

Board dips into reserves to fund Aptos anti-crime plan

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Santa Cruz County supervisors dipped into their reserves yesterday to fund programs aimed at reducing youth crime in Aptos.

As one of the final actions in approving a \$294 million budget, supervisors granted funds for an extra sheriff's deputy and a probation officer who will have offices on the Aptos and Watsonville high school campuses.

Also approved was a 1 percent across-the-board increase for some 60 community social programs, a total cost of \$69,529.

Supervisors asked county staff members to find a way to fund the anti-crime and social programs after overflow crowds spoke in support of them at the beginning

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of budget hearings last week. Neither had been included in the first budget proposals.

The Aptos programs were proposed by a group called the Aptos Community Alliance, which formed early this year with representatives from business, schools and the community.

The group didn't get all it asked for. It wanted two additional deputies for Aptos, instead of the one additional for the entire county, and \$28,600 for an after-school recreational program at Aptos Junior High and weekend-night open gym at Aptos High School. The campus-based probation officer

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was part of the request.

County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello said the recreation-program money could come from a slight increase in the "county service area" fees residents now pay for parks. Supervisors said they weren't willing to do that.

Midcounty Supervisor Walt Symons said after the meeting the new funding is "positive movement," but said he wasn't happy about taking money out of the county's already-slim reserve. That reserve is down to about \$400,000.

Symons said the money should have come from money raised by Prop. 172, the measure passed by state voters last fall allocating money for public safety agencies.

The Aptos Community Alliance proposal would have cost \$207,000 for a year; supervisors allocated \$117,000.

Supervisors also allocated \$100,000 from the reserve fund for two new positions in the district attorney's office.

Although yesterday's budget approval was "final," supervisors will almost certainly have to make budget adjustments later this summer, after the state budget is final.

More than 40 percent of county government's money comes from the state, which is facing a slim budget of its own.

The state budget could be approved as early as today, the supposed deadline. But legislators often drag hearings out into July, and even after the budget is approved there are "cleanup" bills to address various problems.

In other budget action yesterday, supervisors approved an agreement for the Allied Veterans Council to hire another group to operate the Veterans Memorial Building in Watsonville. Supervisors took no action on the vets' request for financial assistance, but asked for a staff report on the matter Aug. 9.

The vets raised the issue of assistance after the county approved a law two months ago banning smoking in most public places. The vets expressed concern that the law would reduce business at their weekly bingo games, a major revenue source for operating the hall.