

Warren County voters will weigh tax hike to build modern library

BY PHIL SUTIN

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Officials of the Warren County library want to build a modern building so it can provide modern service.

They are asking the county's voters on April 6 to approve an increase of 4 cents for each \$100 of assessed valuation to pay for a building that would triple library space. The tax would expire in 10 years.

The structure would be on Highway 47 just inside the southern limit of Warrenton, said Sallie Hancox, director of the library.

The district's tax rate last year was 7 cents. The owner of a house worth \$70,000 would pay an additional \$5.32 a year to the library if the proposal passes.

The library has been in 2,500 square feet on the first floor of the Schowengerdt Building at 100 East Main Street, Warrenton, for 38 years, Hancox said. The library is across the street from the county courthouse. People using the library have to park on the street.

"We are trying to provide 1999 library service in a building that was adequate for 1960," she said. "In 1960, Warren County had 8,700 people. Now the county has 22,000. Space needed for 8,700 residents is not adequate for a population of 22,000," Hancox said.

The tax would raise about \$1 million in 10 years, Hancox said. The new building including furnishings, would cost about \$600,000. The district would use the tax increase as the basis for borrowing money, she said.

Construction of the new building could begin in the spring of 2000 and be complete by the end of the year, she said.

The new building of 7,500 square feet would house 41,000 items. The current library has 23,000, Hancox said. The number of seating spaces

would grow to 50 from a crowded 18, she said.

The new structure is designed to allow for future expansion, probably to the north, east and west, which could double its size, she said.

The new library would include a meeting room for 50 people that community groups could use free of charge, she said. The number of Internet computer stations could increase to eight from three. The current computer space "is very, very cramped," she said.

The new library would provide off-street parking, she said. The new building would provide the site with space to double its collection through the years, she said.

To get the tax proposal on the ballot, the library presented the County Commission with a petition signed by 941 voters, Hancox said.

She said 430 signatures were needed. The commission then called the election.

Hancox said the library can absorb additional operating costs related to the opening of a large building.

Eventually, it may ask voters for an operating tax increase, she said. But that issue has not been seriously discussed, she said.

"That is not to say we will not go for an operating tax increase. But at this time, we have no plan for that," Hancox said. The current tax raises about \$170,000 a year. Warren County's share of state library aid is \$9,300.

"Of 139 tax supported public libraries in the state, Warren County's tax of 7 cents in 133rd," she said.

Hancox said only Warren County property owners would pay the tax increase. The money the increase would raise would stay in Warren County and be used for the new building, she said.