



On Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 1:00pm, the BDL Public Services Committee met in-person at the Coldwater Branch Library, in compliance with state MDHHS COVID19 requirements and local BDL policy.

BDL Trustees present: Susan Brooks, Thomas Lowande, Susan Smith

BDL Staff present: Kimberly Feltner, John Rucker, Jessica Tefft.

The Agenda of the meeting covered:

- I. Fee for non-resident cards
- II. Computer purchasing for 2021
- III. Library Card Policy Review
- IV. Fee Forgiveness Proposal.

## **I. Fee for Non-Resident Cards**

Director Rucker reported that while recently compiling data for the 2020 Annual Report, he saw that increasing Branch County property values have brought the average household's tax bill to the library to \$59.83. BDL currently charges \$40 for an annual non-resident card, and \$10 for a 3-month non-resident card. \$40 was the approximate average household tax bill to the library in 2015 after the passage of our second millage.

BDL has had 108 non-resident cards since 2008, 43 non-resident cards in the past 5 years, but only 7 not expired as of this writing.

The formula used to derive the average tax bill is as follows:

From the MI Treasury's L-4023 form, we get the total State Equalized Value of residential property in Branch County. For 2020, this number was \$1,127,656,320. We also need the number of residential parcels reported on that same form: 20,281. Multiply the SEV by our millage rate, and divide by the number of residential parcels.

$$\$1,127,656,320 \text{ (SEV)} * 0.0011047 \text{ (our millage)} / 20,821 \text{ (houses)} = \$59.83$$

After discussion, the Committee recommended amending the [List of Fines and Fees Policy](#) to raise the fee for non-resident annual cards to \$50. By extension, 3-month non-resident cards would go to \$12.50.

## **II. Computer Purchasing for 2021**

Director Rucker reported on the industry-wide supply chain shortages in the technology sector due to COVID19 and the popularity of cryptocurrency mining, and how the costs of available product was more expensive than expected. Rucker requested guidance on a preference to either follow our [Technology Plan's](#) purchasing schedule or stay within the budget. It was also discussed how vendors are unable to give 30-day price guarantees at this time due to the volatile situation.

The Committee recommended following the Tech Plan, even if it means going over budget somewhat, and understands that a purchasing request may be brought to a board meeting soon without the Committee having had a chance to review it first.

### III. Library Card Policy Review

We had a request from a trustee to review our [Library Card Policy](#) to see if we should include on the policy how long the card is valid, and also to determine what that length of time should be.

For many years, BDL's card term was 3 years. Cards have expirations for two reasons: to be a reminder for library staff to update contact information, and to provide a mechanism to purge cards that are no longer used due to death, the patron having moved away, etc. Contact information is important for trying to get lost materials back and to send other notices to patrons. An accurate patron count is important for various statistical reports and sometimes vendors base pricing on our active registered patron count, so it's best to keep that list tight and current.

An email notice is programmed in Evergreen to go out 30 days before a patron's account expires. However, Evergreen does not have a way of renewing online at this time. Renewals must be done with BDL staff, in person, on the phone, or via email.

Patrons who only ever use the card in the library never really notice the expiration. At checkout, staff will simply ask them to verify contact information, extend the expiration date for another year, and it's done. Heavy users of the digital services, however, will notice the expiration sooner, since they won't be able to access services like Libby or Hoopla on an expired card. Library staff view this inconvenience as more of a feature than a bug, though, since it ensures that the patron contacts us to renew, whereupon we verify their contact information.

The length of the card term was never in policy, so at some point after 2015, the term was changed to 1 year. Rucker was unable to determine exactly when this happened, but the change was made because the library was finding that patron contact information was changing so fast that we were losing track of many patrons, especially their email and phone numbers. After we made this change, the library staff who worked collections said that it started making their job easier.

Rucker polled the Michigan library community for comparison and received 42 responses as to how long their regular resident card is good for. The results were:

1 year:	9 libraries
2 years:	8 libraries
3 years:	23 libraries
5 years:	1 library
no expiration, if active:	1 library

Most of the above respondents who are at one year voiced that they had the same rationale as BDL: to update patrons' rapidly changing contact information. A couple libraries who are at 3 years said they used to be at 1 year, but found that schedule to be onerous for patrons and/or staff.

After discussion, the Committee recommended to leave the expiration of BDL cards at 1 year, and to update the Library Card Policy as follows:

Change the 3rd section:

#### **Types of Branch District Library Cards**

1. Resident Cards
2. Non-resident cards

to:

### **Types of Branch District Library Cards**

1. Resident Cards
2. Annual non-resident cards
3. Temporary non-resident cards

Then add this section immediately after:

### **Library Card Expiration**

1. Resident Cards: 1 year
2. Annual non-resident cards: 1 year
3. Temporary non-resident cards: 3 months

The library web site has already been edited to make it more clear that there is a 1-year expiration on cards, and how to go about renewing them.

## **IV. Fee Forgiveness Proposal**

In the February Board packet Director Rucker [proposed an "amnesty"](#) to wipe the slate clean on all fees owed to the library for lost and damaged items. The Board wanted more information before making a decision and tabled the discussion.

Rucker provided the following additional data points:

- The February statistical report showed that \$45,236.55 was still owed to the library. (The difference between this and what was reported in February was from expired 6-year-old charges.)
- This total is owed by 938 patrons.
- They owe amounts ranging from \$1.95 (partial payment on a lost book) to \$476.73 for someone who lost 30 books last September.
- The average amount owed is \$48.49.
- The majority of those who owe, 765, are adults. 173 are under 18.
- It's been only 3 years since we went fine-free, but since then we are levying lost and damaged book fees of between \$7,000 to \$10,000 per year.
- The maximum we have taken in for lost/damaged payments in a year is about \$3,000, so a big chunk of what is assessed is simply never paid and the patron is barred from using their library card.
- Since the library has likely already replaced popular items that were lost or damaged from our annual materials budget, the net loss to the library will be less than the total owed, perhaps by quite a lot.

The perspective from the management team is that this proposal would be for a one-time event, in light of the pandemic and the extra money we put into the fund balance last year. It would not be repeated, but hopefully it's a little bright spot for a family that might be hurting right now, even though it might also benefit someone who simply absconded with BDL materials.

After discussion, the Committee like the idea of adopting the proposal with the change of using the word "forgiveness" instead of amnesty, and that any announcements to the public make it clear that this is a one-time event with fees again accruing for lost or damaged books the day after we execute this forgiveness.

The Committee recommends that all charges owed to the Branch District Library for lost or damaged materials assessed through March 31, 2021, be forgiven.

A sample letter to a formerly barred patron:

Dear Library Patron,

At some point in the past you had charges on your library account from lost or damaged materials. At their April 2021 meeting, the Branch District Library Board voted to approve a forgiveness of all charges owed that had accrued through March 31, 2021. This one-time forgiveness is in response to the extraordinary events of the past year, and it will not be repeated.

Please know that your account is now in good standing and you are able to use the library again. If your card hasn't been used in more than a year, you'll need to contact the library to renew your account.

Any materials lost or damaged after March 31 will be subject to a \$5 processing charge, plus the original retail cost of item, per BDL policy.

Regards,

The Branch District Library

The Public Services Committee meeting adjourned at 1:34pm

Report submitted by John Rucker