

Commissioners Put Parkside Library Expansion Plans in Limbo

By Carol Dimmick

Supporters of expanding the popular Parkside Branch Library ran into a setback when the SF Library Commission effectively put a plan to enlarge the cramped branch library on the back burner, citing concerns about dwindling budget reserves and raising questions about the merits of the proposal.

It comes down to money and concerns about other branches wanting expansion in the interest of parity, said Charles Higuera, president of the commission.

Seen as an early litmus test by supporters, the lukewarm reception the \$500,000 expansion plan received at the June 26 commission meeting makes it unlikely the commission will take action before mid-October, when the City learns if it is awarded a \$4.6 million grant from the state to renovate the Richmond Branch Library. According to a budget analysis presented at the meeting, the state grant would free up enough funds for the Parkside expansion, which is expected to cost \$2.7 million without the expansion.

City Librarian Susan Hildreth, who told commissioners she supports the expansion plan, warned against taking action to allocate an additional \$500,000 for Parkside before the grants are awarded in the fall. To go ahead and approve it now is very risky, she said.

Early in the summer Sunset residents packed into the popular branch library to learn that two options to expand the floor plan by 900 square feet, which were not part of the original plan to make the building seismic and ADA compliant, would put the project \$500,000 over budget.

At that meeting Hildreth told residents that they would have to convince the commission to approve the extra funds for the project. Several possible options to finance the project were discussed at the June commission meeting. These included using the interest that has accumulated on the library bonds or taking \$25,000 from projects allocated for improvements to other branch libraries to finance the expansion plan.

But after a budget presentation that revealed dwindling reserves, commissioners signaled their reluctance to commit additional funds for Parkside until state money becomes available by asking for more information about the merits of the Parkside plan.

Supporters of expanding the library vowed to continue to fight and say they deserve every cent of the extra funds because Parkside is one of the busiest branches and needs the room.

For months the Parkside Library Expansion and Renovation Committee (PERK), a grassroots organization representing 1,600 Sunset residents, has waged a fight for what they say is their fair share of bond funds approved by voters in 2000 to renovate the city's 19 aging branch libraries. They point out that while Parkside is the eighth busiest branch library it ranks near the bottom of the list in funding.

"I welcome parity. We are the lowest funded of all branches not renovated," said Nancy Wuerfel, a member of PERK.

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