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# Council approves additions to budget

Bowing to some requests from city department heads, the Watsonville City Council added a new firefighter, \$10,000 for library books and \$5,000 for a discretionary fund to the budget recommended by the city manager last night.

Those additions, plus some corrections and changes, added \$242,498 to the \$55,701,137 budget originally proposed by City Manager Steve Salomon.

The council also approved a 12 percent increase in water fees last night, an increase that had already been figured into the budget. The increase was needed, city staff said, to cover increased operating expenses and a water conservation program it is implementing. The average residential water rate is now \$11.42 a month. With the increase, it will go to \$12.78, which is still lower than the average rates elsewhere in the county.

The council postponed action on a proposed garbage-collection fee increase, which had not been figured into the budget.

Although several department heads had told the city they were understaffed and wouldn't be able to effectively carry out certain programs, the council was the most concerned about the lack of sufficient staff at Fire Station II. In an earlier study session, Fire Chief Gary Smith said the station was in violation of health and safety standards because of the low staffing levels. The firefighter won't be hired until October to save some money this year.

Library Director Vivian Hurley had also made an impassioned plea for the city library, which, she said was lagging far behind standards for libraries serving cities of Watsonville's size.

Although the budget, now at \$55.9 million, is quite a bit higher than last year's \$44.9 million, the increase doesn't mean the city has more money for operating expenses. A large portion of the increase reflects funds received for specific projects, like the \$18 million raised through bond sales for sewer, water and solid-waste projects, and Measure E (earth-

quake-tax) money that will be used for a host of special projects and programs. In terms of day-to-day operations, the city, under the new budget, will be at a level similar to this year's.

Salomon, citing economic uncertainties both locally and nationwide, said the budget reflected "cautious and conservative spending." He has advised the council to look at the budget again in October, and re-evaluate the city's financial situation, making further additions or deletions then.

While some areas are being funded at about last year's level, spending on social services agencies has increased greatly. The council has set aside \$230,000 for the agencies this year, although no decisions have been made on which, among the 40 organizations seeking money, will receive funds and in what amounts. Last year, the council distributed \$140,000 to the agencies. Requests this year were more than double what the council approved.

Among the projects funded this year are the construction of an 836-seat auditorium at Watsonville High School that would be shared by the school and community; a new youth center on Maple Street; the development of walking trails at Pinto Lake park; improvements and expansions of several city parks; modifications to City Hall and an expansion of the parking lot; lighting replacements for the runway and an upgrade of lighting in general at the municipal airport; construction of another runway; planning for expansion and remodeling of the library; numerous water, sewer and landfill projects; and a downtown parking structure.

Funds for the projects come from a variety of sources including Measure E money, special grants and impact fees. Many of the parks and recreation projects rely on the passage of a landscape and lighting assessment district, which will be discussed at a public hearing Tuesday. If the district isn't approved, the projects will not get done.

-Chela Zabin