


TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Honorable Mayor & City Council Initials: 

FROM: Shawn Hart, Acting Assistant City Manager File #: MGR25-267

DATE: April 25, 2025 Mtg. #: 05/01/25 UBa

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

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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 policies regarding charges for lost, misplaced, and damaged materials.

At the April 17, 2025, Council meeting, staff responded to the concerns raised by Council and the previous meeting. On April 9, the Library Advisory Board also met to review and address these concerns. Following those discussions, Council directed staff to evaluate the Board's recommendations.

Attached is a memorandum from Director Tully responding to Library Advisory Board suggestions, which includes recommendations put forward by staff on how the Library can proceed with addressing the issue at hand without additional costs based on the input from the Library Advisory Board and City Council.

Staff has reviewed items 9 and 10 of the Director's memo, which suggest (1) allowing students with blocked accounts to check out a single book and (2) applying time-limited suspensions rather than indefinite account blocks. Due to limitations within the Library's 15-year-old system and current staffing levels, staff has determined that implementing a one-book policy would require interrupting the checkout process to manually verify a child's borrowing history—an approach that is time-consuming, particularly during peak usage periods. Additionally, the system does not support time-based suspension tracking, which would also need to be handled manually.

Staff believes that implementing these procedures would involve currently unknown costs, potentially including software upgrades or additional staffing resources.

At this time, staff recommends approval of Recommended Amended Motion No. 1, which endorses the Director's proposal to enhance communication with the public and ensure that borrowing guidelines, particularly those related to lost or unreturned items are clearly communicated, and re-evaluate this approach in 6 months with an update to the City Council.

Staff has also prepared Amended Motion No. 2, which would direct staff to further research and report on the potential costs and operational impacts of implementing both a one-book borrowing policy for students with suspended accounts and time-limited suspensions, as outlined in items 9 and 10 of Director Tully's memorandum in response to Library Advisory Board comments.

The motion on the floor from the April 17, 2025, Council City meeting is:

**Moved by Bradberry**, seconded by Kistler the City Council discuss the Ketchikan Public Library's lost and damaged item charges on student accounts.

**Recommended Amended Motion No. 1:**

I move the City Council direct staff to approve enhanced public communications regarding Library borrowing policies as recommended in the Library Director's April 22, 2025, memorandum; and direct staff to report back to Council with an update on the effectiveness of these efforts in six months.

**Amended Motion No. 2:**

I move the City Council direct staff to assess the cost, feasibility, and operational impacts of allowing students with suspended accounts to check out one book and implementing time-limited suspensions and to report back to Council with an analysis.

**To: Members of the 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: Library Advisory Board suggestions, Library response and actions taken**

**Date: April 22, 2025**

The Library Advisory Board had its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, April 9, and discussed the issue of lost and damaged book charges for children. On August 16, Library division heads and the District Library Consortium Representative Caitlin Jacobson met to review and respond to the Board's suggestions:

1. **Should the deadline for returning a lost book in good condition be less than 6 months?** Response: Technically it's 6 months, but in reality, it is longer than that (basically when the selector has a chance to review the list). If a title is popular and in high demand, it is reordered before the 6 months are up.
2. **Can children still access electronic resources if their accounts are blocked?** Response: Students whose accounts are blocked are still able to access digital resources such as the Alaska Digital Library, Comics Plus and others (except for Hoopla, which is restricted to Public Library accounts).
3. **Is it possible to run a report on how many people return their lost book after receiving a bill?** Response: No; once the item is returned there is no link between the patron and the item, so the system cannot report on it.  
As of April 1, there were 1,232 PL items in Lost status; this includes 161 lost items on student accounts. It does not include items we have billed and deleted from the system.
4. **Clarify the language of the overdue and lost/damaged item notices, including the following information:**
  - **if an item is not returned within a certain period of time it will be considered lost and a bill will be issued;**
  - **if the item is returned before it is reordered then the lost book charges will be waived;**
  - **if they cannot find the item due to unavoidable circumstances, contact the Library so we can work together to resolve the situation.**

We have changed the wording on the overdue and Lost item notices.

5. **In the notices, omit that the returned books need to be in good condition.** Response: It is important that the item be in good condition so it can be used by others, so we need to specify this.
6. **Mention in the notices that the book can be returned to the public library, one of the school libraries, or the Plaza book drop.** Response: It can only be returned to a school library when school is in session, not during breaks or over the summer. Best to omit this to keep the notice succinct.
7. **Provide positive incentives for returning materials, like stickers.** Response: We provide stickers and bookmarks for participating in some Library activities; but we hesitate to do this for returning items that have been checked out.
8. **How much does the Library pay to replace books each year? Does it fluctuate a lot? This is not something we are able to track in our system. If it is a fairly small amount, is it something that the Library could absorb?** Response: Payments for lost item replacement and processing are deposited in the City's General Government fund, not in the Library's budget. Any time the Library replaces a lost item, the purchase and processing costs come out of the Library's current budget. The Lost Item charge is not really to recover the cost; it is to encourage people to return the items so that the Library does not have to spend our existing collection budget on replacement copies.
9. **Is it possible for children with lost books to have their account suspended for a period of time—a year or less—and then reactivate the account even if their books are still lost? That way they have an incentive to return the books to reactivate their account early, but they don't lose the ability to check out for an indeterminate period.** Response: School libraries allow students with blocked accounts to check out one book at a time, so they are able to check out a book as they need it. Limiting their checkouts to one book reduces the chance that lost item charges will accrue over time.
10. **Could the public library also restrict kids with blocked accounts to one checkout at a time?** Response: This is something that is already done by school library staff.
11. **Is it possible to tell whether patrons who are sent overdue notices or bills have actually opened the email?** Response: Notices are only sent via email when there is an email address in the account, and there is no mechanism in our system to let us know if an email has been opened. School libraries hand out or distribute paper notices to students, and lost item notices are sent out in paper.
12. **Is there an option to text students about overdue and lost books rather than email?** Response: Many student accounts have their parent or guardian's cell number on file, and by state law, public libraries may not send notices to anyone but the student.

13. **It is unclear to students, parents and guardians what the relationship is between the school library and the Public Library.** Response: We will create an FAQ page on the Library's website explaining this relationship.
14. **Can the school libraries and the public library come up with a single process for notifying students about lost book charges and coordinate their communication about this?** Response: Patrons get billed every Thursday, and the bills get generated according to which library—the public library or one of the school libraries—is the patron's home library. Because the public library is not able hand-deliver lost notices to students, we mail them. Schools hand-deliver lost notices to their students. We coordinate our processes as much as we are able to given the essential differences between school libraries and the public library.

**By the May 1 City Council meeting:**


The Library has carefully reviewed the suggestions of the Library Advisory Board and the City Council, and in response is taking the following actions:

1. We have changed 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. We will provide information on the Library's overdue and lost items policies to OCS, RYC and WISH families; school libraries; and agencies that deal with at-risk families, asking them to encourage children that have lost items to contact the Library so we can discuss with them the circumstances and the possibility of waiving lost charges.
3. 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.
4. The Library will prepare and add to its website a Frequently Asked Questions page with information on lost, damaged and other patron charges.

These changes will allow the Library to 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.

TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

7b

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
<b>\$ 2,815.38</b>	<b>\$ 1,022.00</b>	<b>\$ 3,837.38</b>		<b>74</b>	<b>161</b>

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
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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.



TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Honorable Mayor & City Council Initials: 

FROM: Lacey G. Simpson, Acting City Manager File #: MGR25-175

DATE: March 14, 2025 Mtg. #: 03/20/25 NBF

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

The attached informational memorandum was provided by Library Director Pat Tully at the request of Mayor Sivertsen and Councilmember Zenge. The information provided by Ms. Tully is a comprehensive overview of the Library's current system of charges for lost, misplaced and damaged items and the rationale for this system.

As Ms. Tully references in her memorandum, the Ketchikan Public Library eliminated overdue fines in 2022 to further encourage library use and access but continued to charge for lost and damaged items. This is reflective of the actions taken by many libraries nationwide following the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ketchikan Public Library's fine and charges system has been in effect for many years, and it does not differentiate between types of patrons (adult, student, parent/guardian, etc.), as all patrons are subject to the same fees and penalties when items are lost or damaged. Recognizing that such charges, which may result in blocked accounts, may prevent a patron from utilizing the Library, staff will waive the charges when the circumstances warrant. Charges for items that are returned after being charged as lost are also waived. As shown in Ms. Tully's memorandum, 74 student accounts are currently blocked due in part to lost Public Library items, or less than 8% of all student accounts.

As the City Council is aware, the Ketchikan Public Library's collection is held in the public trust and is nearly entirely supported by local public funds. When items are damaged or lost, these are additional expenses that must be absorbed by the Library's budget and supported by taxpayers. Charges and fees for lost and damaged items are put in place to ensure the proper care and stewardship of public assets if library items are to remain open and available to all patrons and with respect to the library's fiduciary responsibility.

Recognizing the benefits and disadvantages of charges and fees for lost/damaged library materials, staff welcomes a discussion with the City Council on this matter.

A motion has been prepared for City Council consideration.

**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**

**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.)

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<b>\$ 2,815.38</b>	<b>\$ 1,022.00</b>	<b>\$ 3,837.38</b>		<b>74</b>	<b>161</b>

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
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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.