PARK RIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

TO: Board of Trustees
FROM: Janet Van De Carr
DATE: June 13, 2014
SUBJECT: Fees for Programs

Public libraries are community gathering places, and libraries offer programs as a way to promote literacy, educate the public on a variety of topics, provide access to new life skills, and to bring the arts and cultural events to the community.

The Library has a strong tradition of providing a variety of programs for all ages and interests throughout the year. Considering the limited amount of space we have for programs we are able to offer over 900 programs per year.

Last month I was asked to estimate how much revenue the Library might collect if we began charging residents to attend some library programs. I have attempted an estimate using the FY13/14 statistics and the results of the program surveys.

① If registration fees are implemented I assume we would charge for:
- All programs where the Library pays the presenter a fee
- Computer Classes – Basic Skills and Information

② I also assumed the Library would not charge for:
- Programs that were provided at no cost to the Library
- Programs presented by staff – storytimes, after school programs, book discussions, young adult programs, computer training on library resources, low-vision support, etc.
③ - Films (due to licensing restrictions)

Estimate of Revenue

Total programs held in FY13/14 that meet the criteria for charging based on the above assumptions:

④

182 Programs	Attendees – 4,547
4,547 x $3 = $13,641	4,547 x $5 = $22,735

These numbers assume that everyone that attended a program for free in FY13/14 would pay a fee to attend the same type of program in the future.

In the program surveys 63% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to pay a fee to attend adult programs and 45% of respondents indicated they would be willing to pay a fee for children's programs. Answers ranged from $1 to $5 per program – see survey results for details.

151 Adult Programs	3,454 (63% said they would pay a fee) = 2,176
2,176 x $3 = $6,528	2,176 x $5 = $10,880

31 Children's Programs	1,093 (45% said they would pay a fee) = 492
492 x $3 = $1,476	492 x $5 = $2,460

Range of total estimated annual revenue:
⑤ $2,668 assumes $1/person for those indicating willingness to pay
to $22,735 assumes $5/person for all FY13/14 program attendees

Questions to consider:

⑥ • Will attendance at programs decline due to program fees?

• Will this have an effect on all programs if residents have the perception that all programs require a fee?

• Will residents choose to attend programs at other libraries to avoid program fees and will this impact overall Library use?

• Will this have a trickle-down effect on businesses in the Uptown area?

• Will presenters charge us more for their presentations? There is often a 'library discount' because presenters know that libraries are not making money off of their programs.

⑦ • Will we be discriminating against a specific portion of the community by imposing a fee?

⑧ I do not believe charging for some library programs will generate a significant amount of revenue for the Library. With only one large meeting room and one small meeting room/computer lab in which to hold programs, the Library is limited in how many programs can be scheduled throughout the year.

⑨ I have not had time to research the cost of new software that would accommodate charging program fees. Our current software generates the online program calendar and community calendar, is used to reserve the meeting rooms and manages program registration; however it is not designed for online payment.

1. Do only programs involving outside "presenters" who charge the Library for their presentations have enough value to justify charging an admission fee? If so, why offer staff-run programs at all?

2. No programs are "provided at no cost to the Library" – the costs of using the Library's space, its utilities and its personnel are inherent in every such program. Staff members participating in programs also can't attend to their other Library duties, at an expense to the taxpayers.

3. What "licensing restrictions," other than costs? What films are being presented that can't be obtained from Netflix, Red Box, On Demand, etc.?

4. The "criteria for charging" apply to only 182 of over 900 programs presented in FY2013-14, representing only 4,547 of the 30,213 total program attendees.

5. "[T]hose indicating willingness to pay" refers to a half-baked survey which we wrote about in our 05.29.14 post, "It's All About Priorities."

6. If people aren't willing to pay even a $1 program admission fee, doesn't that effectively say that they consider the program worthless?

7. Does the Park District "discriminate" against residents whom it charges for its programs? Does the City "discriminate" against the resident commuters it charges for parking along the tracks or in the Fairview lot?

8. What is "a significant amount of revenue"? Isn't $20,000 that would have kept the Library open all 14 Sundays this summer "significant"?

9. "[N]ew software" shouldn't be needed simply to try out a user-fee system – the Library can wait to see signs of success before making that investment.