

More books or more branches is the question

JULIA ANTHONY has given up looking for new books at the downtown Santa Cruz library.

"Everytime I've looked, what I've looked for hasn't been around," said Anthony, who visits the branch about three times a week. "New books aren't what they're about."

Anthony isn't alone in her observations. Last year, a survey completed by 5,000 county residents listed new books — and being open Sunday — as the changes most desired.

The situation was made public last January when library Director Anne Turner had signs put on barren book shelves, informing people that the book budget had been cut 45 percent. It was a jarring move that caught a lot of people off guard, according to library visitors.

But judging from a battle looming between the city, the county and the library system, library patrons had better get used to long waits for new books and empty shelves.

On the plus side, people in Live Oak might finally get a library of their own.

At issue is the \$3-million-plus budget operated by the city-county library system. The city kicks in one third of the budget and the county two-thirds under an agreement negotiated in 1975.

Turner says the budget isn't enough to restore the book budget, which she cut last year by 45 percent, let alone expand services.

If the library doesn't find some way to get more money than what's being recommended in the county budget, employee layoffs and shorter hours are a possibility, Turner said.

"We're in big trouble," she said. "We're like public agencies everywhere — we're starving."

Although less was spent on new books last year, the library budget increased by \$200,000. Turner said the amount is still not enough to keep up with inflation, staff costs, and special expenses.

Besides annual raises, library employees are greatly affected by the city wage settlement program for pay equity, Turner said. Pay equity is an attempt to pay female employees the same for jobs deemed comparable in worth to those held primarily by men. "Most library employees are women," Turner said.

The 10-percent cut in the book budget in 1986-87 was supposed to be temporary. "I would never have cut the book budget if I had known we'd be facing the same problems this year," she said.

"Honestly, for a librarian to cut a book budget is painful. We deal in getting information out to the public.

"If we don't get enough money to restore the book budget, we're going to have to cut services in a major way," said Turner.

Library officials were counting on a special tax to be levied on property owners to pick up the slack in the budget. After all, the county had put a "service charge" on property tax bills in the unincorporated area to pay for sheriff's services. Instead, residents raised the roof over the law enforcement tax and supervisors repealed it. The library tax never had a chance.

Turner would like to see the library renegotiate the budget agreement. The city, she says, is doing better financially than the county. And she'd like to see the city of Scotts Valley get a seat on the Library Board and, by the same token, put money in the till for the library there.

PAT Busch, analyst for the County Administrator's Office, sees it differently.

He thinks library administrators are too concerned about building up the downtown library while other areas don't get service.

He says the Santa Cruz library system has as many books, new and otherwise, as a library of its size needs. He cites statistics from libraries of comparable size in Butte County, San Luis Obispo, Huntington Beach and Monterey County which have about the same number of books as Santa Cruz' libraries.

He points to a long-range plan established by the Library Board last year. The plan calls for expanding service in all areas, particularly by opening libraries closed after Prop. 13, such as Capitola.

"We wanted to make the point that the long-range plan goals are laudable, but we really haven't gotten very far. We want the budget to reflect the effort to realize long-range plan goals.

"Everybody like books and we're not opposed to books," said Busch, "but what's a reasonable acquisition level for a library of this size? We've got big holes out there (in unincorporated Santa Cruz County) with no services — Live Oak, Soquel, and Capitola haven't gotten one hour of service.

Busch recommends the library use a contingency fund of \$187,000 to open a branch in Live Oak. He notes that while most of the library space, 75 percent, is in the downtown branch, only 23 percent of users are from the city of Santa Cruz.

It's a question that won't be answered till the county approves its budget later this month.

— LAURIE SLOTHOWER