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Proposed city budget avoids crippling cuts

Spending package contains no layoffs, keeps offices open

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The City Council will get a look this afternoon at the proposed 1993-94 budget which, despite a possible \$1.3 million revenue loss

to the city, manages to keep offices open and avoid layoffs.

The proposed \$55 million budget calls for some fees to go up and will delay several capital projects. Several vacant city positions will

remain so, and a reduction in the level of park and street maintenance — tree trimming, street sweeping — may have Watsonville looking a little rougher around the edges.

The city's ability to provide information and assistance in non-public safety areas also will be reduced as a result of an "aggressive attrition" policy and interdepartment personnel juggling.

But, thanks to the city's Challenge '93 program begun early this year, about \$500,000 will be saved in operational expenses, allowing Watsonville to avoid the layoffs or cuts in major services that are

occurring elsewhere.

City offices will still be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, current library hours will continue, and the num-

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ber of police and fire personnel will remain unchanged.

The budget is based on winning council approval of several recommended fee increases and changes. Targeted are the utility user's tax, parking-meter charges, card-room fees, business-license fees, police false-alarms fees, and the cost of releasing impounded vehicles. Specific rate and fee increases are not included.

The balanced budget also hinges on reducing General Fund expenditures to compensate for an anticipated loss to the state of between \$300,000 and \$600,000 in property taxes.

The principal uses of Watsonville's \$16.5 million in General Fund monies are police and fire protection, legislation and administration, building safety and planning, public works, the library, and parks and recreation.

Nearly 200 capital improvement projects and equipment acquisitions are covered in the budget, with money designated from the General Fund; special revenue funds, such as redevelopment; and enterprise funds, including the airport, wastewater treatment and garbage.

The largest chunk of funding, \$2.95 million, has been targeted for wastewater operations, followed by \$2.9 million for airport projects, including purchase of three land parcels to create an airport "clear zone. Wastewater Division projects total \$2.78 million, and \$2 million is designated for Federal Emergency Management Agency sewer-line replacement.

But more than half of the projects are identified by the budget as "being of importance but possibly less urgent," and another 21 have been called worthy projects but eligible for the back burner. Fourteen are listed but have not been recommended, and three dozen others have been discussed as future projects or referred back for consideration in the city operating budget.