

Rio board gets bleak news about the county budget

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A committee formed to see if the Rio del Mar area is getting its fair share of services from Santa Cruz County for its tax dollars didn't have much good news for the Rio del Mar Improvement Assn. at a meeting last week.

Chairman of the committee, Leonard Wickliffe, reported that available funds to the county are tight, and in the future, will probably be tighter.

Most of a property-tax payer's money goes to education, he said. Only 25 percent of property taxes paid goes to the county, which means only about \$26 million of the county's \$126 million budget comes from property taxes.

The majority of the budget revenue comes from state and federal sources which will probably be reduced in the future because of the elimination of federal revenue sharing funds and reductions in the Gramm-Rudman bill now being

considered in Congress.

"These (measures) are merely going to compound the financial squeeze the county is in," Wickliffe said.

The Rio group decided to review the county's budgetary process after the county proposed to assess each property owner in Rio del Mar \$200 for a proposal to improve Rio del Mar Boulevard and Clubhouse Drive.

When the county made the recommendation for the assessment district, many residents in the area felt the county should improve the streets with funds from their property taxes.

The budget committee has completed only a part of its work. Wickliffe said the next step is to see where the county is spending money.

Understanding the county's budgetary process, however, will be very helpful in future years, Wickliffe said.

"What we're doing is studying the 1985-86 county budget so we can get a handle on how the process works," he said. "Then

when the 1986-87 budget is being considered, the Rio del Mar Improvement Assn. can have some input. You can't clamor for action in your own area if you don't have some idea about the process."

Wickliffe said he found that an important part of the budgetary process is the recommendations of County Administrative Officer George Newell on how funds should be spent. Newell issues a report to the supervisors which discusses and prioritizes projects that need funding.

"There are a lot of things the county puts a high priority on that we may feel should be a low priority," Wickliffe said. "We should know what we can do to affect this process of allocating available funds."

"If the county thinks it's more important, for instance, to house the homeless than to take care of our streets, then maybe we'll have to find other alternatives to finance things we think are essential to our community," he added.