

“BOARD OF SUPERVISORS PASS RESPONSIBLE, BALANCED COUNTY BUDGET”

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday unanimously adopted a balanced budget for the fiscal year that begins on July 1.

The budget is geared toward achieving the Countywide Vision, www.sbcounty.gov/vision, while reflecting the County’s ongoing struggle to cope with a deep economic downturn and dramatic and continuing increases in pension liabilities.

The \$4.8 billion budget is \$165.2 million smaller than the current budget and responsibly closes a \$21 million gap between projected ongoing revenues and expenses without using reserves to cover ongoing expenses. The gap was fueled primarily by \$12 million in federal and state takeaways and \$9.7 million to cover the costs of AB 109 state prison realignment.

The budget fills the gap mainly through anticipated concessions from labor union members. If for any reason those concessions do not materialize, the only alternative will be to make deep and drastic cuts to other county programs.

County Chief Executive Officer Greg Devereaux described his staff’s effort to bring the Board a responsibly balanced budget as “two steps forward, one and a half steps back.” The economy has improved and revenues are slowly on the rise. However, it will take the County several more years to recover from the recession, which put the County behind in funding infrastructure, pensions, and basic services.

The economic downturn forced the County to make 47-percent cuts in non-public safety services such as parks, museums, and Registrar of Voters; get many employees to agree to forgo raises and fund their share of retirement contributions; and eliminate funding for community projects.

Needs that have gone unmet include jail staffing, adequate law enforcement patrol and Code Enforcement in unincorporated areas, roads and other needed infrastructure, and funding for worn out vehicles and other equipment.

The budget leaves 84 percent of the recently built 1,392 High Desert Detention Center expansion unstaffed and unused. There are also \$117.1 million in county assets – vehicles, computers, etc. – that are beyond their useful life and there is no funding to replace them.

The budget manages to build up County reserves, but reserves will only be at 13.8 percent, which is well below the 20 percent mandated by County Policy. Healthy reserves are essential to maintain the County’s good credit rating and are necessary to fund large projects and to cover unexpected expenses.

“When we have an earthquake we will need this pot of money available,” Mr. Devereaux said.

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