



DATE: September 2, 2021

AGENDA ITEM # 4

**TO:** Library Commission  
**FROM:** Jaime Chew, Staff Liaison  
**SUBJECT:** Library Naming Rights

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Review information and take action as appropriate

---

**BACKGROUND**

At the regular meeting of August 5, 2021, the draft Library Naming Rights article was briefly mentioned. The Commission requested that this be agendaized for the next regular meeting for review and discussion.

**DISCUSSION**

The Commission will need to review the information and take action as appropriate.

Attachment:

- A. Library Naming Rights Article



---

☰ MENU

---

[thelibrary@bedard.com](mailto:thelibrary@bedard.com) » [futures](#) » Library Naming Rights

Library Naming Rights

# A draft view of library naming rights for comment



## **An overview of naming rights policies in place in the United States, California, Santa Clara County, and the City of Los Altos and how they might influence fundraising for the future development of the Los Altos Libraries.**

**I** first started researching and writing this memo last year to surface best practices and solutions to any issues which might exist in the sales of naming rights in the building of a new library. In the context of library development (or redevelopment), whether the libraries are rebuilt or remodeled, the purpose of this note is to try to put together guidelines which currently exist, at the national, state, and local level. At the time, my task was more to kickstart the efforts of others who were looking at building a new library. I undertook a survey and found a few examples which I've used in this memo.

This paper serves to supplement the original staff report on the subject written by Jon Maginot (now Deputy City Manager) in 2018 for the North County Library Authority (NCLA). The primary purpose of selling sponsorships and/or naming rights is money – money for the library's development, growth, and maintenance.

**What are naming rights?**

**Are there jurisdictional and local issues specific to Los Altos and Santa Clara County?**

**What are some of the best practices by libraries about donations and naming rights?**

# What are naming rights?

*Naming rights* are a financial transaction and form of advertising whereby a(n) . . . entity purchases the right to name a facility . . . typically for a defined period of time.

*A nonprofit organization* has the option to recognize a major gift from a donor by bestowing naming rights to a property in recognition of the financial support. This is not (necessarily) a financial transaction in the style of the private sector.

Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naming\\_rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naming_rights)

**F**undamentally, naming rights are about money. While a library may not be a sports stadium, the analogies are similar. A library may not be as crass as naming itself the Oracle Los Altos Library, or the Los Altos Library at Adobe Creek, but there is a financial transaction which stands for a period of time. Instead, most library donations tend to be parsed into different types of sponsorships – rooms, book/technology collections and the like.

There are still many outstanding questions – including what kind of packages we might offer. My study is not meant to be conclusive and aims to elicit discussion around the issue of library naming rights.

The Los Altos Library needs a more sophisticated naming rights policy. As often happens, more questions get generated in a search for

^

answers. The following three examples, by Sonoma County and two other civic libraries (Guilderland and Baldwin), may lay a path.

## Sonoma County Library

**S**onoma county takes an approach of listing a price for the sponsorship of each room and then parceling it out. There is an agreed-to procedure which is outlined in detail about how people go about donating. Also, they take into account any changes which might occur during construction which could change some of the dedications.

For instance, if the library expanded out towards San Antonio Road, what would happen to the fountain and the bricks which contain dedications. It's unclear that we currently have a provision for this, and the agreements under which the bricks were "sold" to donors would have to be revisited to ensure that the City stay within the laws governing these types of donations.

## Guilderland Public Library

**G**uilderland is a town in upstate NY in Albany County of just over 30,000 inhabitants, like Los Altos. Guilderland is currently building a new library. They set up a system by which rooms, plaques, collections, and other contributions are defined and addressed in a systematic manner. Like



Sonoma County, they have an a la carte pricing for the naming of their different rooms and areas.

Guilderland does a good job of setting out a process which any library could easily adapt and adopt. There seem to be enough checks and balances in all of these rubrics. Terms are well defined and can be adapted.

Because of the amount of money involved potentially, any rule changes would have to be submitted through to the City Council. One overwhelming issue of standing – who owns the sponsorships and who has the right to collect money?

## Baldwin Public Library

**T**he library sets out a process for getting naming rights contracts approved. While simple and sparse in construction, the document would be a good framework to follow to document an approval process. Baldwin Public Library's approach to the problem is a gold standard.

## Jurisdictional issues

**T**he question became, if someone came forward with enough money to memorialize someone, what would it take? What are the rules? More importantly, who “owns” a naming or  
^

sponsorship decision? Who sets the rules with regards to naming a building, a room, a bench, a collection, or a brick?

Is it the County? The City of Los Altos? The Town of Los Altos Hills? The North County Library Authority? And what of all the volunteer groups – Los Altos Library Endowment (LALE) or the Friends of the Library (FoL)? What is there stake in the rules?

What is the bifurcation line between City and County. Where does one stop and the other end – coarsely? The county owns the running of the library and the librarians and staff. The city owns the building.

County personnel can be pulled to work on critical county needs, as happened during the pandemic, resulting in the shutdown of Woodland Library.

At the same time, the City of Los Altos can do what it will with the physical property, including setting up a leaseback mechanism to cover a \$10 million dollar note for the benefit of the new Community Center.

So who has jurisdiction on naming rights? This remains an unanswered question, well worthy of debate and discussion. No doubt the Los Altos City Attorney and the representative from Santa Clara County are free to agree or disagree with my assessment. My assessment is rather cursory, based on limited research and study.

The process is complex, even without these jurisdictional issues. ^

Three years ago, the NCLA looked at this issue. This memo is only meant to add to and ameliorate the initial look at this issue by Jon Maginot back in his memo of April 5, 2018, addressed to the NCLA Redevelopment Task Force. Who gets the donation? Is it the county or the city? Where is the line?

Because of the dichotomy between the soft part of the library operations (the people, the collections) and the hard part of the library (the buildings, the rooms, the physical plant), there does not appear to be clearcut guidance or interpretation of the rules for naming anything larger than a room. Santa Clara County also has no visible a la carte menu for donations.

The County provides a simple sparse form which essentially says, unless you intend to just fork over cash and let us decide how to use it, call us. This is not proscriptive and does not address the rebuilding or remodeling necessary.

## City of Los Altos' Naming Policy

**T**he City of Los Altos' current opinion on the issue of Naming Rights was researched in 2018. I've provided the full memo attached. What has Los Altos Library done in the past? Are there any Los Altos precedents? In short . . .



*“The only policy the City of Los Altos has regarding naming of City facilities is found in the Los Altos Municipal Code Chapter 9.28 – Naming of Public Streets, Parks and Other Public Facilities. This Chapter outlines certain criteria to be considered in selecting a name, including “neighborhood or geographical identification, natural or geological features, historical or cultural significance, the articulated preference of residents of the neighborhood surrounding the public facility, or a person or group of persons who have made an unusually outstanding public service contribution, provided that such person has been deceased for at least 25 years.”*

*Memo to NCLA from Jon Maginot, 2018*

There is a fountain adorned with commemorative bricks on the San Antonio side of the library. There are in-house collections donated to the current library by LALE. These are only two of the many existing donations and bequests to the Los Altos libraries.

## Recommendation

I’ve attempted to provide some great examples or how other entities deal with naming rights. There are likely many more examples beyond what I’ve surfaced, but these three are fairly representative of how to market and sell naming rights.

The Library Commission might look at in helping shape policy and decide if the issue needs to be addressed by ordinance. ^

Specifically, I recommend that we:

- 1. Sort out all the jurisdiction issues – determining what flexibility exists for both the City of Los Altos and Santa Clara County.**
- 2. Define naming rights within the context of each jurisdiction, if necessary creating an “a la carte” price list.**
- 3. Determine what to do with past donations and bequests.**

Maintain the current Los Altos City policy with regards to naming rights, but . . .

Be flexible – don’t make it up as you go, but don’t pass up an opportunity. The City Council can vote to do whatever it wishes in this regard. My strong recommendation is not to let the law get in the way of a great opportunity.

Overall, we need a more sophisticated naming rights policy. As often happens, more questions get generated in a search for answers than answers.

Thanks for your attention.

Bookmark the [permalink](#).

---

« Los Altos Library Endowment



## Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment

Name \*

Email \*

Website

Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

Post Comment

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed.](#)

*All opinions are completely personal and are not meant to reflect any appointed position any of the writers and artists may hold unless specifically stated. © bedard.com 1995,2021*

[thelibrary@bedard.com](mailto:thelibrary@bedard.com) | Powered by [Mantra](#) & [WordPress](#).

