



Agenda Item #: \_\_\_\_\_

# Staff Report

## City of Manhattan Beach

**TO:** Honorable Mayor Aldinger and Members of the City Council

**THROUGH:** Geoff Dolan, City Manager

**FROM:** Lindy Coe-Juell, Assistant to the City Manager

**DATE:** April 1, 2008

**SUBJECT:** Discuss the Postponement of the Information and Outreach Effort and Subsequent Library Facility Improvement Ballot Measure Project

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that City Council discuss postponing the information and outreach effort for a library facility improvement ballot measure in consideration of the Manhattan Beach Unified School District (MBUSD) budget concerns, the City's current budget outlook, and the current general economic state. Should Council decide to postpone the library effort, staff further recommends discussion and direction regarding public communication of this decision.

### **FISCAL IMPLICATION:**

In July 2007, Council approved a contract in the amount of \$231,600 with the Lew Edwards Group for a Facility Strategic Plan non-advocacy public education and polling program. The terms of the contract provide for a 30-day written cancellation notice. Should Council decide to postpone the facility outreach and ballot measure effort, staff recommends cancelling the Lew Edwards Group contract. This would result in a savings of approximately \$100,000.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Over the past two years, the City of Manhattan Beach has engaged its residents in a comprehensive Community Facilities and Open Space Master Plan process. The goal of this process was to determine the current and projected needs of our community for public facilities and open space, and to create a template for the best placement, size and relationship of these facilities. This process included over 80 community meetings, extensive work by a 20-member Steering Committee, professional planning and architectural guidance, and regular active involvement of the City Council and staff.

The result of this process is the Facilities Master Plan, which was recommended by the 20-member Steering Committee in September 2007 and subsequently approved by the City Council during its March 4, 2008 meeting. This Master Plan reflects the optimal placement, size and relationship of community facilities should the residents decide to improve or replace any facilities. However, the

Plan is not an implementation document. Any implementation of components of the Facilities Master Plan will require additional community input, a funding plan, and voter approval.

To that end, and as the Master Plan process was reaching conclusion, the City sought to assess community awareness and priorities related to the identified Master Plan facilities. Understanding that a good many of our Manhattan Beach residents were unable to attend community planning meetings, but should have their perspectives reflected in the process, the City retained the Lew Edwards Group to provide public polling expertise to scientifically survey a broad reflection of our residents to get an accurate representative view of all residents' priorities for our facilities.

The polling research, which was conducted from September 2007 through December 2007, revealed that while residents believe that many projects outlined in the Facilities Master Plan are important, there was a strong preference to implement projects singularly rather than comprehensively. The research further identified the library as the top priority that the community would support for implementation, with 62% of respondents indicating that they would support a library ballot measure in the November 2008 election. A Lew Edwards Group representative provided these polling results during the February 19, 2008 City Council meeting.

Given that a general obligation bond to fund a library improvement project would require a 66% voter approval, and based on advice from the Lew Edwards Group, the City Council decided to move forward with an information outreach and feedback effort that included a series of six community mailers. The first mailer with information about the needs of the current library was sent out the week of February 25<sup>th</sup>. Council had planned, through these mailers and other outreach methods, to provide information on the needs of the library and to seek additional feedback regarding the community's support for a library improvement ballot measure.

**DISCUSSION:**

Since the time that the City Council decided to proceed with the library information outreach and feedback effort, several community conditions have become apparent. Most importantly among those conditions, the MBUSD is facing serious budget constraints, in part, because of the state budget deficit. In light of these budget issues, there is a growing possibility that the school district will have some kind of revenue measure on the November ballot.

Another factor to consider is the growing daily media coverage of a downturn in the nation's economy. It is reasonable and understandable that our residents may be unwilling to take on too much additional debt with economic uncertainty looming overhead.

Finally, the city is also facing several budget constraints. Within the near future, it is likely that we will need to increase water, sewer, parking and storm water rates just to be able to maintain our infrastructure and meet current levels of service without entering a budget deficit.

In consideration of these community conditions, we asked the Lew Edwards Group to provide their professional opinion on the viability of a library improvement funding measure for the November 2008 ballot. The Lew Edwards Group has advised (see attached) that the presence of two local funding measures on the ballot could significantly detract from the possibility of either passing in this soft economy.

**CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, although we have identified important space and programming needs for our library and the community has previously expressed a good deal of support for an improvement project, we believe that the City should consider postponing the library improvement project to a time that it will work for our community at large. Should the Council conclude that we will postpone the project, we would like to discuss ideas for communicating the decision to the community, for example a letter to the community published in our local newspapers.

**ATTACHMENT:** Lew Edwards Group Memo dated March 27, 2008

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**EDWARDS**  

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G R O U P

To: Manhattan Beach City Council and City Manager Geoff Dolan  
From: Catherine Lew, Esq. - President & CEO  
Date: March 27, 2008  
Re: Election Viability and Timing Considerations

You have asked that we comment on the advisability of continued community outreach and planning related to a potential City of Manhattan Beach Library Bond, in light of external factors such as the state budget crisis and its effect on other local agencies such as school districts.

The City's community surveys showed a potential Library Bond at 56% support initially -- with a "definite yes" of 30% -- ten points below the ideal "hard intensity" needed for the viability of the measure. Though support increased to 62% after educational information, the intensity of support remained at 34% -- lower than the low forty percentiles necessary for a viable two-thirds measure. Passage of a potential Library Bond Measure under these circumstances, while possible, would be hard fought given the level of support expressed by your community, requiring broad-based public consensus and the community's identification of library improvements as the clear and unequivocal funding priority.

At the time of the survey, the extent of California's devastating fiscal emergency was not yet announced -- and the state of budget cuts to education was not clear. Since the Governor's announcement of a budget deficit of as much as \$16 Billion, we have seen trends in other communities where voters clearly want their local city services and programs *protected and maintained*. However, *protecting and maintaining local services is different from improving* local services or facilities, in a time of frugality.

Now with the budget impact on Manhattan Beach schools clear, the community will almost certainly be more focused on educational needs, and legitimately so, than it was six months ago. The strong desire to protect and maintain educational programs, and potential competition from a potential school parcel tax is likely to create an environment that would significantly undermine support for a library bond, and almost certainly defeat it. The presence of both a school parcel tax and a library measure on the ballot may lead to the defeat of both as your community seeks to choose between the two in a soft economy. We would recommend that the City focus on what the top issue of concern will be for your constituents, which could very well be how to protect and maintain programs such as education, in light of the current situation.