

Library funding to be discussed

Libraries - 1990-1996

■ Ballot plan?:

Leaders of the Santa Cruz County facilities will talk about whether a tax measure should be put to a vote in next fall's election.

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Still reeling from last year's defeat of a library tax by voters unwilling to cough up money not specifically earmarked for their program, officers of the Santa Cruz City-County Library System will begin a debate tonight on whether to put another fund-raising measure on the ballot next year.

A year ago, voters in the four cities and unincorporated portions of Santa Cruz County

turned down a tax that was unofficially aimed at keeping library doors open. The measure failed, even though it needed only a simple majority of votes cast. Voters rejected Measure L, as the tax-levying issue was called, 52 percent to 48 percent.

Many opponents of that tax said that while they wanted to support local libraries, they could not trust city councils and the board of supervisors to spend Measure L tax revenues for that purpose. As a general tax, the

money was not dedicated to libraries and could have been spent for any purpose, despite promises by city councils and supervisors to use the funds for the library system.

Now library oversight committee members have been sent a report that recommends putting a specific library tax on next November's ballot — a measure that would require a two-thirds majority to pass. They will receive the study at their 7:30 p.m. meeting at the central branch library in

downtown Santa Cruz.

A recent survey conducted by a consulting firm indicated that there is not much support for putting another general, unearmarked tax measure on the ballot next year. Only 40 percent of the voters queried would support another general-tax measure.

But, the consultants concluded, there is "considerable support for a tax dedicated only to libraries." They said that 77 percent of

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those surveyed said they would support a tax dedicated to public libraries.

Consultants said their survey indicated that voters understand the importance of libraries to their communities, want to keep library doors open for more hours each week and feel a good public library system is important to children's education.

The consultants, Gene Bregman & Associates, recommended placing such a measure on the ballot. They said the quarter-cent sales tax for libraries could replace the

current half-cent sales tax, due to expire next year, that was passed for repairs of public facilities in the wake of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

"A well-financed, professionally run campaign should have a good chance for success at the polls" next year, the consultants concluded in their \$10,000 opinion survey.

Director of Libraries Anne Turner said Friday that tonight's discussion could result in a recommendation, perhaps by January, that supervisors and city council members place the library tax on the ballot in November 1996.