

Watsonville council approves two-year

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WATSONVILLE — Everyone's talking about doing more with less these days. Watsonville city staff are actually doing it.

Despite an overall cut of 21 staff positions in the past five years, the city has exponentially increased its level of services; three new youth centers have opened, two youth job-training programs have been implemented and a late night recreation program has begun. More acres of parkland have been added and miles of city street have been

refurbished.

City staff have brainstormed on ways to be more efficient, and many work long hours without extra pay. Interim City Manager Carlos Palacios reported in his budget letter to the City Council that e-mail messages between city employees begin as early as 4:30 a.m. and go on until well past midnight.

Despite the high energy at City Hall, the budget is still in trouble — like last year, the City Council approved a deficit budget with \$400,000 in capital expenditures frozen to make up the deficit. The

city has brought in millions of dollars in outside grants, but in the two-year budget approved Tuesday night, the 1998-99 budget is \$10 million less than this year's because one-time funding for expansions at the library and Cabrillo College's Watsonville Center expansion and other projects will not be renewed.

The general fund amounts to \$19.9 million for 1997-98 and \$20.1 million for 1998-99.

Palacios warned that the fat has been cut, and the only remaining option will be for the city to cut services in the years ahead, unless

an improved economy results in significantly greater revenues.

The city held the line on social and community service expenditures again this year, funding most organizations at the same level they received last year and offering no funding to new programs. The only exceptions were that \$4,731 in additional funding will go to the top three teen social service programs — Fenix Services for counseling, YMCA for recreation and Youth Services for intervention and counseling. In addition, Si Se Puede has been slated to receive

funds for its substance abuse work with teens and young adults, and the county Suicide Prevention Service will be allowed to apply for funding, since many of its clients are youth from the Watsonville area.

Also, \$3,062 taken from the Community Services budget several years ago will be returned to that part of the city's budget, to be divided between the Fats Waller Concert and the Sister City project.

Additionally, water and sewer ratepayers can expect another 5 percent rate hike beginning with

budget

their next bill to pay for the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency's pipeline and other water supply projects.

Councilwoman Betty Bobeda lamented the short notice to the public on the water rate hikes. The measure will become effective July 1.

That gives us six days until our water bills go up 5 percent," said Bobeda. "Why didn't we have hearings in April and May? I know we have to have the increase. It's just the principle of the thing that annoys me."