

# County Budget



The Board of Supervisors considers various budget elements for the 1995-96 budget.

by Joel Moreno

**D**on't look for frills, tax breaks, or big wage hikes for employees in this year's county budget. County leaders say you won't find them. Instead, county residents should expect a solid plan for maintenance of most programs, a plan that remains set in the midst of statewide fiscal uncertainty.

"From my point of view, the good aspects about this budget are that it was on time, in balance and with no general tax increase," said Board of Supervisors chairman Fred Keeley.

The county will open a new jail, a new regional park, will keep basic service intact, and will be of assistance to the community in cases where they expressed their desire to have their government be of assistance, Keeley said.

The final budget adopted by the supervisors for 1995-96 totals \$319 million, larger than last year's \$300 million budget but down by \$1.5 million from the budget proposal submitted by the county administrative officer in May.

Of the \$319 million, only more than \$200 million is the county's general fund monies which will eventually go to salaries, services, supplies and other expenses. Some of the budget is already accounted for, like \$46 million which goes to a variety of special districts and \$26 million for the Live Oak/Soquel Redevelopment Agency.

County employees received a small raise in their paychecks for cost of living expenses, but higher pension contributions are expected to constitute the majority of the overall gain. County government employs more than 2,200 people.

During the course of the

eight-day budget negotiations at the end of June, the heads of 26 county departments went before the Board of Supervisors to push for as much as they could get to continue the programs and services they administer. Department heads were asking for a total of \$258 million. County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello was recommending \$249 million.

Budget negotiations concluded on June 28, and the final figures are in. Public safety racked up \$63 million, more than \$1 million more than last year. Health and human services is receiving less money from the county than last year, but is being compensated by a higher level of funding from state and federal sources as work once administered by other governments is consolidated within county offices.

## Public Safety

The 1995-96 budget gives

law enforcement officials more than they received last year. However, more money is still less than they asked for.

As part of the sheriff's \$24 million budget, the county's still-unoccupied medium security jail that was built in Watsonville in 1991 will partially open for the last six months of the county's new fiscal year. By next spring, the 96-bed penal facility on Rountree Lane will house about 48 inmates.

Opening the jail requires the addition of 14 extra detention officers and a variety of extra equipment, from prisoner clothing and anti-riot gear to kitchen supplies. All told, the jail will cost \$480,000 this year to open, money which came out of the Proposition 172 public safety sales tax revenues. Supervisors have still not identified a source for the estimated \$1 million the facility will cost to annually operate.

Sheriff Mark Tracy said he was glad to see that supervisors approved \$152,000 for three new deputies for the high schools. The sheriff will also receive funding for four satellite offices based in Live Oak, Freedom, San Lorenzo Valley and Aptos, which Tracy said will allow deputies to work more closely with the community.

"The willingness of the board to support that was very much appreciated," the sheriff said.

What his department didn't get was a K-9 unit. Tracy said he will continue to look at the internal dynamics of his department to see if they can afford a police dog without additional funding.

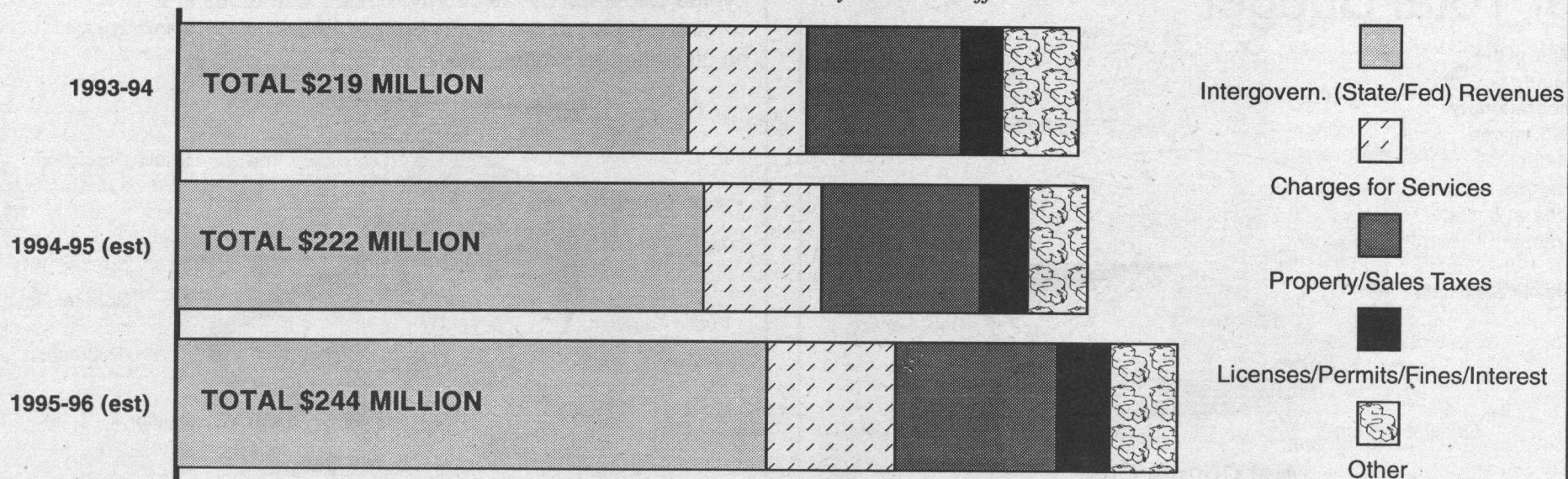
Money for extra prosecutors was found for the District Attorney's Office in a budget that totals about \$8.9 million, up from last year but less than

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## WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

Largest Part of County's Budget Comes From State Funding

Source: Santa Cruz County Auditor's Office





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the \$9.4 million requested.

"The bottom line is that we kept everything going for a period of time," said District Attorney Art Danner. "When it comes time to prosecute a gang defendant or a white collar crime defendant or a spousal abuse defendant, we're going to have the people there to be able to effectively do that."

After an initial early draft budget scare from the county's administrative officer, the District Attorney convinced supervisors to continue their funding of the Domestic Violence Prosecution Team without interruption and also their anti-gang effort.

Danner said supervisors responded well to his department's funding needs. However, he was concerned that funding for a white collar and spousal abuse attorney is not available for the full year, and plans to go before the Board later in the year to try and secure this.

Danner said it is his utmost priority that the District Attorney's office maintains its full battery of prosecutors. He contended that his department conducts an extraordinary amount of fund raising and grant researching to minimize the impact on county coffers.

"About half the budget is offset by revenues that we generate when we're not supposed to even be generating any revenue," Danner said. "We get that from grants and outside sources."

County supervisors approved a \$3.2 million budget for the

Probation Department, which will pay for a new probation officer to help move juvenile crime cases through the system more efficiently. The probation officer won't come on until mid-October due to funding constraints. In juvenile hall, two additional staff members will be added in December to help increase security as the level of violence there continues to escalate.

Overall, Probation Department head Linda Erwood said she understood that supervisors were trying to fund every agency as best they could, but was disappointed with what her department eventually ended up with.

"I would have liked to have seen us have a higher priority. I would have liked to get the intake probation officer in July rather than October. We were also asking for an additional domestic violence probation officer to supervise adult domestic violence offenders, and we did not get that."

### Health

The Health Services Agency for Santa Cruz County offers a fairly extensive range of health care services. County health programs include treatment for mental health, drug and alcohol dependency and basic care for the medically indigent residents. The agency has a public health division and maintains outpatient health care clinics in Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

Most recent acting department head John McGee said the agency will struggle to keep up with demand as they manage a \$61.1 million budget this coming fiscal year. The county's

contribution to this budget actually went down this year by \$700,000, and the increases the agency did see stem from the implementation of MediCal Managed Care in Mental Health, which is providing over \$4.4 million in state and federal reimbursements.

"We'll have to tighten our belts this year," McGee said, "because a lot of the money we're getting is based on a concerted effort by all the staff to get outside money — grants from both the federal and state governments."

With the implementation of MediCal Managed Care in Mental Health, major programmatic changes are planned for the medical clinics. A system will be established to provide managed care services to an additional 1,000 MediCal patients, bringing the total number of recipients in the county to around 3,000.

### Community Programs

The 55 community groups operating in the county were handed a 2 percent increase in the collective \$2.3 million they receive to help serve the needy. The additional \$30,000 will begin after supervisors can assess the outcome of state and federal budget decisions, probably sometime in October.

The CAO had recommended no increase in funding for these special agencies, which offer services like childcare, drug counseling and legal advice for the poor. But Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt pushed for the 2 percent increase, which the Board approved on the final day of budget negotiations.

The Legal Aid Society,

which provides legal consultation and representation for the poor, was handed a partial budget of \$64,000 this coming year, but not before supervisors chastised the organization for joining with a developer to bring a lawsuit against the county for not meeting the state's high demand for low-income housing.

The board re-approved only one of the three contracts the county has with Legal Aid, putting the other two up for bid. Approval was granted for small claims advice, but in August the county's contracts for housing counseling and general legal services will expire.

### Recreation

This year for the Parks, Open Spaces and Cultural Services office, the premiere project is undoubtedly the opening of the Polo Grounds Regional Park.

Supervisors Fred Keeley and Mardi Wormhoudt are credited with a crafty bit of fiscal juggling to get the \$400,000 needed for an access road into the site without raising taxes or borrowing money. But to get the Polo Grounds off the ground, supervisors had to cut funding for the restoration of the historic Valencia Hall in Aptos.

Parks director Barry Samuel said the \$3.6 million budget will continue current service and even bring a few additions to the county park system.

"We feel we are fully funded for the year for the same level of services that we had last year, and we're very pleased," he said.

However, county service area fees, which are paid by

residents in the unincorporated areas of the county, increased a modest 3.6 percent. The money will go for improvements like a new playground at Rio Del Mar school that will be installed within the next month, and another at Pinto Lake Park in Watsonville. Samuel said his department also hopes to break ground for the Live Oak swimming pool complex this fiscal year.

### Waiting on News from Sacramento

Although the budget adopted has the final approval of the county supervisors, there is still the wildcard of federal and state funding that may force local officials to rethink their funding decisions.

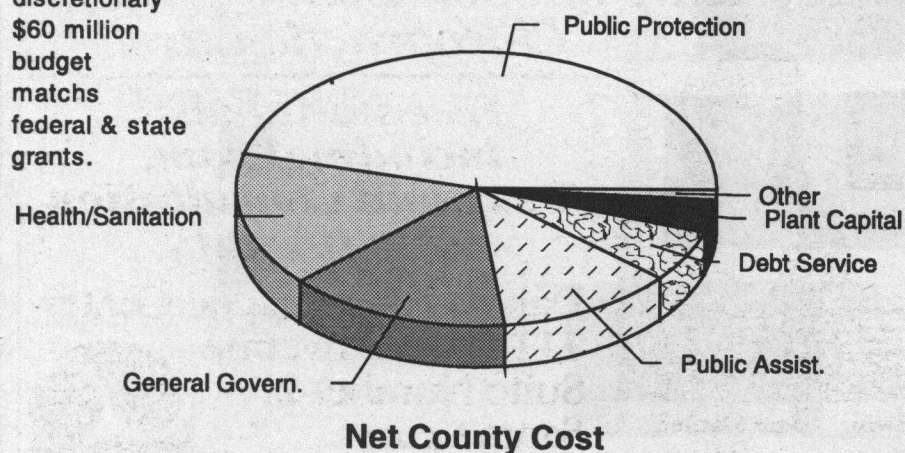
"It's just not done," said Supervisor Jan Beautz of the state and federal budgets. "We have not seen what the state and the federal government are going to do."

Despite missing the deadline set for adoption of a budget, state legislators are still working on resolving a state budget. Meanwhile, federal congressional leaders remain at odds over the continued funding of social programs throughout the nation.

Noting that a majority of county funds are collected from the state and federal governments, Beautz said that even though the county's budget is currently balanced, county supervisors would not be able to sustain significant federal or state shifts in funding, and conceivably more programs might be affected mid-year based on events occurring outside the county's purview. □

## Local County Share of Total Budget

Most of the county's discretionary \$60 million budget matches federal & state grants.



## Total County Spending

Much of the County's Budget consists of funding that is received by and dispersed by the county. While these funds are considered part of the county budget, county supervisors have no discretion as to their use.

