

County supervisors refuse to cut deputies

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SANTA CRUZ — The eight sheriff's deputies recommended to be cut from the county budget will not be eliminated, county supervisors unanimously decided this morning.

The vote came in the wake of the shooting of a local sheriff's deputy and a highway patrolman in Felton Monday.

Newly-appointed Board Chairman Joe Cucchiara suggested in a letter supervisors reject County Administrative Officer George Newell's recommendation to cut an entire patrol of deputies from the Sheriff's Department.

The board now will have to find other areas of the

budget in which to cut the \$100,000 the eight position cuts would have saved.

Consideration of how to eliminate the remaining \$2.9 million of a \$5.7 million budget deficit began this afternoon and will continue through Friday.

Cucchiara said he was making his recommendation before supervisors began the mid-year budget hearings because he wanted the board to have the maximum amount of time to decide where to cut the \$100,000.

The board chairman added he also made his recommendation because Newell's proposal went against a unanimous board direction made in November that Newell was to attempt not to cut patrolmen from the budget.

Opposition from both the public and deputies over the recommended cut also convinced him to bring the matter as soon as possible to the board, Cucchiara said.

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Some 15 deputies used their New Year's holiday to man a petition drive at area shopping centers to get the public to state its opposition to the proposed cuts.

"Clearly this recommendation, in addition to being contrary to the stated intent and direction given by unanimous vote of the Board of Supervisors, has caused unnecessary distress and deep concern among the public and sheriff deputies alike," Cucchiara stated in his letter.

"Obviously, residents throughout our community are rightfully upset with the thought that such a drastic reduction in sheriff protection would occur at this time," he added.

At the very time the board took its vote, 40 law enforcement officers and untold others were out in the field searching for a male hitchiker suspected of shooting

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Deputy Michael Gray and Highway Patrolman Jeff Lee on Highway 9 in Felton Monday afternoon.

Gray is in critical condition at Dominican Hospital, while Lee is in stable condition at Community Hospital.

Another seven deputies this morning were maintaining the normal patrol of the unincorporated area during the manhunt, according to Chief Deputy Marv Gangloff.

The entire patrol and investigation divisions are being used for the search at this time.

Supervisor Dan Forbus told The Sentinel if there was any support on the board for the deputy cuts, it had been eliminated by Monday's shootings and the need to use

every available deputy in the manhunt.

Before voting this morning not to eliminate any deputies, Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. said he wanted to make it clear that the board never did lay off the deputies, but was just voting against Newell's proposal.

Supervisor Gary Patton agreed there was confusion among some members of the public who believed the deputies already had been eliminated. Patton stressed only the board can make such a decision.

"I'm sorry the county administrative officer went against a rather strong recommendation of the board . . . I'm rather sorry we had to do this twice," Patton said as the board reaffirmed the position it took in November.