

Calvert Library hopes to do away with fines

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Prince Frederick, MD - Having the threat of a hefty fine levied by the local library may soon be a thing of the past in Calvert County. Local library officials met with the Calvert County Commissioners for a work session to discuss the "fine-free" strategy they would like to implement in the next year. Calvert Library Director Carrie Plymire stated in a memo to the commissioners that the fines are characterized as fees for late returns. "Currently the revenue from fines is less than \$35,000, and it goes to the County's General Fund," Plymire stated. The revenue would be lost in the current fiscal year's budget (FY 2019). The \$35,000 represents less than 1 percent of the county's operating budget.

Calvert Board of Library Trustees (BOLT) wants to implement the new policy as a way to improve material circulation and enlarging its customer base. "This is happening across the country," said Plymire, who told the board that library systems in Colorado, Ohio, Utah and Tennessee have implemented fine-free strategies and have seen their visitor and circulation numbers rise significantly.

During the library's presentation it was also pointed out that by not being burdened by managing fines, library staff can spend more time on outreach initiatives. Without a punitive charge looming, library customers who have borrowed materials such as books or digital video discs would be more inclined to return those items. Plymire said the library would still charge customers for lost or damaged items.

In her memo to the commissioners, Plymire indicated that the library system could have a funding source that would replace fine revenues. "Calvert Library is working with the U.S. Department of State to become a Passport Acceptance Facility," she stated. "Their initial application has been approved and the Library expects to be collecting revenue to offset loss of fine income in FY 2020."

"You are not risking a lot," said Commissioner Mike Hart [R-District 1] who added Calvert has many young families who frequently visit the library branches and the fine-free strategy would be welcome.

The commissioners, by consensus, directed county government staff to work with BOLT and the library staff to craft the fine-free strategy, which, because of its fiscal nature, most likely will be the subject of a public hearing.

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