

Library- 1980

Santa Cruz council balks at approving library pact

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A new city-county library agreement, expected to put an end to the budget wrangling that last year left the once-proud public library scrounging for funds to buy books, was unexpectedly delayed when the Santa Cruz City Council failed to approve it last night.

The new contract would increase funding for the cash-strapped library system by 22 percent over the next six years, from from \$3.1 million this year to \$3.8 million in 1993-94. It would also give the county significant new say in the governance of the library, and provide for the establishment of a much-needed Live Oak branch.

County supervisors approved the contract Tuesday morning, expressing confidence the City Council would also ratify it later in the day.

But the council delayed action, with three members saying they needed more time to go over the new agreement. Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt called for a public hearing at the council's first meeting in September. Only Michael Rotkin, who helped negotiate the new contract, voted to approve it last night.

This morning, Library Director Anne M. Turner said the delay would mean the library would continue to operate on last year's bare-bones budget, because the county has said it will not release any cash to the library until the council signs the new agreement.

Turner said the city was contributing its share, regardless of the status of the new contract.

"This means another three or four months without books and staffing," Turner said. "It is

too bad the county has tied this agreement to the budget. However, it is the county that will suffer primarily, because we just won't be able to proceed with the Live Oak branch as soon as we expected to."

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retained ownership over all materials. In recent years, the county has been demanding more for its money, including more branches in the unincorporated area and ownership of what its money buys.

Although the old agreement does not officially expire until 1994, the county said it wanted a new one now, or it would secede from the joint system and start its own public library.

"This ... new agreement, if we keep our eye on the ball, should be seen as an important victory," said Supervisor Gary Patton. "Keeping our eye on the ball, we realize that if we don't approve this new agreement, we will have two library systems."

Patton said severing the system would be bad for both the city and the county.

Patton was responding to criticism from Hal Morris, chairman of the Library Advisory Board, a group of citizen-

appointees, which would be dissolved under the new agreement. Morris said even more citizen participation should be encouraged. He also criticized the agreement because the cities of Capitola and Scotts Valley had not been made party to it.

Morris said the library system would be strengthened with cash contributions from the two cities, neither of which has a library.

Capitola officials said earlier this month they were angry not to be included.

But Supervisor Dan Forbus accused Capitola of dragging its heels.

"We have never been able to get Capitola to sit down and really come to the table with the intent to form an agreement," he said.

Forbus said he was pleased that Live Oak would at last get a library. The new branch is to be paid for with a portion of \$22 million in redevelopment funds which will shortly start rolling into the county.

Over a five-year span beginning next year, the county will put \$1.2 million into the new branch, to be built at the Granite Rock site on 17th Avenue.

The books purchased for the new branch will be available to all residents of the county.

Some supervisors this morning expressed mild disappointment that the city had failed to act.

"The county just has to wait now," said Forbus. "It's a pretty good agreement, and we would feel a lot better if it were completed."

Supervisor Robley Levy, who helped negotiate the agreement, said, "I am hopeful that in September we will see agreement signed."