

News

Economic picture looks good in San Jacinto

PLANNING AHEAD: City manager says drop in development activity was anticipated.

By CHARLES HAND/The Valley Chronicle

The San Jacinto City Council got its first look at the city's financial picture for the coming year this week and the news was mostly good.

The only downer in the report from City Manager Barry McClellan was a substantial decrease in revenue stemming primarily from a decrease in development activity.

However, McClellan told the council, the decrease was anticipated and adjustments to expenditures will leave in place increases in public safety staffing and other expansions of city services.

McClellan's report came during a first look at the 2007-08 budget, which will be followed by other discussions, including a public hearing at which citizens may discuss the issues as well.

The budget is expected to increase \$2.3 million, from \$51.5 million to \$57.8 million, between the 2006-07 and 2007-08 years.

The general fund is expected to increase from \$14.8 million to \$16.9 million.

The general fund - also known as the operating budget - is the source of the city's discretionary spending.

Public safety accounts for 50 percent of the spending, with general government and development services splitting the remainder evenly.

The city's contingency reserves are expected to increase from \$3 million to \$5.3 million, the capital reserves decrease from \$5.2 million to \$3.4 million, and the development services reserve decrease from \$4 million to \$3.4 million.

The contingency reserve is the money set aside to cover unexpected expenses and the capital reserve the amount set aside to cover unexpected construction and equipment needs.

The development services reserve holds back developer fees collected in previous years for projects not fed into the system until subsequent years.

The budget allows for expansion of services in several areas, McClellan told the council.

In the Police Department, he envisions the addition of a third school resource officer for San Jacinto High School, turning the part-time sexual offender monitor into a full-time position, adding two officers to the problem-oriented-policing team, and adding a community service officer.

Police Chief Kevin Vest said the need for a dedicated officer to track sex offenders is the result of the city's growing population.

When the Sheriff's Department took over police duties in the city, there were 160 sex offenders on the department's list, but that number was reduced to 47 through compliance checks that revealed many were no longer residents of the city or had died.

Since that time, however, the number has risen to 100, making it necessary to provide a full-time compliance officer, he said.

Vest also noted that San Jacinto is a popular assignment.

He said he has a list of six to 10 deputies seeking transfer to the city from county areas or other contract cities, many of them San Jacinto Valley residents who would like to work closer to home.

He said he expects the number of city officers living in the San Jacinto Valley to rise to 80 percent to 90 percent within the next three to four years.

In the Fire Department, the city is planning to upgrade six firefighters to paramedics, which will provide one paramedic per engine per shift to provide 24-hour paramedic coverage at both city fire stations.

City Engineer Habib Motlagh should get a deputy, McClellan said, or the city should consider hiring a staff engineer, to keep up with the growing workload.

Motlagh provides services under a contract. He is not a city employee.

The City Council voted to allow Motlagh to hire a deputy and continue his contract status, rather than ask him to become a staff engineer or to replace him with a staff engineer.

"That is a good option with little risk," said Councilwoman Chris Carlson.

Mayor Jim Ayres said the city needs a full-time engineer because of the growth in the work load.

"I have every confidence in Habib," he said, and his performance is not at issue, only the workload.

"We have a tremendous amount of work," he said.

Public works would get a new maintenance worker under McClellan's proposal.

Special districts' financial services consultant would be converted to a senior accountant on staff.

McClellan's proposal also recommends \$322,500 in capital spending for such items as new chairs and desks for the Community Center, microfilm services, park walks and other improvements, a street striping and stenciling truck, replacements for two electric vehicles on which the nonrenewable leases are up, exercise and office equipment for the downtown fire station, and a City Council voting board.

The voting board would be portable so that, should the council start meeting in a different location, it could be moved.

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