

# Ballot measure would be boon for libraries

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A measure which would double the budget for the Santa Cruz city-county library system and provide materials for three new libraries, including one in South County, will go before voters Nov. 8.

Known as Measure L, it would establish a quarter-cent sales tax, which would run indefinitely. The tax would start in 1997, the same time the county's Measure E half-cent earthquake-recovery tax expires. Voters approved Measure E in 1990.

If the measure passes, sales tax would be 8 percent; 7.75 percent without it. The current tax is 8.25 percent, the legal maximum.

The library budget is \$4.1 million; passage of Measure L would bring it to \$8.4 million.

The money would go toward restoring the 24 percent cutback in

library hours brought on by budget cuts last year; establishing Sunday hours at the main Santa Cruz library and branches in Live Oak and Scotts Valley; doubling of the books and materials budget, now \$433,000; and hiring additional staff members.

Library supporters started planning for Measure L a year ago after the library system faced sharp cuts in state funding that library officials said could have meant closure of all libraries except the main one in Santa Cruz.

State Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, sponsored bail-out legislation that provided \$900,000 a year so the libraries could maintain the status quo. That funding runs out in 1997.

New libraries are planned for Live Oak, Capitola and Watsonville, and a \$730,000 renovation is anticipated for the Felton branch.

Redevelopment-agency money has already been set aside for construction of the Live Oak and Capitola libraries.

Measure L money would go toward stocking the new libraries, but not for construction costs. Watsonville has a separate library system, but gets part of its money from the city-county system. (See adjacent story).

Measure L needs a simple majority of the votes cast Nov. 8 for passage — a key issue for opponents.

"Proposition L is the biggest deception," said Carolyn Busenhart, co-leader of the L No Committee.

If a tax is legally earmarked for a specific purpose, it's known as a special tax and requires a two-thirds vote for passage.

County supervisors got around that rule by promising — but not legally requiring — that the ad-

ditional money will go toward libraries. Supervisors voted 5-0 to put Measure L on the ballot.

The county is violating the constitution with its strategy, said Busenhart.

"There's nothing to say the county couldn't take it (Measure L money) for the general fund," Busenhart said. The board could also "backfill" its general fund by using the Measure L money for libraries, but using part of the money it now allocates to libraries to other departments, she said.

In spending funds from Measure E, Busenhart said, the county loosely interpreted what earthquake relief was, spending some money on public works projects that were planned before the 1989 earthquake.

Dan Haifley, spokesman for the Yes On L Committee, said supporters of the measure will keep a close eye on supervisors to make sure the money that's supposed to go to libraries does.

"It's very easy to see if the money is being spent on libraries," Haifley said. "There's no mistaking a library for a planning department employee."

The Santa Cruz system now spends \$20.43 per capita on libraries; passage of Measure L would bring it to \$37.32 from 1997 to 1998, 53 cents above Santa Clara County.

Whether Santa Cruz County's libraries are adequate is a matter of individual interpretation, Busen-

— Lane Wallace

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## What Measure L would do for city

Passage of Measure L county-wide won't assure the Watsonville library will benefit unless voters in the city also approve Measure U in the Nov. 8 election. If both measures are approved, it would nearly double the Watsonville library budget, providing funds for earlier opening of the library, more books, establishment of a branch library, and expansion of the present library.

Although Watsonville has a separate library system, it gets part of its funding from the Santa Cruz

city-county system, based on use of the Watsonville library by non-city residents.

Last year, Watsonville received \$175,000 of its \$750,000 from the Santa Cruz city-county system. Measure L — and Measure U — passage would mean an estimated \$640,000 in additional money for the Watsonville library.

Library Director Vivian Hurley said the city's first priority is to open the library at 10 a.m. every day, instead of the 11 a.m. opening in effect since 1976.

The second priority is to increase the budget for materials, which was cut back last year. After that, the goals are to open a branch in the north part of town.

Hurley envisions a "storefront" branch of about 10,000 square feet in an existing vacant building. That branch would replace the small Freedom library, part of the Santa Cruz city-county system.

The fourth priority is to expand the existing downtown library, Hurley said.

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hart said. She questioned whether all the branch libraries would close in 1997 if Measure L fails.

"There's plenty of money in the budget for libraries" if supervisors go line by line and reduce other areas, she said.

When election time rolls around, she said, public officials try to get extra money by "threatening to starve the public" with proposed cuts in popular programs such as libraries and police protection.

Haifley said Measure L "is not a scare tactic. Do you think a parent with two small children would enjoy seeing nine of 10 branches closed?"