

Budget

# Bit of good news for county budget

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SANTA CRUZ — County supervisors went into the final round of June budget hearings today, still working to bring a proposed \$153-million budget into balance.

A bit of good news for county government came Wednesday when Assessor Bob Peterson announced that property tax revenues would be up nearly 10.4 percent instead of the 10 percent estimated by County Administrative Officer George Newell last week.

The increase could bring in an additional \$65,000, according to the county assessor's estimate, to cut away at a beginning \$100,000 deficit.

The 1986-87 county budget is up 8.2 percent over current spending.

Increased spending for insurance, police, fire protection and workers wage increases, coupled with cuts in federal revenue-sharing money, has

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county government turning to a combination of revenue sources that takes more money from taxpayers and further depletes county reserves.

Included in the methods is a fee increase on the tax bills that will take an average of \$35 from each property owner in the county area, an increased transient occupancy (hotel) tax from 9.5 to 11 percent, dipping into a workers' compensation fund for \$500,000 and relying on wage savings from workers who retire or leave their jobs for other

reasons. The savings accrue during the interim the jobs are not filled and if the positions are cut.

Supervisor Dan Forbus said the county got into its fiscal trouble through a combination of Proposition 13 cuts that began in 1978 to hold property taxation at 1 percent of the value of homes and the costs of the 1982 storm that devastated county roads and exhausted local emergency services.

Forbus said, "We've come to where government itself and existing services use up the basic tax rate. Any new services have to be paid for with new fees."

Supervisors' Chairman Gary Patton said, "We're going to have to be honest and say 'reality has caught up with us, folks.' If people want parks and roads, they will have to pay for them."

Patton said it was a choice of charging residents directly for new

and increased services or slowing down the demand for services through growth control.

"It is my belief we will have to do both," Patton said.

The board approved budgets for the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (\$29,753), the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (\$32,035), the Local Agency Formation Commission (\$113,380) and the animal-control program (\$447,738).

Poundmaster Doug Fakkema had asked for an increase but it was turned down by the board.

Commenting on the size of the animal-control budget, an analyst commented, "Well, there's a lot of running dogs out there."

Supervisor Joe Cucchiara told Fakkema that some Valley residents had problems with the pound, saying one case involved the pound picking up a golden retriever and putting it up for adoption before the owner could bail the dog out.

However, Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. commended Fakkema for improving the animal-control service.

The board ended the afternoon with a look at the county projects list (capital improvements program) and decided its 1986-87 format was unclear.

Public works and administrative staff were told to simplify it when it returns to the board in September for final action.