

**BUDGET DETAILS:**  
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY  
SUPERVISORS MAKE  
LAST-MINUTE CHANGES

# Some groups regain funding

By David L. Beck  
*Mercury News*

After two weeks of often painful budget hearings, Santa Cruz County ended up Friday pretty much where it began, with a \$312 million general fund budget that represents about \$20 million less than last year's spending plan.

The difference was in the details. Making adjustments on the final day, the board of supervisors returned about \$500,000 to the money it gives to various non-profit community programs. It also reduced, but did not eliminate, a new co-payment for patients at the county clinic. And it added \$5,000 to the county's share of the Santa Cruz AIDS Project.

The supervisors refused, on a 3-2 vote, to pass up their scheduled February 2003 raise, a move that would have saved the county \$13,332. Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt's proposal would have been a symbol that the supervisors were willing to share the pain of the people whose services are being diminished, she said. But only she and Jan Beautz voted for it. The same two voted against the four-step schedule of pay raises in March 2001.

The county also finally approved an animal control budget that, at a "net county cost" of just under \$1 million, now includes an extra \$115,000 to extend the contract with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals through July. The county's share of that one-time payment is \$81,000, but it voted a little extra for start-up costs for the joint powers authority that will take over animal services from the SPCA.

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## BUDGET WOES

Here are some of the big losers in the final \$312 million Santa Cruz County budget approved Friday by supervisors:

**Swimmers:** The Simpkins Swim Center on 17th Avenue will close Sundays and Mondays. Fees for children go up 75 cents, but Tuesday and Saturday remain dollar days.

**Drivers:** The county cut its planned \$3 million road repair contribution to \$1 million.

**The poor:** Users of once-free county clinics now have a \$5 co-pay, plus \$2 for lab tests.

**The troubled:** Mental health spending was cut \$441,000, and nearly 13 full-time mental health staff positions were slashed.

**Inmates/jailers:** Six vacant positions at the overcrowded main jail won't be filled. "We're asking our staff over there to work harder with less," said the sheriff.

Source: Santa Cruz County

# BUDGET | Big agencies feel impact of cuts

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Supervisors Jeff Almquist and Tony Campos, still unhappy with SPCA management of the contract and the money it owes the county, voted against the animal control budget.

Friday's adjustments, which total about \$735,000, were made from contingency funds and do not affect the total budget. What could affect it down the road are the state budget, which has not been finished, and the general state of the economy.

It was the poor economy coupled with the loss of its 7 percent utility tax — \$10 million out of the discretionary portion of the general fund — that forced the county to tighten its belt. Departments were asked to submit cuts of 12.5 percent.

There were few surprises. The big agencies took the big hits.

"I think we did the best we could," said Beautz, the chairwoman of the board of supervisors. "It's not easy. And a lot of our concerns are not finished; there will be further cutbacks in the state budget."

"But I think we managed to keep it balanced."

Here are some of the major cuts:

**Health Services Agency** — The new appropriation is about \$2.1 million less than last year's with most of that in MediCruz, the county's indigent-care program, and mental health. The proposal to charge a \$10 co-payment for clinic visits was cut to \$5 with Wormhoudt arguing that even that was too much for those whose only income was public assistance of \$600 a month or less. Her proposal to eliminate the co-payment lost 4-1.

**Sheriff** — "Most of our cuts were on the corrections side of the business," said Sheriff Mark Tracy. "We did everything we could to protect front-line services." The new budget cuts six positions at the main jail, one in transportation and two in work-release, plus a couple of deputies and a clerk. The drug education program aimed at grade-schoolers will be cut to a single full-time deputy. The sheriff's spending budget is about \$825,000 lower, while the jail's is higher by \$86,000 — a figure offset by cuts of more than \$400,000 in services, supplies and fixed assets.

**Roads** — The county is in the midst of a long-term "pavement management" program involving more than \$10 million in general funds to complement the gas taxes that support public works. The fiscal 2002-03 contribution was supposed to be \$3 million; it has been reduced to \$1 million. County administrative officer Susan Mauriello said that would lengthen a planned seven-year program by two or three years.

**Planning** — Revenues will be down about \$619,000 and expenditures down nearly \$1.5 million — a "net county cost" of about \$860,000 — as the building permit officials struggle with the loss of 17 full-time positions. Beautz and Wormhoudt objected to spending \$40,000 this coming year on an outside study of the fee schedule — "Can't someone in this building figure out the fee schedule?" Beautz asked — but they were outvoted.

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