

SEBASTOPOL REGIONAL LIBRARY FAQs

(As of December 19, 2024)

A. THE SEBASTOPOL REGIONAL LIBRARY

What is the Sebastopol Regional Library? It is one of the many libraries managed by the Sonoma County Library. Sonoma County Library is a system of free libraries, a local public agency, and a special district as those terms are defined in California law. The Library is controlled by a Joint Powers Agreement created and updated by the Sonoma County cities with libraries.

What is the Sebastopol Library? The Sebastopol Regional Library (“Sebastopol Library”) is the public library serving residents of the City of Sebastopol (“City”) and surrounding areas. It is a branch of the Sonoma County Library (“County Library”).

If it is a county system, why is it the Sebastopol Library? The Sebastopol library has roots in the first parcel map of Sebastopol drafted in 1871. In Sebastopol there were numerous early social groups and at least one literary club by 1884, but no library or reading room.

A grant of \$7,500 from Carnegie was obtained in 1911, but the town had hoped to receive \$10,000. This was the period of more stringent Carnegie funding and with closer attention to simplicity of architectural style. The matter lapsed until 1914. In 1915, a proposed bond issue to finance a more impressive building received a negative response. In 1916 there was controversy about whether to remove a historic oak tree or Lincoln Hall, an early school and then a community center, to make room for the library; the tree was felled. Brainerd Jones scaled down his library plans to fit the \$7,500 budget. The very simple Classical Revival structure was dedicated January 4, 1917, and served until 1976.

The building which presently houses the Sebastopol Regional library was constructed in 1975, shortly after the establishment of the Sonoma County Library JPA.

In 1974 the *Joint Powers Agreement for Consolidation of Public Library Facilities Among Cities in the County of Sonoma and the County-Wide Provision of Library Services By The Sonoma County Library* was made effective.

The City of Sebastopol joined the 1974 JPA on January 27, 1975.

The 1975 JPA served the library system until 2014, when the *First Amended and Restated Joint Powers Agreement for the County-Wide Provision of Library Services by the Sonoma County Library* became effective.

Who owns the Sebastopol Library Building? The branch libraries are operated in buildings that are either owned by the County Library, or by the city in which the branch is located. For example, the City of Sebastopol owns the building in which the Sebastopol Library is located.

When the branch building is owned by a city, the County Library leases the building from the City. The Library JPA provides that the County Library and members shall “work together to plan for the provision and payment of capital improvements and capital repairs to facilities operated by the Library, including but not limited to major repair and replacement of building structures, HVAC systems, plumbing, roofing, ADA improvements, and other structural elements or external features such as parking lots.” Member cities are required to obtain approval from the Library Commission prior to expanding or remodeling a library branch building owned by the city.

B. JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT

What is the Joint Powers Agreement for the County-Wide Provision of Library Services by the Sonoma County Library Provision (JPA) and what does it mean to us? In 2014, the City, Sonoma County, and all other cities within the County, executed the First Amended and Restated Joint Powers Agreement for the County-Wide Provision of Library Services (“Library JPA”). This updated Library JPA replaced a prior agreement between Sonoma County and many of the cities in the County related to library services.

Joint powers agreements are agreements between public agencies to jointly exercise common powers to provide identified services. The joint powers agreement created a new independent legal entity, the Sonoma County Library.

Is the Sonoma County Library a department of the County of Sonoma? No.

The County Library is an independent public entity, not a department of Sonoma County, and is not governed by the Board of Supervisors. Rather, the County Library is governed by the Library Commission, which is established by the Library JPA. The governing body of each JPA Member, including the Sebastopol City Council, is entitled to appoint one commissioner. The JPA Members control the JPA agreement and can update it periodically to have the County Library reflect the wishes of the county library patrons.

Is the City of Sebastopol a JPA Member? Yes

What are the eligibility requirements for a JPA Member? To become a JPA member, the governing body of a city must (1) formally request membership in writing; (2) sign the JPA; and (3) present such documents to the Library Commission.

What are the City's responsibilities as a JPA Member? JPA Members, such as the City of Sebastopol, have agreed to collaborate and work cooperatively with one another and the Library in good faith to ensure the provision of library services to Sonoma County citizens across the regional county-wide library system.

Agencies that belong to the JPA ("Parties-Members") have a responsibility to monitor the terms of its agreement, enforce the agreement, and if needed update the JPA agreement to clarify the intent.

C. LIBRARY GOVERNANCE

What is the Library Commission? The Library Commission ("Commission") is the governing and administrative body of the Sonoma County Library. Generally, it is responsible for exercising the powers established by the JPA and applicable law to accomplish the purposes of the Library.

The County Library is responsible for “operating, managing, and administering the integrated free public library system in the County of Sonoma”.

The Library Commission is the governing board of the County Library and authorized to exercise all of the powers held by County Library. One of these powers is the authority to appoint the Library Director, who is responsible for the day-to-day operation, administration, and management of the County Library.

One of the Commissions specific responsibilities is to provide structure and direction for the operational, administrative, and fiscal oversight of the Library.

The Library Commission’s role and authority over the County Library are equivalent to the City Council’s role and authority over the City. The Library Director is equivalent to the City Manager.

Does the Library commission report to the board of supervisors? If not, who does the commission report to or how is it monitored? No. Under the terms of the JPA Agreement the Library Commission is charged with the duty to provide structure and direction "for operational, administrative and fiscal oversight of the Library.”

The agencies that belong to the JPA ("Parties-Members") have a responsibility to monitor the terms of its agreement. No state-level agency or local agency directly monitors or specifically oversees the JPA

A local LAFCO (Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission) has no direct control or oversight of the JPA, though under limited circumstances, it can conduct municipal service reviews.

The county civil grand jury is authorized to provide oversight of the JPA. “County civil grand juries function as civil watchdogs and may examine the records of JPAs operating in the county, while county auditors keep tabs on the financial reports of JPAs.”

California Government Code, Section 6505 requires accountability from JPAs, including audits. A JPA has options for who performs the audit. It can designate an outside CPA, an officer, or employee of one of the constituent members, who must post a bond. It can also designate the county auditor for this service (*California Government Code, Sections 6505. 5 and . 6*).

What is the role of council's appointed library commissioner? The appointed library commissioner sits on the Commission as a full-voting member.

Is there a Library Director? Yes. The Commission appoints a Library Director. The Library Director reports to the Commission and serves at its pleasure.

What are the Library Director's responsibilities? In general, the Library Director is responsible for the day-to-day operation, administration, and management of the Library and performs duties as assigned by the Commission.

Decision of the Library Director regarding policies, facilities, and materials may be appealed to the Commission.

What is the role of our Library Advisory Board? In addition to the Library Commission, the County Library has a Library Advisory Board ("LAB") for each regional branch.

Each LAB is comprised of residents from the service area of the regional branch. The purpose of each LAB is "to provide information and make recommendations to the Commission and the Library Director on matters affecting library service based on input from their respective service areas."

Each LAB may also appoint one of its members to act as a liaison to the Library Commission. However, the LABs have no decision-making authority and serve a purely advisory role. The Sebastopol Regional Library Advisory Board serves as the LAB for the Sebastopol Library.

What is the role of Friends of the Sebastopol Library? Ten Friends of the Library groups support Sonoma County Library branches and patrons through advocacy, volunteerism, contributions, and book sales.

The Friends of the Sebastopol Library is a volunteer nonprofit organization that provides support to the Sebastopol Regional Library. While the Sebastopol Regional Library is a part of the Sonoma County Library system and is tax-supported, there are many items for which there are not enough tax dollars.

The Friends sponsor programs such as Summer Reading, music performances, and holiday events. Funds from the Friends' book sales, membership dues, and donations enable the Friends to purchase books, equipment, and furnishings for the library.

The Friends contributed approximately a quarter of a million dollars toward the renovation and retrofitting of the Sebastopol Regional Library in 2012.

D. FUNDING

Generally, how is the Library funded? The County Library is operated pursuant to an annual budget adopted by the Library Commission. The County Library is required to "distribute its personnel, financial and technological resources among the various regional library branches in an equitable fashion". As part of this requirement, all branches of the County Library are required to be open for the same baseline number of hours, with the exception of the Central Branch. While branch libraries are allowed to accept gifts or donations to benefit that particular

branch, such gifts or donations cannot be used to expand the operating hours of that branch because all branches must have roughly the same hours.

What are the funding sources for Library services? Public libraries are run and funded primarily by local governments. In California, local public libraries can be operated by counties, cities, special districts, or joint power authorities

The Sonoma County Library, a JPA, is funded predominantly by a parcel tax levied on properties within its jurisdiction. In November 2016, Sonoma County voters passed a $\frac{1}{8}$ cent sales tax dedicated to funding the Sonoma County Library. Over 71% of the electorate approved the measure (Measure Y), which required a two-thirds majority to pass. The measure will be in effect for ten years.

Funding for Sonoma County Library is largely split between property taxes (60%) and sales taxes (40%). Sales tax funding has been crucial to the library's growth and success, allowing it to expand programs and services to all areas of the county and adding more hours.

There has been mention of a new expanded Sebastopol library building. County taxes could pay for a new library, but my roads need to be fixed. Which comes first, road repairs or expanded library? Road repair is an ongoing expense, it never ends. A new Library building can take many years of sustained funding to create. While it might seem counterintuitive to fund a new library when roads need repairs, both are important to the community, and allocating funds to both is typically what happens.

Key points to consider:

Community priorities: Local government officials should consider the needs of the entire community when budgeting, not just the most pressing issue at the moment;

Long-term benefits of a library: Libraries offer access to information, educational programs, community events, and can be vital for personal development, especially for children and students;

Funding mechanisms: Often, different funding streams can be allocated for different projects, meaning that road repairs could be funded separately from library construction; and,

Advocacy and engagement: If you feel strongly about prioritizing road repairs, actively engage with your local government to voice your concerns and suggest alternative funding solutions.

When money comes from our taxes thru a specific measure that supports the county wide library system, can that money be shifted to other things? California has a number of restrictions on the use of special tax and bond revenue, including:

Voter approval: local taxes require voter approval, with general taxes requiring a majority vote and special taxes requiring a two-thirds vote;

Purpose: the proceeds from bonds payable from special taxes can only be used for purposes approved by voters;

Special assessments: must be proportional to the benefits they provide and must be justified by the existence of those benefits; Property tax increases property taxes can only be increased with a two-thirds vote to fund a general obligation bond; Local property tax allocation. The Legislature controls how local property tax is allocated among cities, counties, special districts, and school districts within each county;

Fees: for the use of local agency facilities and services cannot exceed the reasonable cost of providing those facilities and services.

The proceeds of bonds payable from special taxes may be expended only for the purposes approved by voters, so care must be taken in developing bond and tax measures.

If the library is a county system does the money have to be approved by the County Board of Supervisors? No

E. FUNDING LIBRARY BUILDINGS

Who pays for what? When the cities and county explored alternative models for a County-Wide Library System one factor, under consideration, was how to distribute the costs of library buildings "so that each is funded by those persons which it serves, regardless of political boundaries. "

The JPA Agreement requires the Sonoma County Library to enter into leases with each JPA members which owns or controls branch library facilities

JPA Members are required maintain and repair: (i) the building shell, including exterior walls, roofs, doors, and major structural members, (ii) windows, if damage originated outside, and (iii) sidewalks, parking lots, parking lot lights, and flagpoles. In addition, Members shall be responsible for replacing any major components of the HVAC equipment and electrical service panel.

The underlying goals of such leases are to require JPA Members to provide facilities which are both habitable and appropriate for use as public libraries at no cost to the Library; in return, the Library is required to provide general maintenance and certain repair services for facility upkeep.

The Sonoma County Library is obligated to: (i) maintain and service the HVAC system at least biannually; (ii) furnish all fixtures and carpets; (iii) repair damage to windows if it originated inside; and (iv) maintain landscaping, unless it is part of a larger facility to be maintained by the Member.

The Library Commission is responsible for the adoption of a facilities maintenance plan at least once every three years and revise it as necessary.

The Library Director shall be responsible for causing such a plan to be prepared and presented to the Commission for discussion and adoption.

The JPA Agreement requires the Commission and affected JPA Members to work together and provide for capital improvement and repairs to ensure that facilities are maintained and improved

How much does it take to maintain our building and who pays for it? When the cities and county explored alternative models for a County-Wide Library System, one factor under consideration was how to distribute the costs of library buildings "so that each is funded by those persons which it serves, regardless of political boundaries."

The cities and the county have traditionally provided the buildings that house libraries in each community, and the library provides comprehensive services and outreach.

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F. OVERSIGHT

Who provides oversight for the Sonoma County Library?

The agencies that belong to the JPA ("Parties-Members") have a responsibility to monitor the terms of its agreement and to adjust them as needed. No state-level agency or local agency directly monitors or specifically oversees the JPA.

Under the terms of the JPA Agreement the Library Commission is charged with the duty to provide structure and direction "for operational, administrative and fiscal oversight of the Library."

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G. COMMUNITY SERVICES HUB

What would a Community Services Hub look like? The Sebastopol Library Branch serves a much greater role in the community than as just a repository of books. Groups meet at the library to assist others in a large variety of services: sewing, legal aid, filling out government forms, gaming, 3D printing, art display, public reading for children, tech help, etc. The Library provides information and a place for the community to help each other. A bigger building is needed for more books as well as for more community services.

Why was the Ad Hoc Library Committee created? Sonoma County Library Erika Thibault wrote the Sebastopol City Council in April of 2023, “As you are aware, library leaders have discussed the facility issue many times over the past few years with various Sebastopol Library Commissioners, City Councilmembers, and community members. I urge you to consider our shared responsibility as part of the JPA to provide comprehensive library services to the community with adequate branch facilities, and let’s produce a practical plan together which expands or replaces this well-loved, yet inadequate branch facility for all of our library lovers.”

The city council responded to this letter by creating the Ad Hoc Library Committee and appointing Vice Mayor Stephen Zollman to the committee. That committee has spent the last year studying the library issue and plans to present their report to the city council at the May 21, 2024, city council meeting.

The 28-page report has four sections: an argument for the importance of the library, a brief history of the library, a visioning section on what kind of services the new library could offer, and a section on possible funding mechanisms. See the complete report at <https://www.cityofsebastopol.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Agenda-Item-Number-12-Library-Ad-Hoc-Committee-Report.pdf>

What is a Community Hub? The City's Ad Hoc Library Committee has proposed the building of a community hub with the library as the "anchor" tenant.

A community hub is a public space where community members can access services, resources, and each other. Hubs can be physical locations or online spaces, and they can range in size from small to large.

Community hubs can:

Provide services: Offer a variety of services, such as health services, education, employment services, childcare, social services, and cultural and recreational activities;

Improve community access: Increase access to government and non-government services and support;

Build social cohesion: Encourage social gatherings and interaction among community members;

Develop local projects: Act as a catalyst for local projects, activities, and businesses;

Create local jobs: Provide a base for local jobs and services

Community hubs can be designed to meet the unique needs of their communities.

A Community Hub is a public space that brings several community agencies and neighborhood groups together to offer a range of activities, programs and services. They are created to make better use of public spaces by offering multiple services under one roof that meet the needs of a specific community or neighborhood. Community hubs also encourage social gatherings.

There are different services offered at each location like: Health services; Education; Employment services; Childcare services; Social services; and, Cultural.

Many community hubs can help new arrivals for whom English is a second language to integrate into their new life by taking ESL classes, and to get health and job-seeking services all in the same place. It is also a good way for people of similar cultural backgrounds that speak the same language, to meet.

Why does Sebastopol need to relocate its Library? The current single story library building cannot be expanded, there is no room. The current library building cannot have a second or third story added to it, need a new foundation, thus it would have to be demolished, and a new building built in its place. The existing building is structurally fine, and the City administrative staff next door needs more square footage. An expanded library would have to be located somewhere else, preferably close services downtown.

However, it is time. Our community needs a new building to meet the evolving needs of Sebastopol and the West County, adapt to new technologies, and provide more space for materials and patrons:

Community building: The building which houses our library can be a hub for connecting people and facilitating community gathering. A new building, with the Library as the master tenant, can be designed to be flexible and adaptable, with a variety of seating and spatial configurations; New technologies: Libraries need to be able to accommodate new technologies and the increased demand for library services;

Space: This building does not have enough space for materials, new technology, or patrons;

Infrastructure: Our 1970s library building doesn't have the same infrastructure that a new building would have;

Efficiency: Our library building is not up to modern standards of efficiency.

How will the square footage of our branch expand? The proposed Community Hub / Library would range from 20,000-30,000 sq. ft. Existing building is 10,000 sq. ft.

H. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

How can community members contribute towards the expansion of our branch building and the services that of branch offers? It's critically important for individuals who receive services from the Sonoma County Library, as well as the City of Sebastopol, to have a voice in informing the policies and practices that govern the services they receive. This ensures policies, practices, services, supports, activities, research agendas and protocols, and other systems-level initiatives are community centered and equitable.

Though these factors may seem out of your control, the voice of the people has a surprising amount of sway over the actions of local public agencies.

If you want to support your local library, try one of these three approaches and see what happens.

Attend Meetings of the Library Commission, City Council, and Sebastopol LAB meetings. The majority of important library decisions are made at library commission and city council meetings. Naturally, [getting involved](#) in these meetings is the most direct

way to help. Attend regularly, make your voice heard, and encourage others to do the same.

Run for the office yourself While this is more of a commitment, it allows you to take a very hands-on role in protecting your local library. If you run and get elected, you'll have a bit more influence with the city council and can use that influence to fight against book bans, budget cuts, and more.

Raise awareness. Even if you aren't in a position to involve yourself with the board, you can still help just by raising awareness. Post about it on social media; direct fellow citizens to information, resources, and ways to help; and work to keep the library in the public discourse. This keeps issues threatening the library from growing without the public's knowledge and encourages the community to take a more active role in protecting the library.