

Santa Cruz and county reach library agreement

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By KATHARINE BALL
STAFF WRITER

The city and county of Santa Cruz may at last be on the road to resolving their long-running dispute over how to fund the public library system — a dispute that has left the library crippled and short of books.

The new contract would give the county more say in running the system, and, for next year anyway, would increase the amount of money spent on books.

The new agreement would allow the county to own books and materials proportionate to the amount of money it puts into the system. Under the current 20-year-old agreement (not scheduled to officially expire until 1994), the county has provided two-thirds of the costs of running the library, but the city has maintained sole ownership of all materials.

Dislike for this section of the agreement caused the county to withhold its share of the 1987-88 library budget until just a few months ago, when the city agreed the county could own the materials it paid for this year. At one point, the county threatened to secede from the system.

County supervisors, for the last two years, have also been demanding improved services for the unincorporated areas of the county, and with the new agreement seem to have achieved that. A new branch of the library may open as soon as next year in Live Oak, according to a report by County Administrative Officer George

Newell and Santa Cruz City Manager Richard Wilson.

The new branch would operate in a storefront while a new building is built with redevelopment money the county will raise through bond sales next month.

The new agreement would dissolve the current Library Advisory Board, composed of lay citizens appointed by the city and county. Instead, it would create an "Oversight Board," composed of two supervisors, two City Council members, and a fifth person appointed by the other four.

Current Library Advisory Board Chairman Hal Morris said the new board would be "a step in the wrong direction."

"I always tend to want to move toward more citizen participation rather than away from it," Morris said. He said the current board was naturally displeased at the notion of being disbanded.

The new board would, however, apparently provide the county a more direct say in running the library, including a role in hiring and firing the director of the library, who currently reports solely to the city manager. The current library director, Anne M. Turner, would not be affected by this new agreement, however, Morris said.

Turner said she had no specific comments about the proposed new agreement.

"Just as the current situation with the citizen board has been workable, the new structure will no doubt be workable," she

said.

Turner said the proposed 1988-89 budget included in the document was an improvement over the previous two years, and goes some distance toward restoring cuts made in the book budget. The book budget would rise by nearly \$61,000 from this year to \$321,000.

The budget is contingent upon final approval of the new contract by the City Council and Board of Supervisors, however.

Morris criticized the city and county, for not including Capitola and Scotts Valley in discussions for a new library contract. Both cities would like to join the system, and both, Capitola particularly, have some cash to put into it, while Santa Cruz and the county are struggling with budgets that barely balance.

The new agreement does provide, however, that "other cities" might gain representation on the Oversight Board if they make a "financial contribution" to the system.

The proposed new contract would have an initial term of seven years, then would be automatically extended from year to year afterwards, unless either party gave three years' notice of its intention to withdraw from the contract.

Morris said the current advisory board would begin formal discussion of the new proposal at a public meeting Monday, May 16, at 7:30 p.m. in the meeting room of the library's main branch on Church Street in Santa Cruz.