

Marina Branch library closing in July

By Sue Cauthen

Marina Times June 2005

Turf issues threatening the start-up of the Marina library modernization project were resolved late last month. But potential budget problems could reduce the scope of the \$3.9 million retrofit and expansion. The Recreation & Park Commission approved an agreement establishing its jurisdiction over the library's 6500-square-foot parcel, which is in Moscone Playground. Worked out jointly by acting Rec & Park Manager Yomi Agunbiade and new City Librarian Luis Herrera, the pact permits the library to renovate the Marina Branch and expand onto 1000 square feet of patio space in front of the building. Any future expansion must

be cleared with Rec & Park.

The agreement codifies the principle that libraries are compatible with parks and open space. This is important as it affects several other branch libraries due for retrofit under the \$106 million bond program, including the North Beach Branch.

Park advocates want the North Beach library to move off park land in Joe DiMaggio Playground. Agunbiade and Rec & Park Commissioner John Murray insist that Marina and other branches on park land cannot begin construction without an accord with the commission.

Library, continued page 12

0th anniversary fireworks. m behind. shows the ide. spire with leet Week, d to fly, so f the BofA was acci- al hours. ment. This the point des a per- now that

The three very mov- n a better rny. This t was the et's paint-

ve Lucky will be an as a lead ock band rassic. placed o-dozen esigned around to rest vening. 30 p.m. of the vening outdoor

most yearly ed in tinal, . With isyear, raiser. moving Benz of cars en the mitted e tools tential success cedes Paul and lent s off

ions ntly ave pod ball ys

Library, from front page

Ending the bureaucratic rumble between San Francisco Public Library and Rec & Park is good news for the community. It doesn't end confusion over who owns the land, but it clarifies once and for all how it is to be used. A March letter from Planning Department Director Dean Macris says the Marina library's land is owned jointly by The City, the library and Rec & Park. Planning exempted the project from an environmental review.

Many Challenges

As City Librarian Herrera settles into his new job, he faces what he calls a "challenging" task - completing the \$106 million branch library improvement program on time and on budget. The latter is unlikely because major cost explosions nationally have already affected several library projects and threaten those yet unbuilt.

A closing party at the Marina Branch is tentatively set for July 16. The project should go out to bid in June and start construction by September or October. Estimates call for completion in 18 months.

While the library is closed, the Golden Gate Valley and North Beach branches will have longer hours and a bookmobile will be available. Children's programs move to the Golden Gate Valley Library on Green Street. For further information, ask at the branch or go to www.sfpl.org.

The Money Pit

The original construction plan covered seismic bracing, technology upgrades and code-compliance work, including accessibility for disabled people. The expansion calls for a browsing room for books, which converts into a meeting space.

Work is underway at four of the 19 branch projects covered by the bond issue. But major cost increases threaten plans for the remaining jobs, including the Marina, according to library decision makers. Last December, project manager Marilyn Thompson warned the Library Commission that a 20 percent escalation in construction costs mandated emergency measures and downscaled plans for several branches. The library's escalation set-aside is 3 to 5 percent.

Bids on both the West Portal and Noe Valley branches came in at around \$1 million over budget. SFPL tweaked the projects to lower costs and took \$650,000 from reserves to help West Portal. After Deborah Nieman, presi-

dent of Friends of Noe Valley, criticized the library for "mismanagement and secrecy," and the district's supervisor intervened, the Library Commission dipped into reserves again last month to allocate \$670,000 to Noe Valley.

The problem is that the reserve fund is not large enough to cover shortfalls at all the libraries remaining on the renovation list. SFPL says it is committed to complete all 19 projects but did not say how it intends to pay for them. Without a significant reduction in scope or an infusion of capital, it may not be possible.

Outreach Gap?

A community meeting was scheduled at the Marina Branch May 26, just after the *Marina Times'* deadline. There has been criticism of SFPL's outreach, as there is little advance notice of many community meetings.

One of the library's problems is that its public meetings are poorly attended unless a major crisis looms. By contrast, the rooms are packed when Rec & Park and Yacht Harbor projects are discussed. Insiders attributed this to the library's failure to publicize their meetings sufficiently and a breakdown in communication between the administration and the branches. "Nobody knows what's happening till the last minute," said one employee.

Only six patrons came to a May meeting at the Sunset Branch library. Though SFPL told the Library Commission about an expected budget shortfall at the branch, there was no mention of the fiscal problems at the meeting last month.

Last summer, only two Marina patrons came to a branch meeting to discuss library hours. It was only the intervention of two library activists that prevented closure of the Marina Branch on Monday mornings. Loss of those hours would have hurt a popular reading program for children.

Sue Cauthen is a member of the Library Citizens Advisory Committee.

**Advertise in the
Marina Times!
Call Autumn at
823-7797 for
rates & details.**