



Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
FROM: Councilmember Donald Rocha
SUBJECT: LIBRARY VOLUNTEERS
DATE: January 4, 2012

Approved

Don Rocha

Date

1/4/12

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that the Rules Committee defer action on the direction in Councilmember Oliverio's memo dated December 21, 2011, and instead direct Library staff to follow their past practice of analyzing any new service model changes as part of the budget process.

ANALYSIS

As we all know, the San Jose Library System is laden with prestigious national honors; most recently, it won the 2011 National Medal for Museum and Library Services, the nation's highest honor for a library. This recognition is no accident: our Library Department has a decades-long track record of cutting edge service model innovation that has allowed us to do more with less. This record is a direct result of the excellence of our library staff, from our Library Director Jane Light—a true leader—to our line employees in the branches.

Given this history of innovation and staff excellence, I fail to understand why Councilmember Oliverio proposes that we jump directly to giving negotiating direction regarding a service model change before we've heard staff input, answered relevant questions, or had any kind of meaningful policy discussion. As Jean Lee, Chair of the Library Commission, points out in her email to the Council dated January 3rd, use of volunteers in the library may be an interesting idea, but it entails many policy questions and practical challenges that will need to be overcome before we commit to it as a service model. As I'm sure Councilmember Oliverio will appreciate, it's better to analyze a decision before you make it rather than after. One only need consider the history of decision-making on pension reform, fiscal emergency, or medical marijuana to understand that making fast, ill-advised decisions and then reversing ourselves a few months later is potentially a massive waste of time and the public's dollars.

As an alternative approach, I recommend that we let the budget process work the way it's meant to. Given their long history of service model innovation, our library staff is more

than capable of looking at all cost-saving options as part of developing the proposed budget. We should rely on their expertise, as well as full and public discussions at the Neighborhood Services Committee, Library Commission and community budget meetings, to fully vet service model options before we give negotiating direction.

I appreciate the urgency of Councilmember Oliverio's desire to open all of the new libraries and community centers, but I would suggest to him that jumping to a decision on a new service model with zero analysis is not the way to make good public policy.