Tax protesters vow fight on special library fees

By STEVE SHENDER
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — County supervisors, who two weeks ago backed away from a special tax for law enforcement protection, are to decide Tuesday whether to set the stage for a similar tax for library services.

The board is scheduled to take up the question of whether to form a county service area to raise operating revenues for the Santa Cruz city-county library system at 10:45 a.m.

Tax protesters who successfully pressured the board into dropping the special law enforcement levy have vowed to fight the library proposal.

Formation of the service area would be the first step toward the imposition of flat-rate library "service fees" on property owners in the county's unincorporated areas and in the cities of Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley. Both the Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley city councils have agreed that their respective cities can be included in the service area.

Library officials warned last week that unless the fees are approved, the financially strapped city-county system will face sharp cutbacks.

Supervisors earlier this year imposed service fees for both fire protection and sheriff's protection on properties in unincorporated Santa Cruz County.

The fire-protection service fee was aimed at underwriting the rising costs of the county's contract with the state Department of Forestry for fire protection in unincorporated areas outside of existing fire districts. The fees, imposed only on properties not already included in such districts, have aroused virtually no opposition.

The law-enforcement service fee, which was relatively nominal for homeowners —$18 to $33 annually — sparked a firestorm of protest from commercial property owners, who were charged $348 to $2,547 a year.

Supervisors dropped the law-enforcement fees two weeks ago after angry business owners packed the board chambers and demanded that the fees be rescinded.

Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy subsequently said that she thought it unlikely that the board would support service fees for the library system.