

Freedom residents act to save library

Libraries - 1980-1989
By KEN McLAUGHLIN

Freedom residents are moving on several fronts to save their library from extinction.

Residents were set to appear before the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors today to ask that funding for the Freedom branch of the Santa Cruz City-County library system be continued.

"We're going to ask for an extension," Freedom librarian Betty Ellis said this morning. "We'll take an extension for as long as they (the board members) want to give."

George Newell, acting county administrative officer, maintains that the county must close a number of branches including the one in Freedom, because of the revenue loss caused by Prop. 13.

In a letter to Watsonville City Manager Jim Buell, he suggests that city officials consider "attaching the Freedom branch to the Watsonville library."

"If you were to do this, the circulation at Freedom would count as county circulation . . . and would be paid by the county," he says. "In addition, Watsonville would receive 30 cents per book circulated in state subsidy under current law. We have not done a detailed financial study, but preliminary estimates show this arrangement would have no net cost to Watsonville."

The proposal has not excited Watsonville officials, however. Both Finance Director John Radin and city Librarian Seely Sumpf have prepared memos opposing the merger and questioning Newell's figures.

Says Mrs. Sumpf: "I question how the county can pay enough to Watsonville to cover the expense of operating Freedom

Library gets an extension

The Freedom Library got a reprieve of sorts from Santa Cruz County Supervisors today.

The board voted to keep the library open for the rest of this fiscal year to give the Friends of the Freedom Library a chance to find methods of keeping the library in operation without using county funds.

But the board did not appropriate the money necessary to keep the library open, delaying that decision until next week.

There is a chance that the supervisors won't appropriate the money. They made it clear that the only source for such funds is the general fund contingency account, and it requires a four-fifths vote of the board to appropriate contingency funds.

The vote today to keep the library open was 3-2, with Marilyn Liddicoat and Pat Liberty opposed. Whether one of them will go along with appropriating the funds next week remains to be seen.

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Pointing out that the actual state subsidy is 40 cents — not 30 cents as Newell stated in the letter to Buell — Mrs. Sumpf wonders whether Watsonville could receive the subsidy if the Freedom Library became part of the city library system.

If the budget of the Watsonville

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Library

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Library is reduced in the future, she says, "the Freedom facility would become a cumbersome burden."

"Both facilities would suffer," she adds. "It would be very unwise to see the quality and quantity of service at the Watsonville Library diminished because of Freedom."

Finance Director John Radin also questions Newell's financial logic, concluding that "it appears that costs (of operating the library) would remain greater than anticipated revenues."

Margaret Blaisdell, a Watsonville resident who often uses the Freedom Library, had asked City Manager Jim Buell to place the matter on tonight's City Council agenda, according to one city official. But Buell reportedly declined.

"He made a mistake saying 'no' to Mrs. Blaisdell," said the official, who said that she has been on the phone to complain to members of the council.

The issue is obviously a politically sensitive one, since Freedom residents about a year ago overwhelmingly rejected an annexation bid on the city's part.

If the council approved the plan, it would also place Mayor Bill Johnston in an unusual position. The head political figure in the city would also be the landlord of the Freedom branch of the Watsonville Library — since Johnston owns the building in which the branch is located.

Mrs. Ellis said this morning that another possibility involves combining the Freedom library with the library at Freedom School. Under the plan, which she called "the most promising," the library would be open to students during the day and the public on nights and weekends.

The librarian said Freedom residents have been in contact with top school officials, including Superintendent Wallace Raynor, as well as three members of the board of trustees — E. Wayne Moore, Bruce Richardson and Alex Solano. All would support the plan, Mrs. Ellis said.

The advantage to the school district, Mrs. Ellis explained, would be an expanded collection of school books.

The school district, she said, would not charge any rent, but the library would pay a small amount for electricity and maintenance.

Even if school district officials go for the plan, however, the library would still have to be operated by either the city or the county, according to Mrs. Ellis.

Register-Pajaronian

PAJARONIAN
2-26-80