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open files on
RFK shooting

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LAPD may open Kennedy files

Police Commission to consider airing reports on RFK slaying

By DAVID HART
Daily News Staff Writer

The Los Angeles Police Department's investigative files on the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy — more than 50,000 pages of material — may be approved for release by the Police Commission next week.

Historians, journalists and authors researching the so-called conspiracy theory of Kennedy's death have expressed an interest in the documents, which could be available in six months if release is approved. The material is considered the definitive source on the

crime and the last remaining non-public record of the assassination 17 years ago.

The last time the commission considered opening the files was in 1975, when it was decided that written questions about the shooting could be answered by police staff, but the actual documents wouldn't be released.

However, researchers who submitted questions were unable to get answers, said author Greg Stone, who sought a copy of the search warrant documents relating to the car belonging to Sirhan Sirhan — Robert Kennedy's convicted assassin.

Stone, who says he has unanswered questions about the shooting, became interested in the case in 1975 through former Congressman Allard Lowenstein. Stone is the author of the 1983 book "Lowenstein: Acts of Courage and Belief," and is considering writing another book on Robert Kennedy's assassination.

"This is the most important crime in the history of California and it would be extraordinary if after 15 years there wasn't a decision to begin to allow the public to have access," Stone said.

At least 10 letters supporting the dis-

closure have been received by the commission, including one from an archivist at the Kennedy Library in Cambridge, Mass., which maintains a collection of Robert Kennedy's papers.

"We clearly have a duty to insure the safe preservation of this historical information," said Barbara Schlei, a member of the commission. Schlei was a supporter of Kennedy in his 1968 presidential campaign and was present at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles when the shooting occurred.

"We also have a duty to make public

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that portion of the investigation which doesn't violate people's right to privacy or endanger national security," she said.

The five-member board is scheduled to consider the proposal Tuesday. If the disclosure is approved, it may take as long as six months for the documents to be screened by the police and the city attorney's office and released.

The commission decided to place the item on its agenda after receiving numerous requests for information from the police files — which consist of 50,000 pages of investigative reports, a 1,500-page summary of the investigation and 1,700 photos.

"We felt it was time to address the problem and come to a decision and release what we are going to release," said Bill Moran, executive officer of the commission.

Moran expressed optimism that the records will be made public. "I think everybody realizes that it is in the public interest and we should satisfy the needs of scholars to the extent we can," he said.

So far, public information released about Robert Kennedy's assassination has been scant when compared with other major political crimes, said Philip Melanson, chairman of the political science department at Southeastern Massachusetts University and curator of the Robert Kennedy archives there.

More than 600,000 pages of documents, 26 volumes of the Warren Commission report and 13 volumes of Congressional hearings have been released

since the death of President John F. Kennedy, Melanson said. Similarly, 60,000 pages of federal documents and another 12 volumes of Congressional hearings concerning the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King have been made public.

But since the death of Robert Kennedy, only 3,700 pages of FBI documents have been released — through a Freedom of Information request by the Assassination Archives and Re-

search Center in Washington, D.C., Melanson said.

The release of another 28,000 pages of FBI material has been approved, the result of an FOI request by Melanson and Stone, but the documents have not yet been processed.

Melanson, author of "The Politics of Protection: U.S. Secret Service in the Terrorist Age," said he would use the LAPD documents to study the prevention of political violence.