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TMLDA COMMUNIQUE

Summer 2003

Texas Municipal Library Directors Association is an Affiliate of the Texas Municipal League

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Steve Brown

Real Library Districts for Texas

Since 1997 Texans have had the legal option of creating a library district as a way of funding local public library services. In some ways the district law has been a success. Local voters have consistently approved library districts when given the choice, and 13 small districts now exist.

On the other hand, most citizens of the state will never have the option. Why? Because Texas' oddly structured district law bases funding for a library district solely on sales tax revenues, and the vast majority of Texas communities long ago reached the maximum cumulative rate for local sales tax. Counties, cities and a variety of local districts have the legal authority to institute sales taxes, but the maximum permissible rate for all local taxes is capped at 2%. No room under the 2% cap? Too bad – not an option.

Library Districts exist in some form in 26 of the 50 states, but only in Texas is funding based on sales tax. Under these circumstances, a library district is only possible in one of the increasingly rare communities where there is room under the local sales tax cap AND the sales tax would generate sufficient revenue to fund a library.

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How did we get here? The Texas Library District law was a product of compromise during the 1997 session. Taking the lead in finding sponsors for their cause, supporters of the Westbank Community Library sought legislation to enable them to form a district. Their initial proposal, like most district laws nationwide, was based on an *ad valorem* (property) tax. Unfortunately, when the Legislative Counsel's office examined the issue, they ruled, possibly incorrectly, that a property tax would require a constitutional amendment. Because much of Westbank's service area was below the 2% local sales tax cap, its supporters and their legislative champions opted to pursue this less intimidating path.

The Library District Law has benefited a number of small Texas communities. When given the choice, voters have consistently voted to tax themselves to provide quality public library services. This pattern confirms the broader national experience with library districts. When voters are given the choice, they usually choose to fund district libraries. I believe our experience with Texas' limited district law has proved the case for a broader district law that can provide real options for the rest of Texas voters. Its time to get organized and reopen the issue of district funding.



Let's reexamine the legal issues. Library districts funded by a property tax may or may not require a constitutional amendment. Let's ask the question. And even if the answer is that real districts will require a constitutional amendment, let's be encouraged by the success that districts have had with voters across the state, and work to provide an alternate means of funding library districts in Texas.

TMLDA AWARDS

The following awards will be presented at the
TML Conference in November 2003:

Administrator of the Year

- Has demonstrated consistent and/or exemplary support for the library or for libraries in general.
- Must be in a position of authority over the library (examples: City Manager, County Judge, President of Foundation, Division Head, etc.).
- Nominations are accepted from TMLDA Library Directors.

Outstanding Supporter of Libraries

- Presented to an administrator who may not be in direct authority over the library (examples: Mayor, City Councilmember, Friends President or board member, Library Board President or board member, other city administrator).
- Must have demonstrated consistent and/or exemplary support for the library or for libraries in general.
- Is in a position to influence outcomes for the library.
- Nominations are accepted from TMLDA Library Directors.

Library Director of the Year

- Must be a member of the Texas Municipal Library Directors Association.
- Has made a significant contribution to his or her library or to libraries in general.
- Contribution may include innovative ideas, funding, staffing, development of new projects, and promotion of service or libraries in general.
- Nominations are accepted from peers, local administrators, or co-workers.

Please start thinking about worthy nominees from your organization.

To view last year's application form and previous winners
please go to the TMLDA website at

www.tmlda.org.

2003 Application forms will be available in September.

**TMLDA AT
TLA ANNUAL ASSEMBLY**

TMLDA Meeting
Thursday, July 10, 2003
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Proposed Agenda Items

Legislative Update &
Now What!

TMLDA Booth at TML

TMLDA Program at TML

TMLDA Awards Process

TMLDA Program at TLA

**TML
Annual Conference**

**Nov. 19-21, 2003
San Antonio**

**Affiliates Day
Friday
Nov. 21, 2003**

For additional information
visit
www.tml.org.

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2002-2003**

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