

# Budget ax hits parks, planning

S.C. slashes  
\$720K for 2006

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SANTA CRUZ — Grappling with some of the weakest sales-tax revenue the city has collected in years, city leaders lopped \$720,000 from the 2006 budget with hits to the Parks and Recreation and Planning departments.

"It still doesn't bring us into a forecast balance," City Manager Dick Wilson told the City Council at its meeting Tuesday. "We're back into a comfort zone where we have a good chance to make it work out."

The city's 2006 fiscal budget was saved from \$4 million in cuts with the passage of Measure X in a special election in August to convert a longtime utility fee into a tax.

Still, city officials were forced to trim approximately \$1 million from the \$44 million net general fund that pays for daily operating expenses — mostly police, fire and parks and recreation — with tax revenue.

The city relies heavily on sales, utility and property taxes to make ends meet and deliver a number of popular services and programs.

To help dry the red ink, \$473,000 was cut from parks and recreation, \$223,000 from planning and \$24,000 from human resources and the city manager's office — an overall 1.6 percent of the net general fund.

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MIKE ROTKIN,  
MAYOR,  
SANTA CRUZ

## Budget

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Most reductions were made by freezing or deleting vacant positions, which brought the total drop in city employment to 17.5 percent during the past four years.

There are about 800 city employees and 80 positions still vacant, which will be considered for possible elimination, Assistant City Manager Martin Bernal said.

Since 2002, \$7.7 million has been cut from the city budget and 70 positions have been eliminated with ongoing reductions to services at facilities such as Harvey West Pool, Loudon Nelson Community Center and the Teen Center.

**'This will be a huge impact on our ability to get the job done.'**

GENE ARNER, DIRECTOR, PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Now, city leaders say they're running out of reductions that won't have a major impact on the community.

In this round of budget cuts, the Planning Department will lose three planner positions and shorten public counter hours to half-days, which will slow the time it takes to submit a plan, have it reviewed and approved by city officials, Director Gene Arner said.

During the past few years, Arner said his department has lost 44 percent of its staff, showing the council an organizational chart

with red X's over 14 positions that no longer exist.

"I don't really believe this is a sustainable posture over time," Arner told the council. "This will be a huge impact on our ability to get the job done."

City Councilman Tim Fitzmaurice suggested the Planning Department increase its fees to reflect the cost of services, similar to how the Public Works Department forms its refuse, water and sewer rates.

"We have to figure out a way to do these things," Fitzmaurice

said. "There should be a nexus between the fee and service provided."

The city last raised planning fees in 2003 after conducting a comparison study with other cities, Arner said.

Councilwoman Emily Reilly called for the city to "do a little more research with what the county and other cities do with their redevelopment money."

The city could see additional cash problems in December when union contracts with at least 500 workers are scheduled for negotiation.

"This is probably not our last look at this budget in this fiscal year," Mayor Mike Rotkin said.

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