

LIBRARIES

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"I know the theory behind this, and if I was in a city, I'd probably be all for it," Lane said. "We definitely are not against progress, but we hate to lose our revenues."

One city official who is sensitive to the library district's concerns is Winona Burgess, an alderman in Grain Valley and head librarian at the Mid-Continent branch in that community.

Burgess said library officials do not have to lobby her. She already is harshly critical of tax abatement, saying it is both unfair to taxpayers and short-sighted on the part of government planners.

"I wouldn't want it to hurt the people," Burgess said. "If we don't have a library, it hurts the people."

Last week, a Missouri state legislator introduced a bill that would give library districts and school districts the autonomy to opt out of local tax-abatement plans.

Rep. Everett Brown, D-Maryville, said his bill is intended to help educational entities, particularly school districts, maintain stable financial bases without the threat of abatement.

"I think it's important that the schools can count on their property taxes," Brown said. "And cities keep taking it away from them."

The legislation has been assigned to the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee, chaired by Rep. Annette Morgan, D-Kansas

City.

An official of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education said several school and library administrators around the state have expressed frustration over tax breaks.

"All they're saying is let the school people or the library people make the decision," deputy commissioner Joel Denney said.

Mid-Continent Library's recent letter-writing campaign included a copy of a resolution passed by the district's board of directors opposing any abatement of taxes.

Mid-Continent officials say tax breaks are being doled out in some area communities under the guise of an arrangement known as tax-increment financing.

That arrangement permits local governments to use tax revenue generated by an economic development to pay for infrastructure improvements to accommodate that developer.

Even though the property taxes are collected as usual, Mid-Continent and other beneficiaries do not receive any of the revenue.

In Lee's Summit, for example, an estimated \$1.7 million in revenue from an industrial park development will be used to pay for street, sewer and water system improvements around the 600-acre site.

The industrial park is being developed by the LeMone Smith Development Co. of Columbia.

Lee's Summit Finance Manager

Conrad Lamb said city officials disagree that Mid-Continent is somehow being wronged by not receiving tax revenue from the industrial park project.

Without the offer of tax-increment financing, Lamb said, the developer simply would not pick Lee's Summit for the project and there would be no new taxes to abate.

"They would just say, 'No, thank you, we'll go somewhere else where there already are sewers, streets or whatever,'" he explained.

Donald L. Moore, economic development administrator for Jackson County, said creative incentives sometimes are misinterpreted as pure tax abatement.

Moore said each individual development — and the incentives offered to attract it — needs to be examined individually to see if public agencies like the library district really being forced to make a sacrifice.

"There's a perceived hurt and there's an actual hurt," he said. "You have to look at the numbers."

Lane, the business manager of Mid-Continent, said he has looked at the numbers in the district's budget, and he does not like what he sees.

Although no decline in revenue has been detected yet, he said, the library district's campaign against tax abatement is a preventative measure.

"We just don't want to get into financial trouble," he said. "We're trying to ward off something that might happen in the future."