

Proposed by Commissioner Suzanne Epstein

### **Proposal to use \$6-7 million of NCLA funds to uphold services at the Los Altos Library.**

The NCLA Board, consisting of five appointed Commissioners, is the citizen's oversight board established to provide oversight and accountability on the services funded by the Measure L Library parcel tax to ensure that said funds are spent for the specific purposes set forth in the parcel tax language approved by the voters. The amount of a parcel tax was established so as to cover the defined purposes for the stipulated duration. At the end of the period, the remaining funds should be close to zero. Our current parcel tax is for the twenty year period from 2010-2030. It is a set rate of \$78/year. Though the NCLA Board in 2009 engaged a financial consultant to calculate the annual amount necessary to be collected for twenty years in order to maintain the Library's extra hours until 2030, it now appears the annual \$76 fee was higher than necessary. In NCLA's latest Fund Balance Projection, dated March 7, 2018, the projected 2030 Ending Fund Balance was \$4,546,582. Since that date, NCLA has experienced further savings, yet has continued to collect approximately \$1,051,500/yr. The COVID shut down was the principal cause for lack of spending. That and the windfall ERAF funds, and other government credits, have resulted in virtually no NCLA library staffing expenditures for two years and again for an anticipated third year in FY23.

NCLA has previously looked at how excess funds could be used for library purposes. We are restricted by the parcel tax language, which does not allow for our supporting the goal of building a brand new library.

Measure L Parcel Tax money can be used for limited and specific purposes, namely to maintain library hours, to purchase books and materials, to support library programs, and for "**general purposes necessary to uphold the level of service**". We suddenly have been presented with a golden opportunity to utilize the excess NCLA funds. This month the Friends of the Los Altos Library moved into the existing Los Altos Library. To make possible the Library's accommodation of having the entire Friends of the Los Altos Library operation move inside the Library, valuable patron space was lost, 14,000 books were discarded, a quiet reading/study area will disappear, and spacious patron browsing opportunity was diminished. In addition, due to the lifestyle and work-life changes wrought from the COVID pandemic, the demand for certain services has increased (including more requests for private and small-group meeting areas) and the need for more 'roomy' program areas so attendees are not forced to sit close together. This presents a unique and immediate opportunity to use NCLA funds to expand the existing library to restore services, **if we can move fast enough for the expansion to qualify as "upholding services"** as specified in the ballot measure language.

Recommended conditions for authorization of this expenditure could include:

1. LALE contributes \$3-3.5 million, and the Friends of the Library contribute \$1 million in addition to the NCLA funds.
2. The City of Los Altos contributes by covering their own charges for permits, inspections and personnel. The City is the beneficiary of the newly expanded City building.
3. The County provides some funding toward initial architectural design.

4. A Committee is formed for oversight and planning. Suggested: The Committee consists of one member appointed by NCLA, one member appointed by Friends of the Library, one member appointed by LALE, one member appointed by the Library Commission, the Los Altos Librarian, \_\_\_ members appointed by the County, and \_\_\_ from the City of Los Altos.
5. The City of Los Altos has final approval over the architectural plan and oversight of construction.
6. Construction begins within two years to qualify for NCLA funds.

If NCLA wishes to proceed with this, time is of the essence.