

State budget cuts jeopardize libraries

By Lee Quarnstrom
Mercury News Staff Writer

A last-minute, stopgap funding plan reached by California's Legislature and governor last year will mean longer lines, fewer books and less service for patrons of the Santa Cruz city-county library system.

Budget cuts stemming from the action in the state Capitol "threaten the foundation of our system," according to a county supervisor who sits on the local library's governing

board.

In the waning days of their last session, state legislators chopped the amount of aid they pass along to California's cities and counties. But, to help hard-pressed counties raise revenue, legislators and the governor authorized several new sources of cash:

- ✓ Counties now can charge cities and other jurisdictions with police departments a fee for booking prisoners into county jails.
- ✓ Counties can charge cities and special

districts within their boundaries administrative fees to reimburse themselves for the costs of assessing real property and of collecting property tax fees.

Like their peers in most of the other 57 counties in California, supervisors in Santa Cruz adopted the fees authorized in Sacramento. And, as a result of the decision to pass along property tax administration costs, the Santa Cruz city-county library sys-

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Supervisor Robley Levy, a member of the city-county library system oversight board, said the budget cuts injure the democratic process.

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State budget cuts could mean reduced library service

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tem — which serves all of the county except Watsonville — is taking a big fiscal hit.

Anne Turner, director of libraries, said Monday the county intends to recoup its property tax administrative fees by reducing the amount it contributes to the library system each year. The county, which pays two-thirds of the costs of running the libraries, plans to cut its contribution by \$58,164, she said.

That, in turn, she said, means the city of Santa Cruz will reduce its one-third share of library costs by \$29,082 — meaning that the library will be out \$87,246.

She said several proposals to eliminate the counties' authority to charge the booking fees and tax administrative costs will be introduced in the Legislature this session.

But County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello said she is "not expecting that any of those bills would be passed" in Sacramento — particularly since further cuts in state aid to local government may be in the works.

Turner said library plans call for cuts in

staff and in budgets used to purchase books and periodicals. A staff position used to allow patrons to renew overdue books over the telephone will also be eliminated, said the chief librarian.

Another staff cut will mean elimination of temporary workers who replace librarians when they're sick or on vacation. That, said Turner, will mean longer lines at checkout counters and reference desks.

But a potentially more serious cut will come in the budgets for buying books, magazines and newspapers.

"We've already had \$31,800 cut in state aid for the public library fund, which we use to purchase books," Turner said. "Now we're going to cut another \$10,000."

"That's going to reduce our book budget to \$367,036 — or just \$1.79 a year per capita for our service area. That's outrageous. Some library systems spend as much as \$10 per person."

Santa Cruz County Supervisor Robley Levy, a member of the city-county library system oversight board, bemoaned the budget cuts Monday.

"The foundation of our American system," said Levy, "is a literate and in-

formed populace. When the state decimates the public library system, it's actually the democratic process that's being injured."

Turner said inflation has further reduced the library's ability to buy books and periodicals. The cost of books rises about 5 percent a year, Turner said, while newspapers and magazines are going up at a 12 percent annual rate.

Turner predicted even more severe cuts when Santa Cruz city finance officials decide how to come up with \$500,000 needed to reimburse the county for property tax administrative fees and costs of booking local prisoners into the county jail.

"The city needs to figure out how it can raise \$500,000," she said. "It may well look again at the library and other places where it spends money. And if the city cuts its share, then the county will be able to further reduce its contribution, since it's only required to come up with twice the amount the city contributes to the library system."

"That means we may get hit with a double-whammy."

Cities, special districts to pay

By Lee Quarnstrom
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Property tax administrative costs like those passed on to the library system by the county will be charged all cities and special districts by Santa Cruz County, which expects to raise almost \$2 million through the fees.

The four cities — which also will be paying actual costs of booking prisoners into county jail — will be charged hefty fees to reimburse the county for assessing property values and collecting property taxes. Santa Cruz is being charged almost \$104,000 for the current fiscal year. Watsonville's tab comes to slightly more than \$56,000 for 1990-'91. Scotts Valley's share is \$11,290, and Capitola is being billed \$1,275.

School districts also will be billed substantial sums for the property tax administration. Among the hardest hit will

be the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, \$350,813; Santa Cruz High, \$205,542; Santa Cruz Elementary, \$132,598; Cabrillo Community College District, almost \$158,000; San Lorenzo Valley Unified, \$115,678; Soquel School, \$70,194; and Scotts Valley, \$60,397.

Fire protection districts also will have to dig into their treasuries to pay the property tax assessing and collection fees.

Central Fire District will pay \$87,455, Aptos-La Selva Fire \$58,506, Scotts Valley Fire almost \$40,000 and Zayante Fire \$2,308.

The Santa Cruz Port District will be charged \$8,353; the San Lorenzo Valley Water District, hard-hit by the recent freeze that broke pipes and depleted water supplies, will be billed \$4,405; and the Pajaro Valley Cemetery District will pay \$5,106.