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Branch libraries tax vote is slated Countywide balloting will be March 2, 1999

Roger M. Showley STAFF WRITER

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Neighborhood libraries from Oceanside to San Ysidro stand to receive an infusion of \$423 million in new money if a measure to increase the sales tax wins in a special election next year.

The San Diego County Regional Library Authority yesterday set the election for March 2, 1999.

It will be the second time around for the countywide measure, which needs two-thirds approval to increase the sales tax by a quarter-percent for five years. A similar measure fell short with 59 percent approval in November 1996.

If approved, the present 7.75 percent sales tax rate would increase to 8 percent July 1, 1999, and expire automatically June 30, 2004. On a \$20 purchase, now taxed at \$1.55, the additional sales tax would amount to a additional 5 cents.

The 19-member library authority, representing the region's 18 **city councils** and the county Board of Supervisors, approved the election date and tax measure on a 13-0 vote. Absent were members from El Cajon, Escondido, Lemon Grove, Poway, San Marcos and Vista.

Under the tax measure, each **city** would receive library funds in proportion to its share of regular sales taxes collected locally. The projected totals range from \$879,490 for Imperial Beach to \$212.5 million for the **city** of San Diego. Libraries in the county's unincorporated areas would share \$20.1 million.

Under the tax plan, **cities** will have to maintain current levels of library funding, with an allowance for inflation, in order to receive the tax money. After the tax expires, the San Diego Association of Governments would enforce this provision.

In many cases, **cities** have decided to place most of the money raised by the tax in trust funds so that annual interest income could be used to augment library operations, increase book and computer purchases or improve maintenance.

Oceanside librarian Jose Aponte said his **city** envisions opening one or two new branches and greatly enlarging access to computers and online databases.

San Diego's plans call for spending roughly one-third of its money to remodel or replace 23 of its 33 branches and to build one new branch for Mission Valley.

Ten recently built San Diego branches, as well as the others, would share in the projected \$6.5 million earned annually from depositing the remaining revenue into the library trust fund.

None of the money is earmarked to build or operate a new main library in downtown San Diego. That \$103.5 million project is proposed to be funded from redevelopment funds, donations and hotel room taxes.

Supporters of the neighborhood library measure believe they can win this time because they will have a year in which to campaign.

"We're hoping there won't be any opposition," said San Diego **City** Councilwoman Judy McCarty, who heads the authority. "People recognize that libraries are a tradition in this nation, that equal access to knowledge is important and we need to provide the tools to gain that knowledge."

San Diego Mayor Susan Golding opposed the 1996 tax vote as untimely because of its impact on businesses coming out of recession. She has not yet stated a position on the renewed effort.

The San Diego County Taxpayers Association board previously voted to oppose the tax measure, partly because members felt the trust fund idea was bad public policy.

The library authority plans to delay final action on the tax ordinance until November in case changes, such as those sought by the taxpayers group, can be made.

The library authority's selection of March 2, 1999, for the neighborhood libraries election may mean that San Diego's new main library would not appear on a ballot until June 1999 or sometime in 2000.

The San Diego **City Council** wants to place the main library proposal on a ballot when it won't be competing with other **city** measures. Votes are expected in June and November on measures related to the convention center expansion and a possible new ballpark for the Padres.

If at first you don't succeed....

The County Library Authority will again ask voters to approve a temporary sales tax increase to benefit branch libraries county-wide. The election will be held in March 1999. If approved, the tax would become effective on July 1, 1999 and continue for five years.

A similar ballot measure failed in November 1996 because it did not gain two-third voter approval. If the measure were passed the money would be divvied up in the following manner:

Jurisdiction 5-year total

Carlsbad \$19,883,005

Chula Vista 21,194,636

Coronado 2,651,587

Del Mar 1,672,577

El Cajon 21,716,264

Encinitas 9,482,625

Escondido 29,410,796

Imperial Beach 879,490

La Mesa 12,119,951

Lemon Grove 6,513,614

National **City** 16,190,623

Oceanside 13,084,632

Poway 6,777,630

San Diego 212,469,677

San Marcos 10,748,138

Santee 7,336,013

Solana Beach 2,460,102

Vista 10,297,823

County of San Diego 20,125,810

UNION-TRIBUNE, Source: San Diego Association of Governments

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For chart see end of text.