

# County approves grim budget

*Budget*  
Needy, poor to feel most  
impact from cutbacks

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SANTA CRUZ — Another year of reduced hours at government offices, scaled-back programs for the poor, and little hope of improvement for roads and parks awaits county residents.

The Board of Supervisors on Thursday signed off on a \$366 million budget for the coming fiscal year, which begins July 1, closing a projected \$17 million deficit with deep cuts to public services.

"It's a very difficult economic time, and we just can't pay for everything we'd like to, and even what we need," said Supervisor Ellen Pirie.

The new budget represents a third year of reduced spending by the county — the result of reces-

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sion and lagging tax revenues — and mirrors a trend of austerity by local governments statewide.

"Everybody's had to cut," said Bob Stern, president of the Center for Governmental Studies in Los Angeles. "At least for another year or two, county governments will be cutting back areas that are essential, like hospitals, jails, roads."

In the process, Santa Cruz County's roughly 2,400-person work force will lose about 200 positions, according to the new budget, about 80 of which are now filled.

Additionally, all employees will take 15 to 20 days of unpaid time off over the next 12 months to trim labor costs, and county offices will close 15 days to accommodate the staffing reduction.

County leaders sought to make the necessary cuts as unobtrusive as possible by taking a little from every area of government. Still, some programs made out better than others.

Health and Human Services, which

provides for the community's sick, poor and elderly, was budgeted a sizeable 20 percent cut over last year. The safety-net department, which relies even more heavily on funding from the state, will likely take another hit when California lawmakers settle their budget later this year.

"There's more people who need these services now, who maybe didn't before," said Carolyn Coleman, executive director of the Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center, which works with the county to help the needy. "Without new revenues or new solutions, it could be really bad."

Acknowledging the toll on the community's most vulnerable, supervisors on Thursday halved a proposed 20 percent cut to the 48 nonprofit groups that contract with the county for social work. The restoration of funds was even greater than what was proposed last week.

The additional money was greeted with applause from social workers at Thursday's board meeting and was one of few issues during two weeks of budget hearings that drew public fanfare.

At an earlier meeting, a group of

parents concerned about losing day care lobbied for a popular Mid-County after-school program slated for elimination. Supervisors sympathized and spared the program.

These were among few bright spots in an otherwise grim budget.

Stern, with the Center for Governmental Studies, said the poor were clearly bearing the brunt of cuts to county programs across California. The impact of reduced county spending, he said, would be less obvious to the general public, but not unnoticeable.

In Santa Cruz County, public safety will take a hit that might be perceptible, acknowledged County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello. The Sheriff's Office will be scaling back community policing and the District Attorney's Office its prosecution efforts.

Public Works crews, too, won't be able to repave roads as often, Mauriello said, and parks officials won't be able to maintain recreational facilities as much.

"But we hope we've done enough thoughtful reductions that won't cause major challenges for the public," she said.