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# Budget plan proposes end to planning office closure

SANTA CRUZ — "I never thought I'd make people happy telling them they could go to the Planning Department," said County Administrative Officer George Newell as he went over the proposed 1983-84 county budget.

The nearly \$110-million budget, down \$3.2 million from this year's, proposes an end to the week-long, once-a-month closures of the Planning Department which began in January to save money.

Newell's proposed budget will be presented to supervisors when they meet Tuesday beginning at 9 a.m. in Room 525 of the County Center. Budget hearings are set for June 21-30.

There are few surprises in the budget, Newell says. It proposes elimination of 102 positions, including some from the Planning Department and District Attorney's Office; establishment of a minimum security prison for women and an increase in the transient occupancy tax charged on motel and hotel bills.

The once-a-month closure of the Planning Department was approved by supervisors in December to save \$294,000 of a \$5.8 million mid-year budget deficit.

Planning Director Kris Schenk proposed the closure as an alternative to laying off 14 of his employees. But even with the closures for five months, two employees lost their jobs and one vacant position remained unfilled.

Builders objected to the closures and the Santa Cruz County Builders' Exchange took the matter to court. Superior Court Judge Rollie Hall denied the builders' request to have the closure overturned.

Only certain functions of the department remained open during the first week of every month from January through May. The building inspection, erosion control, grading and geology personnel

remained working during the closures.

Newell expects it will please builders that he's proposing an end to the closures. Overall, the Planning Department loses slightly more than one position in the proposed budget. Newell said planning officials are happy with the proposal.

Some positions actually have been added to the Planning Department through the receipt of grants in 1983-84, Newell noted.

The 102 positions recommended for elimination include the 68 positions cut during the mid-year budget session. The District Attorney's Office escaped cuts in positions in January, but Newell is again proposing a cut of approximately four positions from District Attorney Art Danner's staff in 1983-84.

One of the controversies arising from the mid-year budget sessions was whether to close the Women's Work Furlough Facility in Ben Lomond. The facility, which houses low-risk women prisoners, has remained open as alternatives to the costly operation have been sought.

Newell is suggesting that a county-owned building on Blaine Street be used as a minimum-security women's prison, thus allowing the closure of the Women's Work Furlough Facility.

He's further proposing an increase in the transient occupancy tax from 8 to 9.5 percent so the county can give the Visitors and Convention Bureau the \$90,000 it has requested. A recent state Supreme Court decision allows the county to raise this tax without an election.

The budget does not address the subject of road repairs. Sources of money to repair storm-damaged roads will be discussed during budget hearings, Newell said.