

San Joaquin County Grand Jury



STOCKTON – SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY LIBRARY 2008/2009 San Joaquin County Grand Jury Case No. 05-08

SUMMARY

The 2008/2009 San Joaquin County Grand Jury found mismanagement, ineffective leadership, questionable use of public funds, low staff morale and general discontent within the Stockton-San Joaquin County Library System.

The Grand Jury found supervision by the Stockton City Manager's Office has been inadequate. Additionally, library administrators have alienated themselves from local library support groups.

Recently, the Library System has been overtaken by the city's new budget constraints. During the Grand Jury investigation, the City Manager made significant administrative changes. Many allegations centered on the Director at that time and in February 2009, the Director of Library Services was laid off.

The library is a public entity primarily funded by taxpayers. Free use of library materials is a privilege and abuses should not be tolerated. By continuing to address the problem of uncollected fees and fines, City and County officials will help to ensure that library materials will be available to everyone.

In March 2009, an administrative reorganization placed the Library System in the newly-created Community Services Department. This reorganization changed the supervision of the Library Director from a Deputy City Manager to the Director of Community Services.

The Grand Jury found sufficient issues in its investigation to render findings and recommendations.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury received detailed complaints about the general operation and management of the Library System. The complaints were signed by current and former employees, as well as members of the public and library support groups.

The complaints alleged:

- Questionable use of public funds
- Improper spending for consultants, contractors and vendors
- Management practices straining relations with Library support groups
- The Library Director's disrespect of staff fostered low morale and a lack of trust in library management
- Poor intradepartmental communication contradicted promises made by management
- Management failed to follow Civil Service hiring rules
- The Library Director seriously diminished public service through inept management decisions
- The Director's lack of concern for staff safety

BACKGROUND

In 2008, the Library System operated with a budget of approximately \$13.8 million. Over \$6 million was provided by the City of Stockton and \$7 million by San Joaquin County. The Library System consists of 13 branches with 106 budgeted positions, of which 29 are vacant (February 2009).

The Library System was supervised by a Stockton Deputy City Manager and is now supervised by the Director of Community Services. The System is not overseen by any advisory board or commission. In August 2005, the former Director of Library Services was hired by the former City Manager. It was the responsibility of a Deputy City Manager to ensure that the Library Director operated the library in a prudent and effective manner.

The Grand Jury is cognizant of concerns that some of the opposition to the previous director may have had a racial basis. Nevertheless, the Grand Jury is confident her failings were based on issues of competence and not racism.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

An investigation was conducted, testimony was received and applicable documentation was reviewed.

FINDINGS

1. The former Library Director created a new position of Program Director III and hired a friend from San Diego to fill the position at a management salary. Her primary responsibility was to raise funds for the library even though she had minimal experience in fund raising. The Grand Jury found no evidence of new fund development during her tenure. The new position was added even though the Library System already had a Deputy Director on the staff that could have performed the same function.

2. The former Director of Library Services was unable to demonstrate the requisite management skills or experience to manage this large library system. The Director's management style was authoritarian which led the branch managers to believe that they were not appreciated and that their concerns and opinions were not heeded and did not count.
3. The former Director reassigned staff in an arbitrary manner with no input or prior notice. This unilateral action seemed to further entrench some staffers who were already resistant to change.
4. The former Director had an indifferent attitude toward staff safety at the main library. Even after several safety issues had been reported in the news media, the former Director refused to consider the purchase of personal safety alarms for the staff. When the employee union decided to purchase alarms, her attitude toward training staff to use them was indifferent.
5. The City Manager's Office failed to oversee the operation of the Library System. It was the responsibility of a Deputy City Manager to oversee the Library Director. Ineffective and irresponsible oversight contributed to questionable library expenditures and low staff morale.
6. The former Director contracted with several consultants and vendors, including a personal life coach, a long-range strategic planning company, and an internet marketing vendor. Substantial expenses were incurred with virtually no benefit to the library system. For example, the City approved a non-competitive, single-source contract with Youniquely4U, a patron based internet marketing service to provide hardware, software and supplies for library checkout. The City paid approximately \$75,000 on an untested \$96,000 program with very little positive results. Youniquely4U service has been discontinued and the website has been closed.
7. The majority of library patrons still attempt to use the library as a source for new books. There is a strong perception, especially by patrons of the branches funded directly by the City of Stockton, that new books are generally unavailable. The current on-line reservation policy ensures patrons' access to new books. This policy limits walk-in user access to these same new books.
8. Valuable historical special-collection materials are stored in an unsecured area of the Chavez Library. A current inventory of these materials does not exist.
9. A recent City Audit found \$3.4 million in uncollected fines, fees and lost materials.
10. The Director of Community Services seems to have an understanding of the existing problems and how to remedy them. In the short time since the

reorganization, she has worked with the staff to identify significant issues within the Library System and is working towards resolving them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement an annual amnesty week which allows overdue books and materials to be returned to the library without fees or fines.
2. Immediately reallocate funds to increase the purchase of new books and materials.
3. The City Manager increase supervision of the Deputy City Manager for library services.
4. Implement a zero-tolerance policy with regard to late fees and fines.
5. The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and Stockton City Council mutually establish and appoint citizens to a Library Advisory Commission. The Commission will report and make recommendations on matters pertaining to the operation of library services and facilities.
6. Revise the current policy to allow for a portion of new books to be placed on shelves so that walk-in customers have the opportunity to check them out.
7. Establish internal audit controls for library vendor/consultant contracts, fines and fees.
8. The historical special-collection materials be inventoried and stored in a secure area within 6 months.
9. The Director of Library Services receive an annual written performance evaluation.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

Pursuant to Section 933.05 of the California Penal Code:

The Stockton City Council shall report to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court, in writing and within 90 days of publication of this report, with a response as follows:

The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors shall report to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court as to Recommendation #5, in writing and within 90 days of publication of this report, with a response as follows:

As to each finding in the report a response indicating one of the following:

- a. The respondent agrees with the finding.

b. The respondent disagrees with the finding, with an explanation of the reasons therefore.

As to each recommendation, a response indicating one of the following:

a. The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary of the action taken.

b. The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be with a time frame for implementation.

c. The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation of the scope of analysis and a time frame not to exceed six (6) months.

d. The recommendation will not be implemented, with an explanation therefore.