

## News

### A NEW CHAPTER FOR S.J. COUNTY LIBRARIES

#### PROPOSAL WOULD OPEN NEW BRANCHES AND IMPROVE EXISTING ONES

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STOCKTON - Libraries haven't kept pace with population growth in San Joaquin County - peaking more than a quarter century ago - but a facilities plan for the future would make up lost ground and calls for expanding the number of libraries from 13 to 18 by 2030.

The Facilities Master Plan doesn't just cover growth of space to hold books, it includes creating comfortable places to read or work in groups and it provides more computer access to help bridge the "digital divide" separating those who can access the Internet at home and those who cannot.

"Libraries are changing drastically," said Pamela Sloan, director of Stockton Community Services Department. "Lots of things are happening there besides just reading books."

Sloan presented the plan to the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors at its Tuesday meeting.

The Stockton-San Joaquin Library is a mostly countywide system. Stockton runs it, the county contracts with Stockton, and the city of Lodi has its own library.

Plans call for increasing square footage per capita back to levels not seen since 1980, according to the master plan, prepared by Group 4 Architecture, Research and Planning.

The county's population is expected to nearly double to 1.2 million.

"As we have grown in population, we have not grown our library system," Sloan said.

The plan would also create a third tier of library services - something between a small community branch and the main branch in downtown Stockton. This new "resource library" would be larger than a community branch, bringing more services closer to residents in the county's remote areas, according to the plan. There would be four of these. They would be in Weston Ranch, Manteca, Tracy and northwest Stockton.

The projected construction budget runs about \$250 million, taking place in multiple phases. The first phase focuses on improving access for existing customers, so a bond or sales-tax measure could be an effective way to pay for the project, according to the plan. The second phase could obtain funding through developer fees. The third phase will require the library to work with local communities on developing funding strategies.

The county's attention to the library system has increased since Stockton city budget cuts last year reduced operating hours.

During the county's budget hearings last summer, the supervisors asked their own staff to prepare a report on the library system, exploring future options for the county, including the possibility of splitting with the city.

The report recommends that the county continue efforts to modify the agreement with Stockton. On Tuesday the supervisors postponed the discussion of its own report until next week.

Supervisor Larry Ruhstaller said a better working relationship between the city and the county would be needed before the ideas in the master plan could be implemented.

"If you have a dysfunctional marriage, it's probably not going to move forward," he said.

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