

Viewpoint

editorial

Libraries 1970-1979

Boulder Creek library

The battle has been shaping up ever since voters passed Proposition 13: our public library system is facing tough decisions on where and how much service to provide, and each branch library is busily being defended from financial cuts by its patrons.

That situation was clearly delineated at last week's meeting of county supervisors when they tentatively voted to accept the offer of Boulder Creek businessman Robert Kuerzel, who wants to donate a site for a proposed library in Boulder Creek.

A few years ago, officials probably would have jumped at an offer like that. Though Kuerzel would like to build an office building on part of the land, he's made it clear his offer stands whether he builds his offices or not. It is, in essence, a "no strings attached" proposal. Yet supervisors gave this gift horse a close look last week, and though they voted to accept it, the vote was tentative.

Why? One reason is because supervisors want to know if there will be any problem installing a septic system in that area. But underlying the discussion was the bleak financial picture facing the entire library system. Head librarian Charles Atkins has already noted that \$230,000 set aside to build two new libraries—one in Boulder Creek and one in Live Oak—may be spent just to keep the present system going. And once that money is gone? No one likes to think about what will happen then.

That may be why the "sixth supervisor," Alice Earl Wilder, told supervisors she wanted to know more about Kuerzel's "so-called gift" before the county accepts it. It may be that the Ben Lomond resident was concerned with what might happen to her own town's library should a newer, bigger one be built in Boulder Creek. And she may have good cause for concern, since the Ben Lomond Library was closed, though briefly, due to budget cuts. And the Ben Lomond Library, of all the branches in the system, has one of the poorest records of patronage.

Should only one new library be built, we think Boulder Creek has the best chance of getting it primarily because of Kuerzel's offer. Should it come down to building no new facilities or cutting back in other areas, we think library officials should spend their money where it will do the most good. So far, Boulder Creek residents have shown more support for their library, and with growth in that area being what it is, we feel future demand for a good library there will be greater than in other areas.

Police and fire protection must have priority over libraries; we hope that goes without saying. Water, sewer and road considerations should also weigh more heavily. And though we hope all our libraries will stay open, Boulder Creek is using its library more and working harder to build a new one than anyone else. For these reasons, a new library in Boulder Creek should take top priority in the city-county systems.