

# **Options for the Future of Butte County Library Services**

By

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## **Purpose and Scope of Report**

The Board of Supervisors requested an overview of the Butte County Library system and an analysis of alternatives for improved operation and sustainable funding. This report addresses the Board's request while providing historical background and other related, contextual information that will make this report useful and understandable to a variety of audiences.

## **Introduction**

Butte County's proud library tradition is over 150 years old, dating back almost to the birth of the state of California. If assembled, the Library's over 76,000 current card holders would fill San Francisco's Candlestick Park stadium and leave over 7,000 in the parking lot. Every day the libraries are open, an average of over 2,000 Butte County residents come into the facilities to enjoy the benefits of the library system – its materials, equipment, and programs, supported by a knowledgeable and helpful staff. The County is seeking to preserve this important institution, support its transition into a changing future and develop sustainable long term funding.

## **Background and History of the Butte County Library System**

The library system in Butte County has a long and colorful history. The Butte County Board of Supervisors established the County Free Library System in 1913 and five years later, there were 104 branches, comprised of 36 community branches and 68 school branches. The first County Librarian was Miss Ida Mae Reagan, appointed in 1913. She was the former Oroville City Librarian and current Madera County Librarian at the time.

Library services in the Chico area date back to at least 1866. In 1879, the Blue Ribbon Brigade of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) founded the Chico Free Library and Reading Room Association. After a library tax was enacted, the WCTU donated the library to the city. The library occupied several locations over the years as it grew. A Carnegie library grant was used to establish the Library's well known historic building at the corner of Second and

Salem Streets in 1905, which was later turned into a museum when the current Chico Library was built on Sherman Avenue in 1983. In 1976, the Chico Public Library was consolidated into the Butte County Library System.

Oroville's first library dates back to its mining town roots in 1859 and was referred to as a "ladies" library. After receiving a \$10,000 Carnegie grant, a new library was constructed in the Classical Revival temple style and opened on Montgomery Street in 1912 on property donated by Senator George Perkins. The Oroville Library consolidated with the Butte County Library System in 1971. After several relocations over many decades, the present Oroville library on Mitchell Avenue was constructed in 1974.

In the Butte County community of Paradise, the library was established in the home of Emma Blackburn, who with her attorney husband John, had come to Paradise in 1913. One hundred library books were transferred to the Blackburn home near the railroad station, with the blessing of the County Librarian. Unfortunately, the home burned that first summer, along with half the books and a subsequent location suffered a crushed roof due to a heavy snowfall. The library was relocated a number of times as space needs grew, culminating in the construction of the present building on Clark Road in 1976.

Gridley's library dates back to 1914 when the Ladies Improvement Club began the process to build a Carnegie library. The Classical Revival style building opened in 1916, with Emma Sligar serving as librarian and janitor at a salary of thirty dollars per month. Gridley's library consolidated with the County's library system in 1964. The growing population and book collection prompted a new library to be built and it opened in 1983 in its present location on Spruce Street. Volunteers took on the task of moving into the new building, setting up, and landscaping the grounds.

The Durham library opened in 1914 after Butte County Library's first librarian approved the establishment of a Durham branch library. The library was housed in Stephens Drug Store but was moved to a building down the street following a fire in the drug store in 1921. The new location was popular because it was adjacent to a pharmacy with a soda fountain. After a fire burned the pharmacy, the library shared space in the Durham courthouse and jail. If court testimony was deemed too offensive, the librarian was excused for the day and the library was closed. After another move to the Durham Memorial Hall, the library was moved to its current location on the Durham Dayton Highway in 1976. Due to Countywide budget problems, the Durham Library was closed in the fall of 1989,

but later reopened with an all-volunteer staff and remained staffed this way for nine years until a paid staff member was assigned to the branch.

In the small community of Biggs, the original Carnegie library completed in 1908 has been in continuous use ever since. Only 36 Carnegie libraries in California are still being used as libraries and Biggs may have been the smallest Carnegie library built in the state. Original construction was delayed by the high cost of labor following the “San Francisco fire and railroad congestion” after the 1906 earthquake. The library building is still owned by the City. The County has provided for operation of the library since it became part of the Butte County Library system in 1964, although it is only open one afternoon a week.

Butte County acquired its first bookmobile in 1957 through a federal grant administered by the State Library. In 1985, the literacy program was established to teach reading to adults and children. A Literacy Coach was added to take the literacy program and its books to low income neighborhoods, Head Start centers, and other locations to connect with disadvantaged residents.

California has no state mandate to provide public library services. These services exist under permissive state and local legislation (see California Education Code Title 1, Division 1, Part 11, Chapter 6, Articles 1 – 3, Sections 19100 – 19180). In Butte County, the library is established under the authority of its Charter. Unless the Charter is changed by public vote, the County cannot opt to eliminate its library.

In the years that followed the implementation of the Proposition 13 property tax limitation initiative and subsequent legislation to realign state and local revenues, competition for property taxes and other general purpose revenues began to take its toll on funding for the Butte County Library system. Service cuts and layoffs occurred in the early 1980s and the Board of Supervisors considered closing smaller branches. In the late 1980s, the Durham and Biggs branches became all-volunteer. In 1989, only three regular Library employees were funded by the County; remaining funds came from private donations and the cities of Chico and Gridley, augmented by volunteers. About a year later, the County came close to insolvency. From approximately 1998 through 2007, increases in State Public Library Funding allowed the County to hire staff and increase public service hours. In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the effects of the severe economic recession exacerbated the State’s structural budget deficit, leading to the Governor’s proposal for the outright elimination of State funding for libraries and literacy programs.

## **The Butte County Charter**

Although California does not mandate the provision of library services, it does permit such services under local control. Butte County is among 14 of California's 58 counties that have established a level of "home rule" authority based upon the adoption of a county Charter. Butte County's Charter contains Article VIIa., entitled "County Free Library." In this Article, the County's free library is established, along with the position of County Librarian. Further, it specifies that the library shall be maintained in accordance with an act entitled "An Act to Provide for the Establishment and Maintenance of County Free Libraries in the State of California, and repealing an act entitled, 'An Act to Provide County Library Systems, approved April 12, 1909, and all acts and parts of acts in conflict with this act,' approved February 25, 1911, and all amendments thereto." (1923, p. 1554.) The County does not have the option of eliminating its library or position of County Librarian (presumably the Library Director since appointment is by the Board of Supervisors) without a Charter amendment, although branches could be eliminated without a Charter amendment. Additionally, Article IV, Section 7 of the Charter specifies the creation of a merit system for County employees, which has a bearing on whether the County is able to outsource library services.

## **Roles of the Library Advisory Board and Friends of the Library Groups**

The Butte County Library Advisory Board (LAB) is a formal advisory board appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The LAB's role is set forth in Resolution No. 11-078, which states that the LAB will update and maintain strategic and financial plans for the Library, issue an annual "State of the Library" report, develop fundraising plans for Board approval, provide direction regarding the disbursement of earnings from the North Valley Community Foundation endowment for libraries, engage in positive relationships with community partners, cities and others, provide advice on Library issues and trends, including technology, participate in public relations campaigns in support of the Library, and generally support the development and advancement of the public library system. There are ten appointed members and the LAB has been meeting monthly. A committee made up of the various LAB committee chairs was consulted in the development of this report and input was directly solicited from the LAB and its members.

Currently, all library branches except the Biggs branch have Friends of the Library (FOL) groups. These extraordinary, dedicated volunteers support their local branch libraries in a variety of ways, including raising money to fund programs and purchase books, library furnishings, and other materials and equipment. For example, the Chico Friends of the Library group donated funds for the purchase and installation of a new circulation desk. The Paradise Friends of the Library group provided funding for new furnishings. The Gridley Friends group recently replaced six aging internet computers. The donations from FOL in various branches have paid for books, magazines, computers, monitors, projectors, copy machines, movie licensing, audio books, bookcases and display racks, Wi-Fi, summer program entertainment, teen programs, automated cataloging, furniture and a variety of other items. The donations of the FOL groups have been considerable (over \$611,000 in the past five years alone) and have been of great assistance in keeping the branches open, equipped and operating.

### **Current Library Services and the Library's Strategic Plan**

The Butte County Library currently provides the following services to the public:

- Free loan of books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, audio books and other materials
- \$1 rental of first run, new DVDs
- Reference assistance in researching topics and locating various materials
- Interlibrary loan (ILL) service for items not in the Butte County collection (items are procured by mail from other libraries)
- Downloadable electronic media such as e-books (OverDrive)
- Electronic databases for car repair manuals, a large variety of periodicals and journals, catalogs of other libraries, health reference material, fiction listings/reviews, education, law and educational entertainment (stories, songs, games, videos)
- Electronic "Job and Career Accelerator" and "Small Business Resources"
- Public computers with internet connections and child-sized computers for children
- Word processing computers and public copy machines
- Wi-Fi wireless internet service (Chico, Oroville, Paradise, Gridley & Durham) for patrons with their own laptops/devices
- Special events including movie nights, teen sleepovers, writers' workshops, poetry, book clubs, and special lectures/programs

- Scheduled programs for young people, including “Babies Love Books,” children’s story times and playtimes, crafts, and a wide range of activities in the Summer Library Program
- Scheduled programs such as Japanese and Chinese story telling, chess play, Wii for teens, computer classes and book discussions
- Dedicated children’s sections stocked with books and learning toys
- Literacy programs for adults and children, including outreach via the Literacy Coach
- Government and community assistance information, such as tax forms, EIR reports, voter registration forms
- Community meeting rooms for community, non-profit and educational groups, free of charge, serving up to 1,900 people per month
- Test proctoring for residents attending out of town educational institutions, free of charge to the student and the educational institution

The Board of Supervisors and the Library Advisory Board approved a long range strategic plan for the Butte County Library in the fall of 2010. It identified four strategic priorities (specific initiatives are indicated in parentheses):

1. Invest in efficient infrastructure (modernized facilities, popular collections, up to date technology)
2. Target library services (level playing field for Butte County kids, literacy for everyone, a thriving economy, connections for seniors)
3. Focus marketing efforts (clear messages, diverse communication channels)
4. Develop sustainable funding (diversified funding sources)

### **Trends and Challenges Facing California Libraries**

A recent article in the Yuba-Sutter area’s Appeal Democrat newspaper described the following dismal situation facing public libraries:

“They’re the lone source of free computer and Internet access in most communities, allowing the unemployed to search for jobs, learn computer skills and spruce up their resumes. Millions use them to stay in touch with relatives, apply for government services or to seek health information.”

“But public libraries’ critical role as neighborhood information hubs hasn’t shielded the nearly 17,000 of them across the country from budget scalpels.”

“As in previous downturns, Americans turned to their libraries during the Great Recession for free children’s programming or to borrow books, movies and music. In 2008, when the economy was in free fall, a record 68 percent of Americans had a library card, and library visits and borrowing spiked as well.”

“However, a whopping 72 percent of public libraries reported budget cuts this year; 43 percent cut staff as well, according to a recent survey by the Library Journal.”

General public library trends include partnerships with job training/social service organizations to provide computers for job search activities, cooperation with schools to improve literacy and support higher quality education, options for regionalized library administration, charging non-resident fees for library services, the proliferation of electronic media, library “apps” for mobile devices, passive programming, teen programming, short 3 – 5 year strategic plans, and expanded use of libraries as community centers for classes, meetings, discussions, and other functions.

In an interview for the Sacramento News and Review, California State Librarian Stacey Aldrich commented that, “...how we read and what we think of as a book is likely to change very soon...books are more likely to become interactive and use all the senses.” In the same interview, she further predicted that “electronic books will include virtual characters popping up for conversations with the reader, or even have holograms.”

In a landmark study, “Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries,” the authors note that in the past decade or so, the availability of the internet in public libraries has evolved into a “core service.” In 1996, only 28 percent of public libraries offered internet access; now the service is available at almost all public libraries and is used by nearly half of all library visitors. Following are some interesting findings of this study:

- More than three-quarters of these visitors had internet access at home, work or elsewhere;
- 44% of people living below the federal poverty line used public library computers and internet access;
- Whether they have internet access at home or not, people of all races, ages, incomes and educational levels use the public library for internet access;

- Teens were drawn in high numbers, with nearly half of 14 to 18 year olds reporting use of a public library computer during the last year and one-quarter reporting use once a week or more;
- Internet access computers were used to engage in highly essential activities like health research and applying for jobs, as well as routine social and life management functions;
- Public library internet computers were essential to people in the wake of natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, when other computer access was not available;
- Nearly two-thirds of public library internet computer users assisted others while online, such as finding critical information for family and friends;
- More than 26 million people nationwide reported that they used the public library internet computers to access government forms and download information about government programs and activities;
- More than 32 million public library visitors used library computers to further their education.

Another technological advance worth noting is the self-publishing machine. The Sacramento Public Library system recently acquired a \$150,000 “Espresso Book Machine” with a grant from the State Library and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. It can print books of up to 830 pages while the patron watches the books being printed, assembled and covered.

Stable, sustainable funding is the most daunting challenge facing public libraries today. In California, virtually all public library and literacy program funding has been eliminated from the proposed State budget. Library consortia that have weathered decades are threatening to split apart due to waning State support, potentially leaving entire sections of the state without interlibrary loan programs and other services once taken for granted. Of great concern is that the State’s funding woes will result in a failure to qualify for federal library funding, thereby causing the loss of that revenue source as well.

Among other challenges facing public libraries are keeping up with rapid technology advances, acquiring and lending e-books, material digitization and copyright infringement, internet access/filtering issues, privacy concerns connected to technology, censorship, deteriorating facilities, adapting services to an aging population, and retaining literacy programs in the face of declining funding. Library professionals are very concerned about possible federal legislation that would require internet service providers to police users’ activities for potential copyright infringement.



## **The Changing Role of Libraries in Butte County Communities**

From June 2000 through 2010, Butte County's total population grew 8.3%. During that same period, circulation of library materials increased by 85% and the visitor count increased by 122%, even as "open hours" peaked in June 2008 and then declined. June 2011 showed further increases in circulation and visitor count, with a modest increase in open hours over a year earlier.

In addition to the above noted challenges affecting all public libraries, the Butte County Library system has seen its role evolve over time. There is greater emphasis on the use of computers for personal use, homework, and job searches. In FY 2010-2011, Library internet sessions totaled 96,235, up 21% from the previous year, and would likely have been much higher if more computers had been available. Due to the recession, some patrons have discontinued their internet and cable TV services and now rely on the Library's DVDs and computers for entertainment and information.

In the area of technology, Time Magazine proclaimed in two recent articles, "Tablet Bonanza! Adult Ownership in U.S. Doubles in Less Than a Month" and "Digital Library Lending Up 130% in 2011." Electronic readers (e-readers such as Nook, Kindle, etc.) are becoming more popular, as evidenced by the popularity of the Library's OverDrive program that provides downloadable media. In Butte County, lending of e-books and audio books experienced a 1,228% increase from FY 2009/10 to FY 2010/11. Although a relatively small number of e-books are lent out each month (approximately 300), this is due to the limited number and variety currently available on the OverDrive program.

Funded through a State Library grant, Butte, Humboldt and Shasta Counties have joined together in a pilot project called Zip Books to test whether acquiring used books online and loading e-books onto e-readers would be a viable option to the traditional interlibrary loan program in providing materials not in the current library collections. With the elimination of State funds to support traditional interlibrary loan programs, the Zip Books approach may fill part of the gap. Accompanying the surge in the use of e-readers is the concern that lower income residents who cannot afford the various forms of new technology will fall behind in their ability to access the expanding world of information.

For many years, the Library has served as a community meeting and gathering place. Numerous groups use the Library for group meetings and activities, such

as craft fairs, story telling and performances, and lectures. In FY 2010-2011, almost 16,000 people used the Library's conference rooms.

The Library is closely linked with the education system, interacting with schools and teachers to provide complementary materials and programs for school children. During the summer, the Library conducts a summer reading program for personal enjoyment and to keep children's reading skills sharp for the coming school year. Butte County Library staff also provide, at County cost, adult students with test proctoring services when the college or university is out of the area.

Relating directly to education and workplace preparation is the County's Literacy Program. It provides programs and books to get children interested in reading and provides tutoring for adults who are not adequately literate. The children's program uses the Literacy Coach to carry staff and books to state funded preschools, Head Start centers, low-income housing complexes, migrant labor camps, local Rancherias, community events and other places to connect with children who may not have traditional opportunities to develop an interest in and a love for reading. Often, these residents may not have access to the Library due to geographic, economic, or language barriers. Reading, games, songs and art encourage the development of pre-literacy and early reading skills. Every child has the opportunity to choose a book to keep, and at times, staff have observed that these gift books are among the very few books available in the home. In FY 2010-2011, 4,986 books were distributed to children through this program. The Literacy Coach visited over 40 regularly scheduled sites in FY 2010-2011, in addition to being featured at local community family events such as fishing derbies, Easter egg hunts, parades and children's fairs.

In the Butte County adult reading program, 66 adult learners were served in FY 2010-2011. The participants were in their prime wage-earning years and the majority had attended U.S. schools as children, but never developed adequate reading skills. The adult reading program helped them achieve basic goals such as reading books and newspapers, writing letters, using email, using the Library, and reading aloud. As a result, these learners were able to write resumes, get jobs, advance in their jobs, perform their job duties more effectively, obtain licenses and certificates, understand voter material, vote, and become involved with community issues. Volunteers contributed almost 3,000 hours to the program so that others could learn to read and live better lives.

Literacy programs are important in addressing the hidden problem of adults who cannot adequately read. The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) reported that approximately 23% of adults in the U.S. are functionally illiterate, in that they read at or below a fifth-grade level or not at all. Another 26% are estimated to be marginally illiterate, in that they are unable to understand and demonstrate the use of information from text that is complex and lengthy. A lack of ability to read, understand, and act on basic health care information contributes to a higher utilization of health care services, boosting annual health care costs by an estimated \$73 billion, according to the National Academy on an Aging Society. Illiteracy is a significant factor connected to crime and with recidivism in correctional institutions. Inmates cannot compete effectively for jobs when they are released if they cannot read. In California, 21% of inmates read below a third-grade level, and two thirds read below a ninth-grade level. In our society, adults who lack literacy skills have difficulty competing for modern, knowledge-based jobs, are less likely to assist their children with educational needs, are less likely to register to vote, and are statistically less likely to contribute to their communities through volunteerism. The County's Literacy Coordinator estimates that over 29,500 adults in Butte County, or 17% of the population, lack basic literacy skills. Many of these adults may be among the ranks of the unemployed in a very competitive job market. In many cases, a community's public library is the only place adults can access literacy programs.

Libraries have typically been regarded as the repository for books, but they are increasingly seen as an all-inclusive venue for information gathering and sharing. Professional librarians are not only trained in the traditional library sciences, they are also trained to obtain and manage modern information from electronic sources. For example, the Library maintains a number of subscription databases, which contain everything from technical car repair information to popular magazines and professional journals; reference librarians assist patrons in finding what they need from these and other sources. In FY 2010-2011, reference staff answered 32,526 reference inquiries, up 18% from the previous year. In December 2011, there were 3,010 reference requests, up 29% from the same month in the previous year. These inquiries range from simple computer assistance questions to requests for hard-to-find technical information.

The severe economic recession has highlighted the extremely competitive nature of the labor market. Public libraries are now hubs of expertise and technology that benefit those looking for jobs. They provide free access to computers, broadband and Wi-Fi and often offer classes in computer and internet use. According to a study of the benefits of internet access at public libraries, in 2009

over 30 million job seekers nationwide used public library computers in their job search efforts. Libraries offer assistance to people who need to access online job databases and resources, create resumes and fill out applications. Many libraries partner with other agencies to help people find jobs, start businesses and create business plans. In the Butte County Library, the Department of Employment and Social Services provided computers to allow people to apply for benefits and unemployment insurance. The computers also do double duty as general purpose public internet stations. Job seekers can take advantage of the Library's Testing and Education Reference Center and the Job and Career Accelerator, both of which are subscription databases. The Library's website contains "Job Assistance Tools and Tips" that lists a large number of online resources and websites.

### **Library Budget and Funding Sources**

The Butte County Library's FY 2011-2012 adopted budget was \$2,983,451. Near the end of FY 2010-2011, funding was provided by the Board to increase service hours at the Paradise and Oroville branches from 30 to 35 hours per week, to increase service at the Durham branch from 6 to 30 hours per week, and increase the service hours at the Gridley branch from 24 to 30 hours per week. There are currently 26.75 allocated positions, supplemented by extra help employees and numerous volunteers, with over 100 volunteers in the Chico branch alone.

Prior to the loss of State funding, the Library's primary sources of funding were estimated to be: County General Fund (82%), charges for services (5%), State funding (4%), other government funding (4%), all other sources (5%). As the largest share of the Library's funding, the County's General Fund is made up of general purpose revenues such as property taxes and sales taxes. The General Fund supports most County services, including law enforcement and criminal justice, community development and land use planning, elections and voter registration, fire protection and administration. With the apparent loss of State funding, the General Fund support for the Library has increased to approximately 86%.

State funding for libraries has been available through the Public Library Finance Act (PLF) which has historically provided a per capita award to all public libraries that meet a "maintenance of effort" requirement. In FY 1999-2000, Butte County's share of PLF funding was \$340,154. By FY 2004-2005, it had dropped to \$85,569. In FY 2011-2012, \$74,000 was budgeted, but zero will be received due to the State's "trigger cuts." Several other State funding programs have been

eliminated. The County has been backfilling this loss of State funding over time, and is now at the point where it may not be feasible to do so. In addition to PLF, the State administers federal funds under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) which primarily provides grants for technology related projects.

The Library's literacy programs have been funded through County funds, State funding and grants, federal grants, donations, and funds raised through special events. State funding for literacy programs, totaling over \$50,000, has been eliminated in the State's proposed budget.

Since State support for libraries has been eliminated, the Butte County Library will depend to an even a greater degree on the County's General Fund, comprised of revenue sources that are often sensitive to economic cycles. At the same time General Fund revenues are being squeezed by the tenuous economy, the needs of the public "safety net" and law enforcement often increase, creating a funding conundrum for the Board of Supervisors.

The Butte County Library receives services, although now dwindling, from a cooperative known as NorthNet, which is comprised of all libraries in the North State, Mountain Valley and North Bay library systems. These systems exist to provide connectivity between libraries and make materials available over a wide area. Funding has come from the California Library Services Act (CSLA) and other sources (most of which are no longer viable), leaving member counties to question whether the organization can continue on member dues alone, when smaller, rural libraries have experienced drastic funding cuts. Without State funding support, these cooperative efforts may no longer exist for the often rural, underfunded libraries that need them most.

In the State Library's most recent annual report on California library statistics (printed in 2011, covering FY 2009-2010), Butte County ranked low relative to other libraries in Expenditures per capita, Materials Expenditures per capita, Print Materials per capita, and Total Materials per capita. Butte County serves 8,783 residents per single Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employee, which is more than two and a half times the statewide mean, indicating relatively low staffing. Butte County ranked higher in Circulation per capita, Programs Attended per capita and Visits per capita. Butte County ranked lower on Public Access Computer Use, in spite of computers that are heavily used, which is probably an indicator of the relatively low number of computers available. Overall, this State "report card" shows that usage of the Butte County Library is high, especially compared to its relatively low cost.

## Options for Restructuring, Maximizing Funding and Optimizing Public Service

Although libraries are offering more services that can be remotely accessed (such as subscription databases, catalog search and hold functions, etc.), most library services are accessed when patrons physically come into the library facility. Thus, the personnel and facility costs associated with being open to the public are the largest portion of the Library's budget. Any significant County budget reductions will translate into reductions to Library public service hours unless alternative funding sources are found.

### Internal structural and organizational changes

In Butte County, the Library's six branches are managed by three branch librarians who are working managers, representing a decline from four branch managers a couple of years ago. The Library Director, assisted by an Administrative Analyst, provides for the central management of the entire Library system. Given the number and scope of the facilities open to the public, simply decreasing the number of branch librarian/managers would create oversight and operational problems. Two of the branch librarians currently manage multiple facilities in communities with diverse interests and expectations, in addition to different Friends of the Library groups. The third librarian manages the County's largest facility with a substantial number of staff and a large patron base. If the County found itself with substantial funding problems and wanted to scale back Library services, it could reduce and coordinate branch hours and/or close branches to facilitate a further reduction in branch managers and staff. However, communities strongly identify with their branch library staff and manager, making this type of reduction politically difficult. The branches could experiment with staffing patterns that utilize fewer staff, but the County's smaller branches in particular are currently at "bare bones" staffing.

The Library could consider some structural changes in the way it delivers services. Existing branches could be open fewer hours, with more books available in e-book format; however, this approach tends to favor more affluent patrons who can afford e-readers. Acquiring e-readers for general check-out would potentially address that disparity, but would require an initial infusion of funds to purchase the e-readers. Self-checkout machines are being implemented and over time could reduce the need for staff. Book collections could also be

made available at locations other than the branch libraries, along with self-checkout machines. The challenge would be to find other agencies, organizations and/or merchants who would be willing to host a mini-library and who would provide the required security and oversight. Loss of materials might end up being a problem.

Given the fact that several neighboring counties have vacancies for Library Director, Butte County could consider an arrangement where it provided library management services on a contractual basis. In this scenario, with the Director's time spread over more than one library system, Butte County's system-wide management would have to be strengthened. Branch managers could be mentored in budgeting, strategic planning and other functions of centralized management, both for their own development as well as backing up the Library Director. The Administrative Analyst position could be replaced with an advanced administrative position or an assistant department head, and augmented with support staff to provide greater management support to the Library Director. It is speculative as to whether there would be a significant net benefit to Butte County from this arrangement.

#### Redirect administration of libraries to cities

In Butte County, responsibility for the libraries shifted from many of the cities to the County a number of years ago and unless the County could guarantee sustainable and dedicated funding, the cities would be unlikely to take over or take back operation of the libraries. In Butte County, 62% of the population lives in incorporated cities, which is an argument for greater financial participation from the cities. However, all cities in Butte County, except Biggs, are struggling with the dismantling of their redevelopment agencies and the resulting financial impacts. Currently, 18 extra hours of public service are provided at the Chico library because of an annual contribution of \$131,828 by the City of Chico. Throughout the state, there are various examples of city-county partnerships in delivering library services. Some counties contract with a city to provide library services – the Stockton-San Joaquin County Library is an example of this arrangement.

#### Formation of a library district

State law permits the formation of library districts which may include incorporated or unincorporated territory, or both. A district may also cross a county boundary line, but must consist of contiguous parcels and not divide the

territory of any city. It requires a petition and hearing process, designation of the number of trustees, and the opportunity for a protest vote. (California Education Code Title 1, Division 1, Part 11, Chapter 8, Articles 1 – 6, Sections 19400 – 19532).

Special districts can be funded by general/property taxes, special taxes such as parcel taxes and/or benefit assessments. The first two require a two-thirds majority vote and the latter involves a weighted-ballot election. Typically, a library district would be non-enterprise district that relies on property tax revenues and/or parcel taxes to pay their operational expenses, as opposed to enterprise districts that rely on direct service charges.

### Cooperative venture with schools

Some communities have been able to develop cooperative library services with their local schools. Benefits include economies of scale and better coordination between the educational missions of schools and libraries. However, there are challenges that prevent more communities from adopting this model. For example, schools must ensure the safety and security of children, requiring that they be segregated from the general public during school hours.

In Orange County, the Ladera Ranch School Library is located in the lower portion of the County's library. The school's portion can be closed off for security purposes and opened to the public outside of school hours. Joint use facilities also exist in Sacramento (Inderkum High School in Natomas, a partnership among American River College, the school district and Sacramento County), Elk Grove (a partnership between Elk Grove Unified School District high school and middle school and Sacramento County). A similar arrangement between the City of Lincoln, Western Placer Unified School District and Sierra Community College fell apart when the housing crash derailed the construction of the high school that was to be located adjacent to the library. The City of Lincoln has also experienced financial challenges which have resulted in the library being minimally staffed and supplied.

A joint use arrangement would be more feasible if the County was contemplating the construction of new library facilities, but this is not the case. As an alternative, a limited cooperative arrangement could include the movement of collections between the County library and the school libraries and cooperation on electronic media such as databases. At the elementary level, schools focus on connecting library materials and programs to the current curriculum to ensure that students develop a sound, measureable foundation of



reading and comprehension. Older students need non-fiction and database material to support research. In Chico, cooperative efforts might be most feasible, because the schools are staffed with librarians and the County library has a large collection. However, in the smaller communities, smaller library collections and schools without librarians make the arrangement less feasible. Another challenge to a partnership between the County and the schools is the fact that both are experiencing library funding reductions or limitations. A well intentioned partnership might fall apart due to a lack of funding. Despite that, particularly in the Chico area, opportunities for cooperation and coordination exist and could form the basis of a new partnership. Also, the Butte County Library system could assist the schools by bringing specific subject-based programs into the schools and could do more informational outreach on what the Library has to offer.

#### Outsourcing of library services

There is a limited history of libraries throughout the country outsourcing functions such as material selection/collection development, technical services such as cataloging and processing, and centralized management. The latter is often viewed as “privatization” especially if the City or County governing body retains limited authority over Library policy.

A number of public libraries throughout the country have contracted with a private corporation, Library Systems and Services, Inc. (LSSI) for outsourced management services. In California, these include Shasta County/Redding Libraries, Riverside County Library System, and the cities of Santa Clarita, Moorpark and Camarillo.

LSSI is a privately held company based in Maryland, with majority ownership by Islington Capital Partners, a Boston-based private equity firm. LSSI contracts with federal, state and local libraries to provide management and operation of the libraries. Typically under this arrangement, local government library employees are laid off and rehired as LSSI employees. This involves elimination of their ongoing participation in a public pension system, which has been a source of labor strife and controversy in some communities. LSSI can achieve economies of scale and management efficiencies, in addition to pension savings, which potentially translate into expanded local library services and into profit for the company. Critics have cited a perceived relinquishment of local control, diminished salary/benefit competitiveness, questions regarding patron privacy, and the ability to contain costs over time as concerns with this type of contract.

Employees' concerns include changes in pay and benefits, the loss of defined benefit pensions and the loss of civil service protections.

In the City of Fargo, ND, library director Charles Pace was employed by the city directly in 2003 after the LSSI contract was cancelled. He expressed concern about unpaid bills and pressure from LSSI to squeeze the library budget. At one point, LSSI requested a 28% budget increase and got 11%. In contrast, the Shasta Public Library system, managed by the City of Redding, reported increases in service hours and a seamless transition as positive aspects. The City renewed the LSSI contract in early 2010, with community services director Kim Niemer citing "...better service, more convenient hours, new technology, clean facilities, courteous staff, and programs designed by and for their communities."

Active consideration of outsourcing or privatization of library services appears to be a virtually moot issue in view of the legal constraints currently affecting Butte County. The main constraint is the existence of provisions in the Butte County Charter establishing a County free library and a County Librarian. In addition, the Butte County Charter, Butte County Code, and the Butte County Personnel Rules also reference or establish a merit system which provides significant protections to existing County employees who might be displaced or affected by contracting out public library services. Yet another constraint is the state Meyers-Milius-Brown Act ("MMBA", California Government Code Section 3500-3511), which governs employer-employee relations for various local governments, including the County of Butte. The courts and administrative agencies interpreting the MMBA have generally ruled against local governments seeking to contract out merit system functions or positions, stating that the rationale against contracting out is to protect the civil service system from dissolution or destruction. The MMBA and due process considerations also provide considerable protection to individual merit system employees' interests with respect to their jobs. Changes to the Butte County Charter (requiring a majority vote), Code and Personnel Rules would all be necessary if the County wished to significantly outsource or privatize the library.

#### Regionalization of services with neighboring counties and/or sharing of Library Director position

A significant, demographically driven challenge is affecting the workforce from which libraries draw their staff. Approximately 76 million "baby boomers" are in various stages of exiting the labor force or reducing their participation, leaving a much smaller cohort to take over their jobs. This shift is affecting virtually all

fields and all professions in the public and private sectors, although it may have been blunted somewhat by the effects of the recession.

With regard to library leadership, professional librarians are drawn to the field of library science for many reasons, which may or may not be congruent with the demands and rigors of department head level library management. The book, "The Next Library Leadership," cites the work of James Matarazzo, dean emeritus of Simmons College's Graduate School of Library and Information Science in Boston, in which he concludes that the number of librarians entering the profession cannot keep pace with the number of retirements. He estimated that between 1990 and 2010, more than 83,000 librarians would reach retirement age and every twenty years, half of the workforce would retire. Schools of library and information studies are only graduating 5,000 students annually in North America. Also cited in this book is Mary Jo Lynch, director of the American Library Association's Office for Research and Statistics, who states that "...public libraries...are having a hard time filling positions that require the master's degree in library and information studies." The overall shortage of qualified librarians exacerbates the difficulties in finding qualified Library Director candidates, which has resulted in positions being vacant for extended periods of time and/or rapid turnover.

At the current time, Tehama, Plumas, Yuba, and Butte are among the California counties with vacancies for library director. Sutter and Nevada counties recently filled their director positions (one by hiring Tehama's former director).

To address this challenge, Butte County has informally explored with neighboring counties the concept of a contractual library director arrangement and alternatively, formation of a partnership such as a Joint Powers Agreement or Joint Powers Authority (JPA). The California Special Districts Association defines a JPA as follows: "...the Joint Exercise of Powers Act allows public agencies, ranging from the federal government to the smallest special district, to enter into an agreement with each other to jointly exercise a common power." (Government Code Section 6500, et. seq.)

Locally, a number of successful collaborations exist. There is a longstanding, successful JPA model in place between Yuba and Sutter counties, with Yuba County administering juvenile hall services for both counties and Sutter County administering mental health services for both counties. Sutter and Colusa counties share a Public Health Officer since physicians with a public health background are hard to find. Butte and Tehama counties share a Child Support

Services Director. Butte County has partnered with Sutter County, four cities and two levee districts in the Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency.

Although partnerships in the library community are usually comprised of the county and cities within that county, there is no legal reason not to consider a multi-county partnership for library services. The arrangement could either be a Joint Powers Authority (a separate form of government to employ the staff and manage the libraries) or a Joint Powers Agreement between counties (where one is designated as the lead agency and employs all the staff or some variation thereof). Entering into a Joint Powers Authority or Agreement would allow the counties to integrate various systems and find management efficiencies and economies of scale that could be of long term benefit. The Sacramento County Library system and the Sonoma County Library are organized as Joint Powers authorities. If Butte County opted to explore this type of arrangement, it would need to clearly identify its goals and expected benefits and commit to a thorough analytical review to determine its feasibility.

Alternatively, the County could also engage in a department head sharing arrangement for a contractually specified period of time. This might address the labor market scarcity issue to some degree, but would provide fewer opportunities to realize benefits that rely on an integrated structure. If the County were to simply contract with one or more other counties on a time limited basis, a “multi-county management bonus” might have to be added to the Library Director’s salary to compensate for the temporary increase in the scope of responsibility. As mentioned previously in this report it is speculative as to whether Butte County would realize any savings or operational advantages from this arrangement and its temporary nature might make recruitment of a library director more difficult.

Another alternative to explore would be to transfer library management to an existing Joint Powers Authority, although the County’s charter provisions and other considerations discussed in the section on outsourcing might prove this option difficult or unworkable.

State law permits counties to contract with cities and other counties for library services and appoint a county librarian for more than one county. (California Education Code Title 1, Division 1, Part 11, Chapter 6, Articles 1 – 3, Sections 19100 – 19180). County may also enter into a Joint Exercise of Powers agreement for library services. (California Government Code Title 1, Division 7, Chapter 5, Section 6500 – 6513).

In addition to the options outlined above, the Butte County Library could also increase its cooperative efforts with other northern California libraries. Particularly as services from the NorthNet cooperative library system decline, local libraries will need to band together to increase their negotiating and buying power, facilitate interlibrary lending and keep lines of communication open.

### Development of alternative, sustainable sources of revenue

As discussed earlier in this report, most of the Library's funding derives from County General Fund revenues, augmented by donations (Friends of the Library, endowments, gifts) and grants. If the Library is to maintain its services in an era of increasing costs, new revenues must be found, particularly as competition for General Fund resources intensifies. Options for additional funding include fees, fines, taxes, and could include governance changes such as formation of a special district.

#### **Fees**

Fees must be approved by the Board of Supervisors and cannot exceed the actual cost of providing the service. The Library currently charges a \$1 fee to rent new DVDs, which covers a small portion of the cost of acquiring them. Other fee opportunities might include fees for the use of the community meeting rooms, proctoring exams, children's activities, etc. Fees are not likely to generate a significant amount of revenue relative to the Library's overall budget and may discourage participation by low income residents. Furthermore, under the terms of the County's Charter, fees cannot be charged for borrowing books. However, charging a modest fee for interlibrary loan services (ILL) and test proctoring could be reasonable options.

#### **Fines**

Fines are charged as an incentive to abide by the rules. In the Library, overdue fines are charged for the late return of materials. Fines cannot be excessive or they will become uncollectable from a practical standpoint. Substantially increasing fines would not yield significant new funding for the Library and would have a negative impact on public relations.

## **Taxes**

Taxes can be general or special in nature. These include sales taxes, property based taxes, utility user taxes and local income taxes. Butte County's status as a Charter county allows it to levy any tax not specifically prohibited. General taxes fund general governmental services and require a majority approval of the voters. Special taxes are imposed for a specific purpose and require approval of at least two-thirds of the voters voting in an election. General and special taxes can both be reduced or repealed through the initiative process.

### **Special Tax**

California Government Code Sections 53717 – 53717.6 enable cities, counties, and library districts to impose a special tax within their specific jurisdictions to fund public library facilities and services. While these sections do not require that the tax be apportioned on the basis of benefit to any property, the tax may be on or based on benefit received by parcels of real property, the cost of making facilities or authorized services available to each parcel, or other reasonable basis.

### **Sales Tax**

California Revenue and Taxation Code Section 7286.59 authorizes the Board of Supervisors to impose a sales tax (technically, a "transactions and use tax") to fund public library construction, acquisition, programs and operations, based on an adopted expenditure plan, at a rate of 0.125 or .25 percent for up to 16 years. No supplanting of existing funding is allowed and the measure would require a two-thirds majority vote. California Revenue and Taxation Code Section 7285.5 contains a similar provision that allows for a tax rate of 0.125 or a multiple thereof, although both of the taxation provisions described in this paragraph cannot be enacted for the same purpose.

The County could elect to place a sales tax measure on the ballot, the proceeds of which could be dedicated to library services. As indicated, this special sales tax measure would require two-thirds voter approval in the County unincorporated area. Currently, California has a base sales tax of 7.25 percent, which is the rate currently in effect in Butte County. Local voters can authorize additional sales tax to be collected beyond the base

rate, up to two percent (in one eighth percent increments). There are several considerations with a sales tax measure. First, sales tax is considered to be an economically “regressive tax” in that it proportionately hits low income residents harder. Second, the County unincorporated area does not have a large retail base from which to derive new sales tax revenues, so the sales tax would have to be approved by voters in all cities and the county (which makes sense in that library services are countywide). Third, a higher sales tax rate in Butte County could cause buyers to make decisions to buy in other jurisdictions with lower sales tax rates. In 2006, Butte County staff estimated that a one-eighth cent (0.125%) special sales tax would have generated approximately \$3.2 million annually for libraries. Elsewhere, in November 2011, Mendocino County voters passed a special sales tax measure of one-eighth of a cent for public libraries. It passed with a 75 percent approval rate and is expected to raise \$1.3 million annually.

### **Parcel Tax**

Another option is a parcel tax, which is a special tax on a unit of real property. It is not based on the value of the property, but instead, a flat rate is charged on each parcel. Pursuant to the provisions of Proposition 13 (California Constitution Article 13A, Section 4) and Proposition 218 (California Constitution Article 13C), this tax requires two-thirds voter approval and can be used for facilities and services. A parcel tax can also be levied in a Mello-Roos district or a county-formed Community Facilities District. In 2010, Marin County voters passed a parcel tax of \$49 per year for public libraries. It passed with a 74 percent approval rate and is expected to raise \$2.3 million annually.

Richard Hall, a consultant for the State Library analyzed California library ballot measures throughout the state from 1980 through 2009, and found the following:

- Almost 54% of the 307 ballot measures passed, and the average “yes” vote for all measures was 62%;
- On average, the approval rate and “yes” vote have been increasing slightly over each of the last three decades;
- General tax measures requiring a simple majority passed 77% of the time, while special tax measures requiring a supermajority passed 45% of the time;

- Ballot measures for “facilities only” were the most successful; ballot measures for both “facilities and operations” were the least successful;
- Utility user taxes were the most successful commonly used general tax measure and were approved 68% of the time;
- General obligation bonds were the most successful commonly used special tax measure and were approved 66% of the time;
- Parcel tax measures were the most frequently used type of special tax measure, but were approved only 46% of the time.

According to the Library Journal, in 2009, voters passed 84 percent of library funding measures nationwide and 54 percent of library construction measures. However, when considering the above observations, it should be noted that the effects of the Great Recession that have plagued the state and the country for the last few years may have altered the public’s appetite for tax measures.

In Butte County’s recent history, there have been attempts to place a tax measure before the voters. In Richard Hall’s analysis of thirty years of library ballot measures, he mentions a 3/26/1996 Butte County utility users tax that passed, an 11/5/1991 measure to establish a Chico area library district and parcel tax that failed, and an 11/6/1990 special tax that failed. The 1996 utility users tax was a temporary five-year tax, to assist the County with general operational costs associated with the State’s property tax shift (ERAF).

On January 24, 2006, based upon a request from the Library Advisory Board (LAB), the Board of Supervisors considered an ordinance to place a one-eighth cent sales tax on the ballot for libraries which would have raised an estimated \$3.2 million annually. At the second reading of the ordinance on February 14, 2006, it failed on a 3 – 2 vote and was therefore not placed on the ballot. The staff report also discussed the following other tax options for libraries: (1) Special Library Tax (GC 53717, et. seq., discussed above), (2) County Service Area (which entailed various legal concerns), (3) Mello-Roos Community Services District, and (4) Transient Occupancy Tax, Business License Tax and Utility Users Tax (only applicable in unincorporated areas).

On January 6, 2009, Library Director Derek Wolfgram presented the Board of Supervisors with the Godbe Research report. It was funded by all five Friends of the Library groups and surveyed Butte County residents as to their opinions on Library services. It was used to develop a strategic plan focused on essential library services as well as to gauge public support for a potential sales tax measure to maintain and improve library services.



Prior to recommending that the Board of Supervisors reconsider placing a tax measure for libraries on the ballot, library supporters obtained funds to conduct a telephone survey of Butte County voters. This was performed by a professional research company, EMC Research of Oakland, California, in August 2009. It revealed the following:

- While 45% of respondents felt that the County itself was not on the right track, 84% had a favorable view of the libraries;
- 84% said that the libraries had some need or great need for more funding;
- 73% trusted libraries to properly manage tax dollars and 70% said that having libraries is crucial, even if it means raising taxes;
- 57% would vote for a \$40 annual parcel tax (short of the two-thirds majority needed);
- 67% said that it was very important to keep libraries open.

Library supporters concluded that a concerted effort was needed to boost the Library's visibility and increase the number of cardholders before moving forward with a tax measure.

#### Consideration of cost containment mechanisms

This alternative involves containing the County's General Fund contribution to library services. The County could adopt a budget guideline in which a certain percentage of the property tax or other revenue source (or based on a particular formula) would be dedicated to the Library on a continuing basis. This could be used to "cap" the County's contribution, benefitting the budget overall, and would provide the Library with a dedicated funding source, but it could potentially force the Library to reduce services and staff at times when the linked revenue source or the formula-based revenue falls short. It might also prevent the Library from receiving certain State funds that require a Maintenance of Effort (MOE). If the County should entertain such an option, it should be a guideline only, to allow the Board to make adjustments under extenuating circumstances and preserve its right to fiscal flexibility on behalf of the public.

In conjunction with a "capped" approach, the Board could condition ongoing library service levels upon financial participation by the cities, although the smaller cities may be unable to afford to participate.

## Other Suggestions

The Friends of the Libraries (FOL) groups are actively trying to recruit new members, with limited success. Efforts are needed to interest working people, young people and others across the community spectrum in serving on the FOL boards and in FOL fundraising activities. New members could be recruited from high schools, youth groups, and existing service clubs. Consideration should be given to meeting times that will accommodate participation from the greater community.

The Library Advisory Board (LAB) is working on developing a high profile, signature fundraising event. This will be complicated and time consuming to develop, coordinate and execute every year. The LAB has recognized that there is a need to draw in talented members of the community to assist in developing such an event. The LAB could also look at enlisting the help of established groups with project coordination and event management experience, perhaps including CSUC students working on their Project Management minor.

Opportunities exist for the FOL, LAB and others to obtain sponsorships and larger donations from well established local businesses and service clubs. Examples include allowing a business or two to “adopt” the Literacy Coach for a year, covering the expenses for a special event or performer, or sponsoring a collection of new books in a meaningful subject area. The Library could develop a “wish list” or “dream book” of needed items that, if donated, would be most useful and appreciated. A donation form or check-off could be included in County property tax bills, a method currently used in Placer, Sonoma and Nevada counties.

In a number of cases, the Library has benefitted from unsolicited help from the community. For example, the Chico News & Review is hosting the second “Links for Literacy” golf tournament in June, after a very successful event last year that funded the books for the children’s summer reading program. The Sierra Nevada Brewery made a large cash donation about a year ago. A local service club is considering donating funds to assist the Literacy program. Focused community outreach will help the public understand the importance of the Library, which will create an atmosphere conducive to philanthropy. To this end, the Library currently has an employee designated as a community outreach coordinator.

Library staff, the FOL groups and others should continue to apply for grants and other funding from national foundations such as the Gates Foundation and should stay abreast of special technology initiatives at the state and federal levels.

The time may also be right for community members to reestablish the now-defunct non-profit corporation that supported the Library a number of years ago. These organizations can be a particularly effective tool in holding large events and attracting significant donations. Local examples include the library foundations in Sacramento and Solano County. In Solano County, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised from local businesses and institutions, such as hospitals, manufacturers, casinos, foundations, financial institutions, telecommunication companies, and publishers.

### **Conclusion**

To achieve greater sustainability in its library system, the County can opt to increase cost effectiveness, decrease the cost of services, increase revenues, or some combination of any or all of these. Like Butte County, most public libraries are struggling with the challenge of long term sustainability and have found no easy answers. It will require a vigilant “fine tuning” of the library system to get the most out of every dollar, to develop new revenues and to ensure that the services remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

### **Acknowledgements/Sources**

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