

# **County Libraries Phase I First Final Report January 1996**

## **REASON FOR INVESTIGATION**

The concerns of County officials, both elected and appointed, and the citizens of Ventura County for the uncertain future of our libraries were responsible for this study.

Because of the urgency of imminent closure of some libraries, this initial phase of the report deals only with the issue of funding. The balance of the report with further recommendations will appear later.

## **PROCEDURES FOLLOWED**

- Conferred with the Chief Administrator's office regarding the projected future budget for County libraries.
- Interviewed County Supervisors regarding budgeting needs and necessary changes in the Library Services Agency (LSA) and the delivery of services.
- Visited libraries throughout Ventura County including independent community supported facilities and interviewed personnel at branch libraries.
- Discussed with the Director of Library Services Agency the extensive problems facing libraries in Ventura County

## **FINDINGS**

- Libraries are not a public service mandated by California state, county or city law. Funding can be deleted from government budgets without penalties.  
Since the early '90s, the State has cut nearly 50% of LSA revenue. This has caused operating funds for LSA to become unstable and insufficient to operate a basic library program without contribution from the County General Fund.
- With a multi-million dollar projected County budget deficit for the coming year, sufficient County General Fund contribution to library funding is doubtful. More definite budget decisions can be made when County mid-year projected 1996-97 budget report is released on February 15, 1996.
- In addition to reduced library hours open to the public, as an obvious consequence of unstable funding, County libraries also suffer from:
  - a. Serious deterioration of up to date collections of books, magazines, and reference material, including other informational services.
  - b. Low morale among library staffs who perceive that libraries are a low public priority. Trained employee retention is extremely difficult.
  - c. No hope in the foreseeable future for badly needed building repairs, improvements, or the acquisition of new library facilities.
  - d. Delays in book processing, increased workloads, itinerant staff members working

two or more libraries.

e. Inability to do long term planning regarding the above issues.

- Small neighborhood libraries are targeted for closure in March 1996. These libraries serve the recreational and informational reading needs of limited or non-drivers such as children, senior citizens and the poor. The role of technology is generally secondary to their patrons. Large central libraries offer more services but are not accessible to patrons who must rely on facilities in close proximity to their homes.
- This problem of adequate funding for libraries is shared by all counties in California since the State reduced its financial support.
- Supervisor Frank Schillo's plan to preserve Ventura County libraries would shift present County Allocation Plan (CAP) overhead costs and help to form a City/County Joint Powers Agreement/Partnership to operate the library system as a Federation.
- Santa Clara County developed and adopted a Joint Powers Agreement in 1994 which provides that the County and nine cities will share library costs, administration, eliminate duplication of services and implement a more efficient, coordinated program.
- Recognizing the need for a cooperative effort to address the reorganization of the library system, the Contra Costa County Public Managers Association called for a proposal for a county-wide study related to the needs, priorities and issues of the County and the 18 cities involved. A consultant will be engaged to study a variety of models for future library governance, delivery of services, funding and a conflict/resolution consensus process for the agencies involved. The completed study will report the pros and cons of various structures and funding options and make a recommendation for the future model(s) for delivery of library services.
- In the face of dwindling funds, libraries are faced with the demand for more technological services and informational resources.
- To meet increasingly sophisticated and diverse technological and informational needs of California citizens, the State Library Networking Task Force has developed a statewide resource sharing pool. This plan calls for a California multitype library network which will be composed of five Regional Library Networks that will link all types of libraries in a given geographic region. This statewide network will link libraries in communities, organizations, educational institutions, the medical field, and businesses in order to provide state-of-the-art reference, economic, research, educational and cultural information to all participating libraries who contract with this resource sharing pool. This plan will offer collectively more materials more cost-effectively than any one of the libraries could provide individually. Legislation governing this coordinated cooperative statewide plan will be written in 1996 and the phase-in will begin.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the County can no longer afford to fully fund library services, the 1995/96 Grand Jury recommends:

1. Stable funding must be achieved before libraries can make the changes necessary to evolve, adapt and provide relevant services to a diverse society.
2. Supervisor Schillo's plan should be seriously considered, the economic feasibility be determined and all libraries in Ventura County be encouraged to participate at some level in order to provide a coordinated, unduplicated, cooperative delivery of library services.
3. The Santa Clara County model for a Joint Powers Agreement should be reviewed, evaluated and any constructive ideas should be considered in future planning for Ventura County libraries.
4. If a plan for the resolution of the problems faced by Ventura County libraries is not available by March 1996, the County should engage a consultant to study the issues and recommend models/options for future delivery of library services.
5. The California State Multi Library Network plan for providing state-of-the-art informational resource sharing should be factored into plans for the libraries' future.
6. The business community should investigate possibilities of adopting a library or funding a specific program such as the Summer Reading Program, book acquisition, children's story hour, literacy programs, etc.
7. Neighborhood libraries should be preserved because, like any educational facility, they attract new young families with children so important to a vital economic community.
8. User fees should be assessed for any special services beyond basic library services.

## RESPONSE NOT REQUIRED

## **Response to 1995/96 Grand Jury First Final Report January 1996**

County Libraries:

Although a response was not required, I felt compelled to respond. I was very encouraged to see that the plight of our libraries was included as one of your urgent areas of examination. I am also appreciative that you have taken the time to acquaint yourselves with my efforts to restructure library service delivery in Ventura County.

I am happy to report that as of February 27, 1996, we were fortunate in being able to temporarily avert closure of some of our smaller branches. A long term solution is still needed. As you correctly pointed out in your findings, library service is not mandated and will be one of many services competing for scarce general fund dollars. I believe that the Federation Concept is a possible solution. We will make the system the most efficient it can be and will be in a better position to look at long term funding.

The Federation idea is based on the Santa Clara model as well as findings from the State Library Task Force which recommended joint partnerships between cities and counties as the most optimal library relationship for the future. I am pleased to report that we are indeed moving ahead with the idea. I have concluded my meetings with each of the cities and on March 14, 1996, there will be a meeting between the County and all of the cities to begin discussions on the feasibility of the Federation. At this point, my goal is to make sure that the cities have all of the information they will need to make an informed decision. We are continuing to work with community-based groups to solicit their ideas and support.

I am also working on trying to restore some of the lost state funding suffered by our system. Just last week, representatives from most of our cities joined me in meeting with the Governor's Office to discuss this issue. The direction we received is that potential partnerships with schools may be the key to additional funding in the future. I am willing to explore any and every opportunity and plan to look at this suggestion, and any other that may arise, further.

Thank you again for the interest.

Sincerely,

Frank Schillo, Supervisor