

Another Grim County Budget Picture

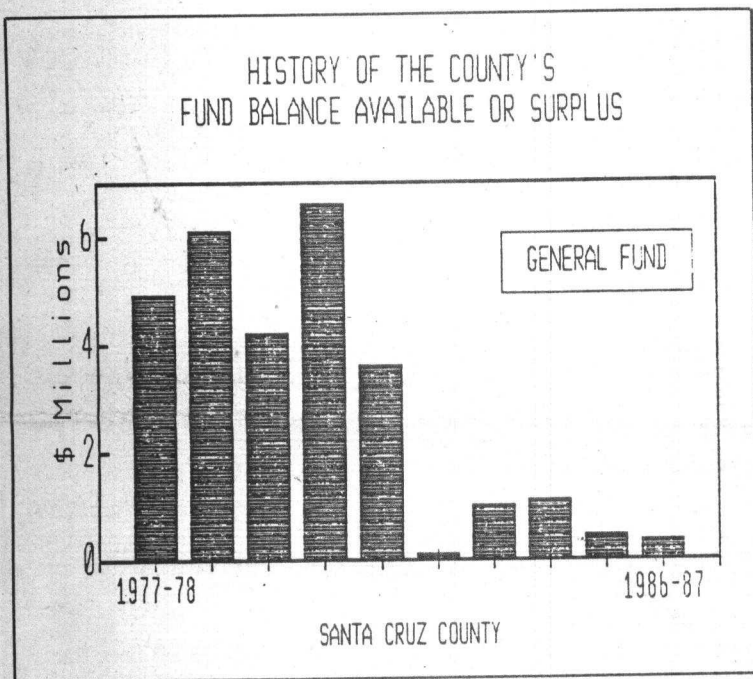
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Predicting a "rather dark future for county government," Santa Cruz County Administrative Officer George Newell this week formally presented the board of supervisors with a 1987-88 budget plan. The board goes through lengthy budget hearings each year to determine spending levels for its many programs. This year, says Newell, the spending decisions left to the board are greatly diminished, due to the cost of state-mandated programs and the lack of state funding to carry them out. As Supervisor Joe Cucchiara put it, out of the \$160 million proposed budget, "2/3 is the result of state mandates over which we have no discretion, and of the remaining 1/3, 80 percent goes to fill the 'empty bucket' left from past state mandates."

Those underfunded mandates, says Newell, "will of necessity result in the reduction of services in non-mandated areas." Of particular concern, says Newell, is the county's dwindling contingency fund, now down to less than \$625,000. In his report to the board, Newell pointed out that even one major death penalty homicide trial moved out of county could eat up the entire backup fund; the county has three such cases coming to trial.

Since the passage of proposition 13 back in 1978, the county funding situation has gradually worsened, and as in the past, a frustrated Newell can do little more than whittle away at existing programs and hope the numbers come out. This year the



task was made even more difficult by last minute information that the county had \$600,000 less to work with than originally thought. That information, coming after the budget figures had already been formulated, caused the budget to reach the board this week, just a week before the hearings are scheduled to begin.

Still to come are specific reports on some of the hottest funding issues, including a recommendation on whether the county should apply for funds to build a new jail, and how it's going to find money to pay for library services. Another report may bring a

glimmer of hope; the board is scheduled to hear an update on a series of legislative bail-out measures being pushed by the County Supervisors Association of California (CSAC).

The board of supervisors is scheduled to begin study sessions on its 1987-88 budget this week, with public hearings scheduled to begin on Friday, June 12. Because of the lateness of the budget material, some board members have indicated they may call for a delay in budget consideration. For the full budget schedule listing, they suggest calling the board office.