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Library Lease and Service Agreement Not a Done Deal

By Sophie Braccini

David Kruegel was angry. The President of the Friends of the Moraga Library, who finds in unacceptable that decisions involving a public service be made without public input, came to the January 12 Town Council meeting to oppose the approval of a new contract that would redefine the relationship between the Town and the Contra Costa County Library system. Kruegel believes that the contract suffers from several shortcomings. The Council, despite staff's favorable recommendation, opted to table the issue.

The agreement, in a nutshell, would assign all of the costs associated with library facilities to the municipalities, while the County Library will provide 35 open hours of library services. The new contract would unify the legal relationship between the Library and the serviced communities. It was crafted by a joint body of library staff and city managers, including Lafayette City Manager Steven Falk.

"It's take it or leave it," said Jill Keimach, Moraga's Town Manager. She explained that the agreement would improve a situation where all the communities operate under different contracts and that it would make library costs more predictable for the town. "Right now we supplement the cost of the service (to offer more open hours to the public) and that cost has been rising sharply," she said, "we will be more in control if we are responsible only for the capital and maintenance costs of the building."

Her conviction could have won the Council's approval, but Kruegel's opinion carries a lot of weight in Moraga when it comes to the library system. The dedication of the Friends of the Moraga Library, their ongoing involvement, and the contributions they make to the programs run by the library, make them partners whose position cannot be overlooked.

After Kruegel voiced his disagreement, it was clear that the Council was not going to sign the contract that night. "The Town owns the building, pays for its maintenance, and the library uses it to provide its services," said Kruegel. "The county does not pay rent to the town, but instead provides services; the problem is that what these services consist of is not described clearly in the contract." Kruegel added that the expenses of the first year were not defined, and that no procedure was identified to resolve disputes.

Moraga was the second community, out of 25, to discuss approval of the contract; the City of Martinez has already signed on. "Other cities may have different views. I don't see an upside to signing this tonight," said Council Member Dave Trotter.

The Council asked representatives of the County Library, Real Estate Manager Dick Awenius and Gail McPartland, Deputy County Librarian, to get a consensus from the remaining communities and then come back to Moraga.

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