

Library Tax Debate Overdue

Increased funding for library system on ballot as Measure B sales tax

*Santa Cruz -
Public Library - Budget*

THE HALF-CENT SALES TAX COUNTY residents now pay toward earthquake recovery could morph into a quarter-cent sales tax to fund a general upgrade in the city and county library system if Measure B passes by the time the Measure E "earthquake tax" runs out early next year.

The library tax, listed on the Nov. 5 ballot as Measure B, would generate an additional \$5.5 million to fund services in the city/county library system as well as the Watsonville Library, which operates now on an independent budget.

The proposed tax would yield a total budget of \$9.5 million. The city/county system would realize \$7.7 million — an increase of \$3.1 million. Watsonville would be allocated \$1.8 million, up from its current budget of nearly \$742,000. Twelve percent of the total budget, or nearly \$1 million, would be used to offset the emergency money from the state which expires next March.

Pros and cons

Measure B needs a two-thirds majority vote to pass. Opponents to the measure argue that library improvements need not be hinged on tax increases.

Carolyn Busenhardt, who heads a committee lobbying against the measure, charges the tax would fund a "massive library expansion," and that politicians who have framed the increase as a vote for children, seniors and community members are really practicing "bureaucratic blackmail."

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"There is money in the county budget. They don't need to be coming to us with a new tax to help the library," she says. "There's a lot of people out there who are opposed to tax increases. There are other ways to fund these basic urban services."

Expansion possible

Advocates say the funds would be used to expand services at each of the county's nine libraries and at the Watsonville and Freedom libraries. Funds would be used to expand children's services, restore open hours, increase collections and renovate or expand facilities.

Director of Libraries Anne Turner — who, as a municipal employee can't advocate for the measure — said that without the boost from Measure E in 1994, "We would have collapsed." And, with the "sunsetting" of those funds next March, the library system would be left to operate on a budget of \$3.03 million.



DAVID ALEXANDER

Aptos Library Branch Manager Heidi Jaeger Smith helps library patrons find any special books they need.

"It can't be done," she says. "We would not be providing a public library system around the county. We'd be providing reading rooms. There's a vast difference between public libraries and reading rooms."

— Helen Meservey