.

Understanding both the advantages and challenges of maintaining a lost/damaged item fee policy, Library staff welcomes continued dialogue with the City Council to identify potential solutions that balance stewardship of public resources with equitable access for all community members.

Recommended Motion:

I move the City Council discuss the Ketchikan Public Library lost and damaged item charges on student accounts.

To: Ketchikan City Council; Lacey Simpson, Acting City and KPU Manager; Shawn Hart, Acting Assistant City and KPU Manager

From: Pat Tully, Ketchikan Public Library

Re: Response to March 20 Council discussion of lost and damaged item charges on student accounts

Date: April 8, 2025

Library objectives in charging for lost items & blocking accounts:

1. To provide an incentive for patrons to return items to the Library, so the items are available to others and do not have to be reordered and reprocessed using Library funds and staff time.
2. To help young patrons develop a sense of responsibility for using and returning Library materials, which are shared by the entire community. The Library is not a bookstore, and adding a processing fee to the replacement charge discourages patrons who want to keep an item by simply paying its replacement cost.
3. To prevent a patron with lost items from checking out and possibly losing additional Library items, to the extent that the total lost charges would be burdensome to them.

Council suggestions and concerns regarding children's lost and damaged book charges:

1. Suggestion: Charge the School District for the lost book charges of their current students.

Response: The Ketchikan Gateway Borough and the KGBSD contribute to the funding of our shared library services and systems (see Note below). The standard practice in both school and public libraries world-wide is for individual patrons to be responsible for library items they check out and to pay for replacing items that are damaged or lost while checked out to them. Charging the School District for items lost or damaged by their students will have the unintended consequence that the School District may then charge the Ketchikan Public Library (KPL) for school library items that are lost or damaged by patrons with a KPL account.

[Note: The Ketchikan Gateway Borough splits the cost of KPL operations with the City of Ketchikan, based on the percentage of Borough residents who live outside the City. The average split is 40% Borough and 60% City. The Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District (KGBSD) and the KPL split our shared online library system costs, based on the number of titles at the School District Libraries and the number of titles at the KPL. The average split is 44% KGBSD titles and 56% KPL titles.]

2. Suggestion: Offer a version of Amnesty Week or Read Away Your Fines for students with lost or damaged book charges.

Response: Many libraries that still charge overdue fines offer an Amnesty Week to encourage patrons to return their overdue items without charge. The Ketchikan Public Library did so before we eliminated overdue fines in 2022. However, it is not the practice in public libraries to offer amnesty for lost or damaged item charges, since this would not recover City assets or permit others to use the materials.

In the past the KPL has offered children the opportunity to read away their overdue fines. This read-away program did not extend to lost or damaged item charges for the reasons stated above. Also, libraries have reported that read-away fines programs have made some of their young patrons think of reading as a punishment or chore rather than a pleasure.

Since the KPL waives the lost item charge and processing fee if a patron returns an item in good condition and before a replacement item is replaced, it is always Amnesty Week at the KPL.

3. Suggestion: Link student accounts to parent/guardian accounts so the adults are aware of the fines and blocked accounts and/or receive the fines.

Response: By State law, a public library may not disclose information about a patron account to another person:

Alaska State Statute Sec. 40.25.140. Confidentiality of library records:

- a. Except as provided in (b) of this section, the names, addresses, or other personal identifying information of people who have used materials made available to the public by a library shall be kept confidential, except upon court order, and are not subject to inspection under AS 40.25.110 or 40.25.120. This section applies to libraries operated by the state, a municipality, or a public school, including the University of Alaska.
- b. Records of a public elementary or secondary school library identifying a minor child shall be made available on request to a parent or guardian of that child.

The Ketchikan Public Library is not an elementary or secondary school library and so may not disclose information about a child's Library account to the child's parent or guardian.

4. Suggestion: Increased communication with parents/guardians of students with blocked accounts and fines.

Response: See the response to suggestion 4 above.

5. Suggestion: Discuss with the schools how they can have more of a role in communicating with parents/guardians.

Response: School librarians work with children one-on-one as they come to the school library with their classes--to remind them when they have overdue or lost books, to waive school library lost and damaged item fees when warranted, and to contact the KPL to arrange for KPL lost item charges to be waived when appropriate. For student accounts that have school email addresses, lost item notices/bills are also sent quarterly. School librarians and staff do an extraordinary job communicating with students in person about their accounts and ensuring that even with a blocked account they are able to check out a book from their school collection. As a public library that has a much larger number of patrons, the KPL is not able to provide the same level of one-on-one services that Ketchikan's school libraries provide.

6. Suggestion: Ask another organization, like the Friends of the Ketchikan Public Library, to pay for children's lost and damaged book charges.

Response: When a patron pays a lost item and processing fee, the money does not go into the Library's budget to pay to replace the item. Instead, the payment goes into the City's General Government fund. The Friends work hard to raise money via book sales and the sales of totes and mugs, and the intent is to use the proceeds to enhance Library services and collections. Currently the Friends help pay for the Alaska Digital Library, the new video, audio and ebook Hoopla resource, and for summer reading programs for children and teens.

If instead the suggestion is for the Friends to cover lost book charges incurred by a student with the money going directly to the Library, this would add up to thousands of dollars a year (much more than the total lost item charges for the 74 currently blocked students)—often to cover lost item charges for children who have misplaced but not lost items, and who, without the incentive of a bill and blocked account, will have little reason to find and return the items they have checked out. In fact, they will be able to check out (and potentially not return) additional items.

7. Concern: Some children, because of family dysfunction, neglect and/or abuse, may not be able to find items they have checked out, or pay for items they have lost. These children may feel too embarrassed or ashamed to talk to school or public library staff and ask them for help, and may not even know that this is a possibility. Blocking these children's accounts prevents them from checking out Library materials and sustaining a love of reading.

Response: As noted above, school librarians communicate with students one-on-one about their library accounts and teach them from kindergarten onward about how to use

the library and library materials responsibly. School librarians work with KPL librarians to ensure that students in difficult situations are able to access and check out library books.

Library recommendations: In order for the Library to better encourage the love of reading in our community members, young and old, while remaining responsible stewards of the Library's collections and making these collections available to the entire community, we will do the following:

1. Change the wording in overdue and lost item charges to make it clear that if the item is returned within 6 months and in good condition, the lost item and processing fees are waived.
2. For OCS, RYC and WISH families; school libraries; and agencies that deal with at-risk families: Provide information to all children and families in these circumstances and invite them to contact the Library about any items they have checked out and cannot find, so we can discuss with them the possibility of waiving lost charges and processing fees.
3. For all patrons who have lost item charges: The Library will continue to communicate with our patrons regarding our policies and procedures, including the practice of waiving lost charges and processing fees when items are returned within 6 months and in good condition.

To: Ketchikan City Council; Lacey Simpson, Acting City and KPU Manager

From: Pat Tully, Ketchikan Public Library

Re: Lost and damaged item charges on student accounts

Date: March 12, 2025

In a March 10 phone call, Councilmember Judy Zenge expressed concern about the Library policy of blocking a child's library account when they have a lost item charge exceeding \$10. On March 11, I responded to Councilmember Zenge with the information she requested. After reviewing my response with Mayor Sivertsen, she asked Acting City Manager Simpson to put this topic on a City Council meeting agenda, with additional information about fees charged to student accounts. Although information about a person's library account is confidential (Alaska Statute 40.25.140); I have summarized information about current students whose accounts are blocked at least in part because of Ketchikan Public Library lost book charges. (Some of these accounts also include lost item and processing charges from the School District libraries.)

Replacement cost	Processing fee	Total lost charges	School	# students	# LOST items
\$ 121.99	\$ 51.00	\$ 172.99	Fawn Mountain	4	8
\$ 138.00	\$ 71.00	\$ 209.00	Houghtaling	6	9
\$ 698.99	\$ 298.00	\$ 996.99	Charter School	16	43
\$ 637.62	\$ 209.00	\$ 843.62	Kayhi	19	35
\$ 188.00	\$ 77.00	\$ 265.00	Homeschoolers	8	12
\$ 172.87	\$ 76.00	\$ 251.87	Point Higgins	7	13
\$ 782.92	\$ 201.00	\$ 983.92	Schoenbar	11	36
\$ 74.99	\$ 39.00	\$ 113.99	Tongass School	3	5
\$ 2,815.38	\$ 1,022.00	\$ 3,837.38		74	161

Note: Of all the Public Library accounts with LOST or LOST-NI charges, less than 8% are children's accounts.

Lost and other Library charges: In 2022 the Ketchikan Public Library eliminated overdue fines but, as noted in the memo accompanying the topic in the March 17, 2022 City Council meeting, the Library still charges lost item and other fees, including:

LOST – When an item is more than 4 weeks overdue, the system sets it to LOST and a notice is sent to the patron. The charge is the replacement cost of the item, the price the Library paid for the item when originally purchased. (LOST-NI is assigned to a long-lost item the details of which are no longer available.)

DAMAGE – When an item is returned too damaged to be put back in circulation, the patron is charged the replacement cost of the item.

PARTSMISS – When an item with multiple parts is returned missing one or more parts (a multi-disk DVD, for example), the patron is contacted to return the missing part to the Library. If they cannot find the part to return it, the patron is charged the replacement cost of the item.

PROCESSFEE – For lost and damaged items and those missing parts, the patron is charged an additional \$7.00 per item.

ILL – When an adult patron wants an item that is not available from a library in Ketchikan, they can request that the item be borrowed from another library. There is a \$3.00 charge for shipping the item from and back to the lending library.

The Library also charges for temporary cards for seasonal residents (\$10 fee and \$20 refundable deposit) and using the public printer (20 cents a page) and photocopier (25 cents a page).

Patrons with blocked accounts: The Library encourages everyone to use our collections and services, whether they have a Library account or not. Patrons whose library accounts are blocked may not check out items, but they are welcome to use the Library—they may read books in the Library, use study rooms and attend programs. We also have a selection of adult and children's books in the Library lobby that can be checked out without a library account.

When a patron—adult, child, parent or guardian--comes to us to explain why they or their child is unable to return an item, we waive the charges whenever the circumstances warrant it. Our librarians are in regular contact with library staff at the schools, and we also waive account fees at their request.

When a student graduates, the charges they have incurred remain on their account and when they apply for an adult account they are informed of the charges. If they return their materials at that time the fees for the returned materials are waived. If the charges are several years old and have gone to a LOST-NI status, we usually waive the fees when they come in to reapply for an adult account.

How fees are determined: The Library's fees have been established for many years, and I do not know what body originally approved them.

The replacement cost is the price the Library paid for the original item, often several years before, when item prices were generally lower.

The \$7.00 PROCESSFEE was also developed several years ago and is an average of the cost of labels, barcode, book cover, and the staff time it takes to order, receive and catalog the replacement, and physically process it before it is shelved. In 2025, the cost of a half hour of staff time (the least amount of time it would take to purchase, catalog and process one item) is \$11.48, not including the cost of

labels and other processing materials—more than the \$7.00 per item the Library charges for processing. When the replacement cost is waived, the processing fee is waived as well.

The \$3.00 ILL fee was also established several years ago and is less than the actual cost of shipping the item to and from another library.

Note: The Ketchikan Public Library shares its system with the KGB School District Libraries; school libraries determine how much to charge for lost items checked out of their collections. The Ketchikan Public Library does not have authority to waive Lost Item charges from other libraries.

Reasons for lost and damaged item charges: The Library's goal in charging lost item fees is to encourage patrons to return their library items so others can also use them. Indeed, the Library realizes no financial benefit or compensation when lost fees are paid since they go directly into the City of Ketchikan's general fund (not the Library's budget).

If the patron returns the item before the Library reorders it and in good condition, the lost item charges are waived.

- Library items are purchased with City funds, so these are City assets and as Library staff we are responsible for ensuring that these items remain available for our patrons. The City of Ketchikan Municipal Code, Section 2.40.060 states: “Any person who willfully fails to return any book, newspaper, periodical, publication, or other property of the Ketchikan Public Library within 30 days after notice in writing to return same shall be guilty of a violation; and in addition to the other penalties provided for herein, such person may be denied the use of the library by the librarian.” In practice, we provide as much leeway as we can for patrons with lost items so they can continue to use Library services and collections.
- A Lost item notice notifying the patron of a blocked account often results in the return of the item(s), at which point the lost item charges are waived.
- Lost items tend to be in demand, so the Library must re-purchase them out of a collections budget that has shrunk 31% over the past 10 years, as book and other prices have increased. The replacement of lost items reduces the number of new items the Library can purchase.
- Some patrons (usually adults) check out items that they do not intend to return, either to keep or to sell. Doing away with lost item charges would eliminate any incentive for these patrons to return or pay for the items they have taken, some of which are out of print and difficult to replace. This is especially true with Alaskan and Northwest Coast cultural titles.

Lost item charges are an important element of the stewardship of Ketchikan Public Library collections and eliminating these would be to the detriment of the collections and services the Library offers to the community.



TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Lacey G. Simpson, Acting City Manager

DATE: March 9, 2022

RE: Elimination of Ketchikan Public Library Overdue Fines

The attached informational memorandum provided by Library Director Pat Tully outlines the department's intent to permanently eliminate fines for overdue materials. The rationale for this action is detailed by Ms. Tully. Unless alternate direction is given by the City Council, staff intends to proceed as outlined by Ms. Tully. Should City Councilmembers have any questions and/or concerns, staff will attempt to respond accordingly.



To: Lacey Simpson, Acting City Manager, City of Ketchikan / KPU

From: Pat Tully, Ketchikan Public Library Director

Re: Elimination of Library overdue fines

Date: March 3, 2022

Since the beginning of the pandemic in April 2020 the Ketchikan Public Library has not charged fines for overdue materials, at first because many of our patrons found it difficult to return their items—either the Library was closed or they were stuck at home—and then because so many people were suffering financial hardship due to the pandemic. The Library has not resumed the practice of charging overdue fines.

In the past several years public libraries around the country, including several in Alaska, have stopped charging overdue fines. Fines are a hardship on families with young children, elders, and others of modest means, and this can lead some people and families to stop coming to the library altogether. Our Library provides many helpful services, including public computers, SPOT locator beacons, newspapers from around the region, and programs for children, teens, adults and seniors. People who have unpaid fines can be too embarrassed to come to the Library to access these and other services.

We plan to eliminate permanently the barrier that overdue fines present to many Ketchikan residents.

The Library will continue to charge overdue fines on items borrowed from off-island libraries through interlibrary loan, if those libraries charge us. We will also continue to charge patrons for the replacement cost of lost and damaged items. If a patron's total charges exceed \$10 they will not be able to check out items until they have paid the charges.

Evidence from public libraries that have eliminated overdue fines indicate that most people do not keep items any longer when a library does not charge fines. Many libraries report that when they announce that overdue fines have been eliminated, they have an influx of overdue items and an increase in the number of people visiting the library.

The Ketchikan Public Library plans to make permanent its current practice of not charging overdue fines, and will forgive existing overdue fines owed to the Public Library.