

# COUNTY SUPERVISORS ENDORSE PLAN TO CUT EMPLOYEE WORK HOURS AND SALARIES TO HELP BRIDGE MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR BUDGET SHORTFALL

by Mary Bryant

On May 11, using clauses in union contracts already negotiated with employee groups that relate to times of fiscal crisis and address "temporary layoffs," County Supervisors cut the county's standard 40-hour work week and the salaries of county employees in an effort to avoid year-end spending shortfalls.

Beginning on May 16, the hours of non-emergency personnel were decreased to 37 hours per week which resulted in a salary reduction of 7.5 percent, saving county leaders \$646,000 between May and the end of June.

As a result of the plan, county offices will close early on Friday afternoons at 1pm through June 30. While many residents won't be effected by the shorter hours at a number of county departments, early closure at other units will certainly impact a variety of people. For instance, the county operates a public health clinic which will no longer be open on Friday afternoons.

In the case of the county's public health clinic, it will be necessary for clients to either

schedule appointments at different times in the week, if appointments are available, or find other doctor-staffed facilities to gain care, such as the emergency rooms at local hospitals or private community clinic offices.

Dr. Ira Lubell, the county's health officer, noted that besides the difficulty the changes pose for clients, the cut in pay caused the clinic's only physical therapist to submit her resignation.

The lay-off, according to County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello, will apply to all county employees, including executive managers and middle managers. There are limited exceptions that include: adult and juvenile detention staff on 24 hour schedules; the Department of Public works and the Transportation Commission. The two latter categories are exempt since these departments do not receive revenues through the county's general fund.

But even the sheriff's office must find similar reductions even though officers will stay on duty.

"Sheriff's patrols are affected, but in a different way," Mauriello reported. "What we

did for the remainder of this year was eliminate two paid training days that the deputies would have normally received compensation for [prior to the cutbacks]... Essentially the layoff [sheriff deputies] took, instead of being three hours on Friday afternoons, was 10 hours for two days for the remainder of this fiscal year."

Mauriello also said that reductions in 9-1-1 emergency service were achieved through rescheduling employee shifts and reducing the number of employees on duty during certain times of the day.

But Mauriello cautioned that the changes would not likely go unnoticed by area residents.

"I think that regardless of how we manage these [reductions in services]... and what we do to try to minimize the service impacts, undoubtedly a loss of 7.5 percent of the resource capability in all areas is going to have a very direct impact on the services we are able to provide," said Mauriello.

While discussions of cuts to this year's services began last December, it was not until recently that union leaders and employees realized that the plans to implement "temporary layoffs" was inevitable for this year. With an estimated \$8 million to \$10 million shortfall in revenues projected by the end of the next fiscal year in June 30, 1994, Mauriello said this action was just the beginning of many more extraordinary cuts. And, Mauriello noted that the governor has proposed an additional \$2.6 billion reduction in funding to cities and counties as one measure to close the budget deficit in Sacramento this July. It is uncertain the impact such an additional hit would have on the county's spending plan.

On the brighter side, for local parents who enrolled their children in county-sponsored day care sessions for the summer through the Parks and Recreation Department, these programs were maintained because of the undue hardship late cancellation might create for participants.

But "good" news may be in short supply during the next few months as county supervisors begin to tackle next year's budget dilemma. Even with hiring freezes in place, it is likely, according to those involved, that dramatic cuts will require dramatic action and permanent layoffs may be in the offing.

While Mauriello is careful not to refer to the shortfall this year as a deficit, since county's are prohibited from deficit spending and because the books will be balanced in June by borrowing from the county self-insurance reserve funds, not all would agree with her analysis.

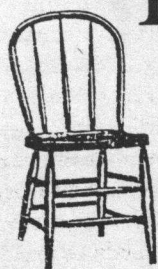
"Call it what you will, I think it's a deficit... It's money we don't have," said First-District Supervisor Jan Beautz. "We're talking about a big problem here... When it comes to making a choice between laying-off employees or furloughing all employees, I think the answer is simple. You vote for the work furlough... I just don't think we can keep going in the hole week after week. I didn't think we had many choices."

At the May 11 public hearing, supervisors also agreed to

accept cuts in their pay of 7.5 percent to begin at once. □

[Editor's Note: All county offices will close at 1pm on Fridays through June 30 except for the following: Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) offices at 1040 Emeline Street in Santa Cruz; JTPA offices at 420 Main Street in Watsonville; and Multi-Purpose Senior Services Program center at 1777A Capitola Road. The municipal courts will reschedule cases which have been set for Friday afternoons. However, it is recommended that persons with Friday afternoon court dates should appear at the scheduled time and place unless that are informed otherwise by the courts. The Superior Court Clerk's Office (Room 110), which includes the Municipal Court Civil Division, will be open from 8am to Noon on Fridays. The county building at 701 Ocean Street in Santa Cruz will closed at 1pm, and there will not be an after hours drop box. Applications for restraining orders will be heard at 8am on Fridays instead of at 1pm. Most superior court matters currently scheduled for Friday afternoon will be rescheduled over the next few weeks. □

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