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Parkside Library Gets OK to Rebuild, Expand

By Carol Dimmick

In a strange turn of events triggered by the city's budget crisis, the SF Library Commission agreed to do something it refused to do months ago - spend \$500,000 of library bond funds to expand the Parkside Branch Library.

The commission's unanimous decision to add an additional 900 square feet of floor space to the popular library won praise from enthusiastic Sunset community supporters and SF Supervisor Fiona Ma, who fought an uphill battle for the expansion. They were present at the Jan. 20 commission vote.

Ma thanked the commissioners for their hard work and said the extra space was necessary because of overcrowding at Abraham Lincoln High School and other Sunset District schools.

"There are a lot more kids and a lot more need," Ma explained.

Sunset resident Nancy Wuerfel, who organized community support for the expansion, told commissioners that she had just come from a music program for children held at the library. Wuerfel said the expansion was important because funding cutbacks had eliminated many cultural programs in public schools.

"The libraries are providing music and art not included in the school. The expansion will accommodate more of these programs," she said.

City's Budget Crisis Provides Answer for Library's Expansion

Ironically, it was the city's budget crisis that ultimately provided the answer to a stand-off between supporters for expanding the eighth busiest branch library and library officials, who declined to approve spending library bond funds for the expansion last June.

At that time, commissioners warned that using the library's reserve bond fund to pay for the expansion could touch off a firestorm in other neighborhoods

with overcrowded branch libraries. They also balked at using reserves they said were set aside to ensure that projects already in the pipeline are completed.

The 900-square-foot Parkside Library expansion is in addition to renovations that were already scheduled to take place. When voters passed the Branch Library Improvement Program bond measure in 2000, Parkside, like all of the branch libraries, was scheduled for renovations approved by the commission.

At the suggestion of city Librarian Susan Hildreth, the project was put on the back burner until after November, when she hoped to get funds from the state to renovate the Richmond Branch Library.

Hildreth told commissioners at the June commission meeting that dipping into the reserves to finance the expansion would be "risky" and that a state grant for the Richmond renovations would free \$500,000 to bankroll the Parkside expansion.

But in November, when the state declined to fund the Richmond proposal, Hildreth, Ma and residents who supported the plan started looking elsewhere for funding.

At the suggestion of Supervisor Chris Daly, the board appropriated \$1 million from the library's reserve fund to help close the budget deficit. When the Richmond project failed to win a state grant in November, Ma and Hildreth persuaded the supervisors to return \$500,000 of the \$1 million for improvements for neighborhood libraries.

With the \$500,000 safely back on the library's balance sheet, the commissioners finally agreed to spend the \$2.7 million needed for Parkside's renovation and expansion.

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