

Supervisors delay vote on library fee

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SANTA CRUZ — Friends of the Santa Cruz city-county library system will have to wait several more weeks to learn whether the Board of Supervisors will approve formation of a new "county service area" to help finance library operations.

But if comments of several supervisors are any indication, it's now problematic whether such a service area will be established at all.

Supervisors Tuesday put off a vote on the matter until Dec. 9, to give the Capitola City Council an opportunity to reconsider its recent decision to stay out of the proposed service area.

If supervisors approve the service area, which has already received the nod of the cities of Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley and the county's Local Agency Formation Commission, property owners within its boundaries could eventually be required to pay flat-rate fees to support library operations. Fees would be set at a later date, following more public hearings.

Library officials are counting on the imposition of fees in 1987-88 to help make up financial ground lost this year when the county refused to increase its \$1.8-million contribution to the library system. The county currently underwrites 65 percent of the system's \$2.8-million annual budget.

Service fees like those sought by the library system were recently imposed on residential and commercial property owners in the county's unincorporated areas to finance a portion of the Sheriff's Department budget. Those fees set off a firestorm of protest among owners of commercial property when 1986-87 tax bills arrived in the mail last month. Though nominal for residential parcels, sheriff's service fees imposed on commercial properties range between \$350 and \$2,500 annually.

Supervisors, who are to review the sheriff's service-fee situation next week, were mindful of the brewing tax revolt as they discussed the proposed library service area Tuesday.

Varying degrees of reservation on the subject were expressed by San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy and Live Oak Supervisor Dan Forbus.

Forbus said he would not be able to support formation of a library service area without assurances that there would be something in it — namely a permanent branch library — for Live Oak.

None of the revenues raised through the proposed library service

district would be used to actually build libraries. All the money would go toward operating costs, such as librarians' salaries and book purchases.

Forbus said he would need some firm indication that some of those additional operating funds would be spent in his district.

Developers of the Capitola Mall expansion project have offered the library system a 7,000-square-foot site for a branch library. But library officials have indicated that they want a 20,000-square-foot site for the Live Oak-Capitola area.

The Live Oak supervisor said he was concerned that current disagreements over the Capitola Mall site would indefinitely postpone construction of a branch library there.

"You're asking for operational funds to run a library and you're asking the people of Live Oak to support something that doesn't exist," he told Library Board representatives Tuesday.

"How far are you along (on plans to build a Live Oak branch)?" Forbus demanded to know.

"It's only informally that the board has talked about how we get the buildings we need," replied Library Board member Sara Bunnett. Bunnett said the board had held "informal discussions" about the "need for a bond issue in 1988."

Her comments led Cucchiara to wonder, "When is the library board going to develop financial numbers for its long-range plan?"

As outlined by Library Director Ann Turner — who missed Tuesday's meeting to honor a speaking engagement in Long Beach — the system's long-range plan calls for construction of new branches in Capitola, Live Oak, Felton and the Freedom-Corralitos area, expansion of the Aptos branch library, and restoration of county-funded library services to areas such as Soquel and La Selva Beach, where branches are run by volunteers.

Service fees would be just one source of funding for the ambitious plan, which is expected to cost nearly \$3.7 million between now and 1990.

Cucchiara and Levy indicated Tuesday that they wanted to know how much the library system intended to spend on the plan from year to year and where the system intended to spend it.

"What the (Board of Supervisors) needs, and what the public needs," said Levy, "is a very clearly defined plan."

"It has to be clear to the public in order for there to be support for increasing (library) service," she said. "The communities of Live Oak and Capitola are going to have to perceive that their interests are being met."