

VCF

LIBRARIES 1980-89

Commentary



Hal Morris

A report on library imbroglio

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By HAL MORRIS

AT A time when most institutions are racing into the age of information, the Santa Cruz City-County Library System has been left behind with an inability to function either as an appropriately funded, electronically oriented, contemporary facility or even as the library that was adequate several years ago. There are short-term difficulties and long-term problems, and the two appear to have become inappropriately intertwined.

The Santa Cruz City-County Library System is governed under the terms of a 1964 contract by joint action of the Board of Supervisors and the Santa Cruz City Council. Management is provided by the city manager through his appointee, the director of libraries. The Library Board comprises four city residents and three county residents who are effectively appointees of the contracting parties. It meets monthly and focuses exclusively on Library functions, with the expectation that its diverse, able membership can offer advice worth serious consideration by administrators and elected officials.

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When the Board of Supervisors and the City Council adopt incompatible Library budgets, they have agreed in advance that a Budget Reconciliation Committee will meet privately to develop a budget that is satisfactory to the board and to the council. The Budget Reconciliation Committee's membership is one elected official and one administrator from each governmental body. Obviously, since a decisive odd vote does not exist, deadlock is a possibility and has become a private reality of unknown dimensions.

The Library budget for 1985-86 which went to the Budget Reconciliation Committee in the summer of 1985, is still not fully settled, over two years later. The Library budget for 1987-88, which went to the Committee over five months ago, is still substantially disputed and the disagreement has prevented the release of funds for current book purchases. These difficulties over annual budgets are short-term problems which must anticipate resolutions that do not drag out over months and years.

Early this year, reacting to the City Charter changes adopted in the November 1986 election, the Library Board suggested to the City Council that it could now initiate activity which might develop a firmer, more contemporary Library System structure than the 1964 contract provided for the existing partners and the potential partners of Capitola and Scotts Valley. Over six month ago, discussions relating to potential changes in the contractual relationship were referred to the Budget Reconciliation Committee, and although long-term contractual relationships, doubtless, a more difficult problem than the Committee's usual short-term assignment of resolving annual budgets, the Committee has failed to send up any meaningful sign of progress since it received its assignment.

Until its most recent meeting, the Library Board has been, perhaps, overly patient about the Budget Reconciliation Committee's inactivity; but now by a vote of 6-1, the Library Board has advised the Board of Supervisors and the City Council to formally engage in a mediation process for the unresolved budget years of 1985/86 and 1987/88.

Hal Morris was a member of the library system's long-range planning committee before being appointed to the Library Board 1½ years ago. Morris, a 24-year resident of Santa Cruz, is the 1987 chairman of that board.