

Over 750 protest plan to close library branches

Libraries 1990-1999
by Robert J. Airolodi

This country was founded in opposition to taxation without representation. And, on July 26, library advocates packed the Santa Cruz Main Library to protest "taxation by misrepresentation." They were fighting a plan that would

close all nine branches, leaving open only the main library itself.

This plan, now before the county Library Oversight Committee (LOC), is in response to a \$1.8 million budgetary shortfall caused by the state's seizure of the \$1.2 million Special District Augmentation Fund—which is local property-tax money earmarked specifically for libraries—

plus \$600,000 in matching city funds.

"I think we've been robbed of our tax money and cheated," said Friends of the Freedom Public Library President Florence Wyckoff.

Over 750 people packed the main floor of the library, standing between aisles of books, sitting on the stairs, and occupying almost all available floor space. The attendees vented their anger,

urging the LOC to keep branch libraries open.

Brad Brereton, president of the Friends of the Santa Cruz Public Libraries, was the first of 46 people to speak at the gathering. He said that, although the county supervisors didn't create the

problem, they are the only ones who can solve it.

The LOC responded to residents' concerns with three motions:

- To find some way of legally

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blocking the planned December transfer of money to the state;

- To adopt a resolution asking Governor Pete Wilson to reconvene the legislature to consider the impact of the tax shift on local libraries;

- To refer the problem of financing the operation of the county library system to the Board of Supervisors and ask the board to consider some form of interim support.

All three motions passed unanimously.

Some of these recommendations were based on suggestions made by speakers during the

meeting. Among other ideas offered, one man proposed a 25-cent fee per book checked out. Linda Bookout, a self-described avid reader, suggested that those who could afford to do so donate \$25 per library card-holder in their family. Another man suggested that the county retaliate by sending the state an IOU for the \$1.8 million. Susanne Espinoza told of a tax revolt started by Contra Costa County and joined by San Diego, Los Angeles and 17 other counties. They are suing the state on the grounds that the tax shift violates the state constitution. Other speakers suggested raising property taxes, while one even

advised that people keep books and videos out past their due dates to run up overdue fines as a revenue source.

Capitola City Councilwoman Margaret Fabrizio said that public officials, including herself, need to give libraries higher priority at budget time.

According to Director of Libraries Anne Turner, the cuts will have no effect on the proposed construction of a new Capitola branch because the money allocated for it is in a separate fund and can only be used for that purpose. Turner also said that capital projects, such as the repaving of the Aptos branch's

parking lot, have been postponed again; also, she has frozen all new book purchasing and hiring until the problem has been resolved.

No speaker embraced the branch-closure plan. In fact, when LOC Chairman Jan Beautz asked for a show of hands, a majority indicated their support for keeping every branch open at least one day a week and making payments of some kind, if necessary, for library services.

LOC members—who include private citizens as well as representatives of the county and cities—joined the public in condemning the state's action. "This

was done," Beautz said, "on the last day of budget hearings in the state capital. This was a last-minute appropriation of money that had always been local and always been the libraries', but has now gone into the state general fund.

"We cannot manufacture money in the basement of the county building," she added.

"Closing a library," said Boulder Creek resident Anne Gulliver, "is like conducting a lobotomy on the community."

*Aptos
Times*

*August
1993*