

# Voters may determine fate of local libraries with Measure L

by Robert Airoidi

County voters will decide on November 8 whether to finance a quarter-cent sales tax extension to fund local libraries.

If approved, the tax is estimated to raise as much as \$5.3 million yearly for public library

services.

Opponents of the measure say the tax is a general tax and will go into the general fund with no guarantee of where it's spent. Proponents don't dispute the fact that it's a general tax, but they do say that the politicians have promised to use the money for

libraries.

Capitola city council members have promised residents that they will only use the money for libraries and county supervisor Gary Patton has said that residents "have my personal commitment" to spend the money only on libraries.

Capitola Mayor Margaret Fabrizio, said at a council meeting, "The libraries are in serious

trouble and if our city council would not allocate the monies toward libraries, we would expect the public to yell and scream and put us out of office."

Fabrizio and other council members have for many years promised residents a library and have worked toward that end.

However, many people believe the wave of the future is toward less branches. According to the

American Libraries Directory 1994-95 Edition, Santa Clara County provides one library for every 40,802 citizens, while Santa Cruz County provides one library for every 20,440 citizens, with that number dropping to about 15,000 if a new branch library is constructed.

Opponents, while still believing that books will be needed,

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think their importance as our primary source of information will decline. With the advent of electronic technology, information highways, networking, and CD ROM's, the future of reference and learning materials will not be restricted to libraries. "Our need to travel to a library facility will be reduced, replacing the archaic methods of the past," said ACTIV member Ed Mazenko who has spent the past three years analyzing county budget records.

According to county records, library funding has increased the last five years. In 1988-89 \$2.05 million was spent for public libraries, while \$3.04 million was set aside for the 1994-95 fiscal year, a 50 percent increase.

The Alliance of California Taxpayers and Involved Voters (ACTIV), vocal opponents of Measure L, have said they would support a dedicated tax, requiring two-thirds voter approval, in support of libraries. This special tax would guarantee the money would go to the libraries.

Voter surveys showed that about 70 percent of registered voters would approve such a tax.

Opponents of Measure L point out the similar guarantees offered

when voters approved Proposition 172, which earmarked money to law enforcement and public safety. However, according to county budget records, from 1990-91 through fiscal 1994-95, police protection spending has declined by two percent.

Mazenko said that adjusted for inflation, this means that Santa Cruz County intends to spend about 10 percent less for police protection this year than it did four years ago.

Measure L backers insist the public and other community groups will act as watch dogs to ensure the politicians will use the tax revenue for libraries. They also argue that public libraries have always been funded by general fund monies so using a general tax does nothing different than previously.

The tax, if approved, will replace a temporary quarter-cent sales tax enacted in 1990 for earthquake repairs and is scheduled to go into effect when the previous tax expires March 31, 1997.

The question boils down to whether you trust current and future office holders to keep their promises.