

# Huntington council takes step toward ending library dispute

By Frank Mickadejt  
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HUNTINGTON BEACH—When library patrons donated computers for the children's section recently, the only place to put them was in a converted storage closet.

Library supporters say they have watched for several years as city officials pumped money into other projects while placing library expansion on the back burner.

But because of a political and financial imbroglio, the library now appears poised to get most of the money it needs to grow.

The potential source is a \$1.1 million fund that city administrators and library supporters have been fighting over for almost a year.

The money has accrued in an account controlled by the Huntington Beach Public Facilities Corp., a non-profit organization created in 1970 as a mechanism to finance li-

brary and City Hall construction.

The corporation holds title to the library and leases it to the city for \$399,000 a year. The corporation uses the money to pay back those who bought bonds to finance the original construction.

Because of favorable financial conditions in recent years, the corporation has taken in \$1.1 million more than needed for bondholders.

Although the surplus belongs to the public, the city cannot get to it unless the five members of the corporation board decide to turn it over. Thus, the City Council is forced to ask a corporation it created for its money.

"It's awkward," Deputy City Administrator Bob Franz said. "The way we set those things up now, this would never happen."

Franz and other city officials say they don't want the money for other projects. Rather, they fear that if the corporation holds onto the money, the bonds might lose their

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tax-exempt status.

The City Council, in resolutions and through administrators, has asked for the money several times in the past year.

So far, the corporation board has been unwilling to turn over the money, arguing that the money should be used to expand the library.

The strategy appears to be paying off. After the corporation turned down city requests to release the money, the City Council authorized a library needs study by an outside consulting firm.

"We want the City Council to look at the needs of the library before they look at other needs," said Lorraine Faber, a corporation board member. "In essence, we made things happen more quickly than the administration might have liked."

The study, scheduled for release next week, indicates that the 74,000-square-foot library — the county's largest municipal library — is about 30,000 square feet too small for its 147,000 cardholders, said Ron Hayden, library director.

Most critical is the lack of room

for children. While youngsters check out about 33 percent of the books, the children's section takes up only 8 percent of the floor space, Hayden said.

"It's obvious from this that we should expand the library," Councilman Peter Green said during a Monday night meeting at which the council again asked the corporation to release the money.

This time, the council also agreed to schedule study sessions to discuss library expansion.

Library patrons had hoped the council would formally commit the money to expansion, but said they

were happy to see some progress.

Whether the Public Facilities Corp. considers the council's action a real step toward library improvements will be determined next Wednesday, when it will consider releasing the money.

Should the board again refuse, "it's going to create some bad faith between people who have a common goal," Councilman John Erskine said.

Faber said she is inclined to release the money. Other board members could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

