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Town Takes Over Library Maintenance

By Sophie Braccini

The Contra Costa County Library system decided to transfer facilities maintenance to the towns and cities that own library buildings, "in order to center our resources to what is our mission," said Laura O'Donoghue, Deputy County Librarian. Moraga is one such town, and as of July 1st has assumed responsibility for maintaining the facility and handling the scheduling of the building's community meeting room. The fact that no formal agreement was issued before the transition date has raised concerns.

The Friends of the Moraga Library have questions about the change and would like to see a contract on paper before forming a final opinion. Moraga Town Manager Mike Segrest would have liked to have at least a letter of understanding with the County since the Town took over the maintenance a few days ago, but as of July 2 he had not received anything.

"We are working on a draft agreement for all our locations," said O'Donoghue, Moraga is part of that group."

As it took over the maintenance of the library, the Town decided to take charge of the scheduling of the Community Room that's located in the library building at 1500 Saint Mary's Road.

"We will use that room to hold some of our public meetings, including Planning Commission and Design Review Board meetings," said Segrest. There are discussions of having Town Council meetings held there as well, instead of in the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School (JM) auditorium, but a decision has not yet been made.

The Friends of the Library oppose holding Town Council meetings in the Library. Their fundamental reason is the size of the Library's Community Room, which is much smaller than the JM auditorium.

"The town is going to build a riser there that will take over about 22% of the room," said Dave Kruegel, President of the Friends of the Moraga library, "another issue is that when we spoke to the town they said that from now on they would charge non-profit groups for the use of the room, which was not the case before." There again, Kruegel is concerned by the lack of written procedures and fee structure.

According to Recreation and Facilities Coordinator Kimberly Nelson, groups seeking to reserve the room can come to the Hacienda's downstairs office from Monday to Friday, 8 to 5. "The procedure is not set in stone," she said, "but as of July 1st folks are asked to pick up the key a day before or morning of the event in our office and drop it off the next day during business hours." The fee structure will be decided at the July 22 Town Council meeting; interested parties are encouraged to attend.

Linda Waldroup, the Moraga librarian, feels confident that the new arrangement will be beneficial to her staff. "We liked the possibility we had to use the room spontaneously," she said, "but the handling of reservations took staff time and we have been assured that our activities will continue to have priority in scheduling the use of the room." The library organizes many talks, kids' programs and other events in that room. Waldroup does not think that the riser will be a problem, even if it will somewhat hamper the flexibility of the configuration of the room.

The riser may change the maximum occupancy of the room. "For many years, the posted Community Room occupancy was 85 persons," remembers Kruegel, "as the Town began considering use of the Community Room as Town Council chambers, room occupancy was increased from 85 to 112, an increase of 29 persons or one-third. This increase was not made by Moraga/Orinda Fire Marshall Michael Mentink."

Segrest confirmed that his staff was still working on the issue and that new maximums were likely to be posted soon with different figures depending on the type of use.

The shift of costs from the County to the Town also involves changes in custodial care at the Library. This is worrisome to the Friends since according to them, over the years the Town has neglected Library maintenance. Linda Waldroup reported that the Town said that it would provide the same number of cleaning days, "they have hired the same contractor that used to work with us, so there should be perfect continuity," she added.

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