



CITY OF MARTINEZ

TO: Parks, Recreation, Marina, Cultural Commission
FROM: Mitch Austin, Recreation Manager
SUBJECT: Casual Use of the Library Downstairs
DATE: March 16, 2011

RECOMMENDATION:

Informational report;

BACKGROUND

At the February PRMCC meeting the Commission decided to direct staff to further explore a volunteer program with the Friends of the Library and other funding options for monitoring the downstairs for casual use. Casual use is defined as use by the public at their leisure for library appropriate activities such as reading, studying, playing quiet games for example. The public could come and go during designated hours the downstairs is staffed.

The initial options presented the PRMCC included:

OPTION #1

The City in collaboration with the Friends of the Library (FOL) would recruit volunteers to provide supervised use of the downstairs area during set hours of the week. Volunteers would be trained and supervised by County Library staff through the existing volunteer program. A schedule would be developed in cooperation with interested and qualified volunteers to open the downstairs, set-up the area for public use and monitoring.

OPTION #2

Requires a half time librarian to staff the downstairs, the cost for approximately 11 hours of public access is approximately \$43,000 per year.

The cost and benefits of each option was explored. There was particular concern that a solely volunteer program may not attract enough long term committed volunteers to keep regular hours. Option #2 was too costly for the amount of hours being provided to the public. While this could be funded by the \$150,000 of library cost savings the City has with the County, it would only over 3 years. Also using such money takes away a "safety net" for providing future library services and equipment should the County decide it can no longer provide 35 hours of service to Martinez with in its current resources. This lead to the discussion of a third less expensive option where the City could hire a recreation leader to work for 20 hours per week at a cost of approximately \$15,000 per year. Funding source was still an issue for this option because it was unlikely that the \$150,000 could be used to fund this from the County and the City has a structural deficit which will require the City to reduce funding for current City services.

Friends of the Library Meeting

Staff indicated it would explore the volunteer program and funding of the recreation leader with the Friends of the Library. Staff met with the Friends of the Library (FOL) at the February 28, 2011 meeting to further discuss these possibilities. The Friends expressed concern that volunteers may not want to be alone downstairs and/or if there would be enough interested volunteers to provide access to the downstairs. The FOL indicated they would send a letter out to their members to solicit interest as to whether any volunteers would like to support casual use of the downstairs. The FOL felt it was more likely that volunteers could support a staff person in the supervision of the downstairs and saw that as a better way to begin the volunteer program. Then a discussion ensued regarding whether the FOL would support a part-time recreation leader at \$15,000 to supervise the downstairs. They indicated they would be interested in supporting this effort if another funding source for the furniture could be found. Staff intends to be at the next FOL meeting to follow-up on collaborating with the FOL and Library staff to support Casual Use of the library at the March Meeting.

Library Subcommittee

The Library Subcommittee met to discuss some of the FOL ideas and creative use of Library savings and/or Measure H money to address the need for furniture. Because there is a savings in the library CIP budget and the a nexus of use of these newly enhanced areas by the public and furniture it was felt that purchase of furniture would be a valid use of Measure H funds. This idea will be further explored by the Measure H oversight committee at their April Meeting.

Library Staff

The County Deputy Librarian, Gail McPartland was unable to attend meetings due to the flu. Since these meetings staff has discussed with her the possibility of using the \$150,000 to fund the causal use program offered by the City. She will be checking with her Finance Department to see if there are any potential means for funding this program with these savings. We hope to hear at the PRMCC meeting whether or not these funds can be used. Staff had initial concerns this may pose a union issue to the County. It should be noted that the library staff support the City's vision of opening the downstairs for casual use and do so for similar spaces in other library facilities.

Key Considerations

Other key considerations that warrant further consideration for providing supervised casual use of the downstairs includes:

- **Creating a Higher Service Level with “One Time” Money**
Using one-time money such as FOL funding or limited funding by library savings is not consistent with best fiscal management practices for ongoing expenditures. Once the downstairs is staffed, it will be expected this new service level will continue indefinitely. Because the City has a substantial structural deficit and will need to cut resource and service levels it is not advisable for the City to also increase its services without a long term funding source.
- **Funding the Higher Service Level with a Supplemental Budget Request**
The City will look to balance the budget in the next two budgets for current service levels. Because of the successive cuts to the City's budget in past years, there are no longer service neutral cuts available for the City to make. So the City will first look to balance the budget by cutting resource for current services levels. Then the City Council will consider “Supplemental Budget Requests” (SBR). These are for programs and services outside the current scope of core City services. It is conceivable the City could decide to fund a (SBR) by cutting more City services beyond the budget balancing if the City so chooses too.

- **The Impact of Anticipated Expanded Programming may have on Casual Use**

As with any new or improved facility use and programming increase and it takes a year to truly know what your demand for services looks like. As the community begins to propose uses for the downstairs and the library programming occur for the year. There is a possibility that the need or desire for casual use could increase or wane. It is imperative that as the use of the downstairs unfolds that there be a means for collecting feedback from the public on how they wish to see the downstairs utilized to serve the community. The priority of use and demand can fluctuate based on the community's needs and vision for that space.

City staff is diligently working to identify viable funding sources and approaches for staffing the downstairs for casual use while addressing some key considerations as we move forward. It is Staff's goal to have these issues sufficiently vetted with FOL, the County and City for a recommendation to the City Council at the April PRMCC meeting. Staff would concurrently approach the Council at the April meeting so a decision could be made before May. Staff recruitment and training could be completed in the five weeks staff would have to provide casual use of the downstairs.