

# The 1990/91 County Budget

## IN REVIEW

by Mary Bryant



Mary Bryant

Supervisor Robley Levy looks forward to increased police protection at the Rio Del Mar Esplanade.

spending in one year, but then, the county has to run courts, jails and police departments, repair and construct roadways, maintain emergency services, provide health and welfare programs, operate a library system, and of course, keep the doors open at the county building.

While many of these services we may take for granted in our daily lives, we would certainly miss them if they were to disappear. And, individually, we would be hard pressed to replace this network of services from our proportional annual tax savings.

Since a substantial portion of Mid-County relies directly on the county services, I thought I would take a look at the budget.

What I found was several volumes of proposed and

amended budget reports, complete with descriptions of department operations and guidelines.

Stacked together on my desk they measured almost four inches. I hadn't been as excited about reading something, since I, many years ago, first saw an almost equally thick physics textbook. But, as it turned out, the facts and figures were interesting and understanding the economic basis for local government is insightful to how the entire system works.

### Up Almost \$30 Million from 1989/90

This year's budget, as currently recommended for the fiscal year July 1990 through June 1991, has been slightly amended through the public hearings held by

the County Board of Supervisors. Still, since the summary document won't be out until September and there weren't many changes, this article is based on the proposal made Susan Mauriello, the County Administrative Officer (CAO).

The budget, \$250,552,268, has increased about 13 percent or just under \$30 million. Though, some departments have received greater percentages of funding than others. For instance, with the help of the passage of Proposition 111 and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) relief funds, roadways will gain over 40 percent or about \$3.3 million in extra dollars. Another example would be the cost of liability and property insurance, showing an increase of over 90 percent.

continued on page 20

**S**anta Cruz County's budget will exceed \$250 million as proposed for 1990/91. But before you rush to find your property tax bill,

you must remember that a substantial portion of the funds are provided by federal and state tax dollars.

In any case, this is certainly a lot of money to consider

*BUDGET continued from page 6*

Of the \$250 million, over \$100 million is provided through spending programs which are funded mostly by outside dollars and are programs mandated by either voter commitment to repay bonds, or unavoidable costs

### Justice System

The county is responsible for maintaining and operating the courts and local jails. While these funds are "discretionary," that does not mean all costs are directly within the county's control. What this does mean, is while

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like insurance. Using the road work again as an example, the majority of these funds are provided by the state's gas tax of which a portion is passed along to the county with the provision that the money is spent for roadways.

### The General Fund

If any part of the budget is discretionary, then that would be in the county's General Fund, which is proposed at \$149 million, showing an increase of 14 percent from 1989/90.

The General Fund provides for services from tax collection to health care to the justice system. The actual cost to the county varies with the department under the Fund. According to Supervisor Robley Levy, "If you look at our human resources and health services budget, they are almost entirely funded. There are some local share of costs, but the vast bulk of those budgets are revenues coming from other levels of government."

Occasionally funding sources change. As Levy said, "The CJS [County Justice System]... used to be entirely supported by local tax dollars. It now [receives substantial help] from legislative trail court funding... however those [funds] are on the block in the [state's] current budget shortfall."

Which is another point to consider. Although the proposed budget is scheduled to go into effect, once the state's officials finally finish balancing their budget, changes may occur in the local forecast of expected revenues. Levy suggested, "Among the areas that may very well be hit are the justice funding, health and welfare funding, mental health care funding and health services programs."

the Supervisors can decide how much to spend on training service for staff, they can not predict how many people will be arrested, how long they will stay in jail or the expenses involved in prosecuting major cases.

For instance, the public defenders office in 1989/90 ran \$79,904 or two percent over budget, while the Sheriff/Coroner's office experienced over \$500,000 in budget overruns (seven percent).

On the recommended amount of \$8,297,938 for the Sheriff/Coroner's department for 1990/91, a little under \$2 million will come from the General Fund, with the remainder provided through revenues collected from fines and other sources.

Levy commented on the need for an increased budget, "The county has acknowledged that we need to increase the level of sheriff protection [and] patrol response in the unincorporated areas.

Levy added that after the failure of a proposed parcel assessment and a ballot initiative to gain substantial revenue increases, "The following year I wrote a letter to the Board during budget and requested that we direct the CAO to develop a program for phased-in [increases] to the sheriff's budget.

"That has what we've been doing. What we do is add a beat over two years, so you fund a portion in one year and a portion in the other year. [A beat is where services are being provided 24 hours a day 7 days a week to a certain area].

"There is [currently] one beat for Aptos [with overlapping and roving beats to provide back-up]... and when this new beat is established... there will be a new beat which will cover Rio Del Mar, La

Selva Beach and the South Coast [currently covered by the Parjaro Valley and Aptos beats]. So you have an increasing level of protection."

Also in this year's funding is additional weekend beach patrols and foot patrols on the Rio Del Mar esplanade.

As a note, if you ever wondered what a siren system for a sheriff's car would cost, the answer is \$500. The county plans to buy one this year, in addition to a patrol vehicle radio at the slightly higher cost of \$2245.

### Health Services

The Health Services Agency (HSA) is also provided for by the General Fund. The total recommended funding for 1990/91 exceeds \$35 million, up almost 25 percent from the 1989/90 budget. The county's proposed share is over \$7.5 million.

The HSA, established in 1973, is the central organization that administers the county's health programs which include, Public Health, Mental Health, Medical Out-patient Clinics, Medical Care for Indigent Individuals, and Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services.

Since it is the county's duty to safeguard the health of all its citizens, many of these programs are mandated.

These services range from immunizations (9,500 est), to HIV testing (3,360 est), to family planning clinic visits (5100 est), to care for homeless individuals (1600 est). The HSA also provide for regular food inspections in restaurants (over 3500 inspections in 1989/90) and monitoring of sewer permits.

### Summary

While a detailed analysis is far too extensive to summarize in one article, *The Post* will continue to review various portions of this year's changes as new programs are added or the services are expanded.

On a positive note for Mid-County residents, road and police protection services have expanded, but the uncertainty still exists for many programs relying on state funding.

And, in spite of a \$250 million budget, and hundreds of programs and jobs, there are still some who feel that needs are going unmet, while others claim there is already too much.

Or to quote Walter Lippmann (1914), "It is perfectly true that that government is best which governs least. It is equally true that that government is best which provides most." □