

LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20231127-05

Date: 11/27/2023

Subject: Expanding library access and eliminating the non-resident fee for those who live in limited purpose and extra-territorial jurisdictions.

Recommendation

Expand library access by eliminating the non-resident fee for those who live in limited purpose and extra-territorial jurisdictions.

Description of Recommendation to Council

Requesting that the Austin City Council use their authority to amend the fee and fine ordinance (Ordinance No. 20230816-007) to remove the non-resident library card fee for residents of the Austin LTD and Austin ETJ from the fee schedule.

Rationale:

Austin Public Library (APL) has had a longstanding commitment to equity which includes examining where barriers exist that prevent community members from obtaining equal access to important resources and services.

As Austin has become increasingly unaffordable, many people who work in Austin and contribute to its thriving culture and economy have been forced to relocate to surrounding areas and commute to the city to work¹². Ongoing gentrification and increased costs of housing, as well as the continued influx of new residents will only exacerbate this trend and have a more significant effect on traditionally marginalized and underserved communities³.

¹ Egan, J. (2022, September 14). *Austin ranks among 20 U.S. cities where middle class can't afford housing anymore*. CultureMap Austin. <https://austin.culturemap.com/news/real-estate/03-01-22-austin-middle-class-cannot-afford-housing-study/>

² Charpentier, M., & McGlinchy, A. (2023, June 28). *Two paragraphs forced black residents to East Austin. exploding real estate prices forced them out*. KUT Radio, Austin's NPR Station. <https://www.kut.org/austin/2023-06-22/two-paragraphs-forced-black-residents-to-east-austin-exploding-real-estate-prices-forced-them-out>

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Currently only Austinites living in Austin's full purpose jurisdiction are entitled to receive a library card free of charge. Surrounding areas, including Austinites who live in the limited purpose jurisdiction (LTD) and extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) must pay a non-resident card fee of \$120 annually. This non-resident fee creates an economic barrier to all individuals who may work in Austin and have been forced to relocate to surrounding areas due to gentrification and increased costs of housing that commute into Austin for work⁴. Some constituents of Districts 6, 2 and 8 also fall outside of the full purpose jurisdiction areas and are negatively affected by this fee.

Austin Public Library access supports workforce and economic development, digital inclusion, STEM and computer training and literacy advancement through the many wonderful programs, services, resources and materials. Expanding access to these valuable services will only contribute to creating a more informed and skilled community for all Austin residents.

There is also precedent for expanding access outside of the full purpose jurisdiction. From 2008-2015 Austin Public Library waived the non-resident fee for anyone who was a resident of the state of Texas⁵. There are several library systems that continue to provide that benefit for all Texas residents including the Houston Public Libraries⁶. In 2017 APL created the Library for All Students program, where they partnered with AISD to provide library cards to all students regardless of their residency status. This program was expanded to include Del Valle Independent School District in 2019, Austin Achieve Public Schools in 2021, Austin Montessori School in 2022, and Manor ISD in 2022. This has been a great benefit for Austin area students, and that support should be extended to the many adults that live in the surrounding Austin area as well.

⁴ Barrón-López, L., Conciatori, T., & Lane, S. (2023, July 5). *Skyrocketing cost of living threatens Austin's status as live music capital of the world*. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/skyrocketing-cost-of-living-threatens-austins-status-as-live-music-capital-of-the-world>

⁵ Rockwell, L. (2018, September 25). *Austin libraries to charge \$120 for nonresidents who want library card*. Statesman. <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2016/09/04/austin-libraries-to-charge-120-for-nonresidents-who-want-library-card/10049072007/>

⁶ Heckler, A. (2023, May 23). *How to get free access to 3 Texas libraries outside Austin*. CultureMap Austin. <https://austin.culturemap.com/news/city-life/libraries-outside-austin/>