

Yolo County Supervisors OK \$330M budget

Allocate funds to new programs, jobs

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After a bit of tweaking Tuesday, Yolo County supervisors ratified a \$330 million budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year, including money for new positions and programs.

"The budget remains balanced," said Patrick Blacklock, county administrator. "That is positive news compared to the past years because we have a higher fund balance than we've had in past years, and that higher general fund balance allows us to bring forward some recommendations."

Delayed road maintenance, foster care services, and funding to refill long-vacant positions were among the budget beneficiaries.

During the recession, reserves for road maintenance were "swept up" to fund other needs, Blacklock said. With disheveled rural roads across the county, repairs have been long overdue, and a recurring subject for supervisors.

"Our roads are falling apart," said Supervisor Oscar Villegas. "Everyday that we don't do road repairs, they become worse so that the cost goes significantly higher."

With the adoption of the 2014-25 budget, however, \$750,000 was placed in the road maintenance reserve, which is only the beginning according to Supervisor Jim Provenza.

"If there is money left in some other contingency," he said, "we should put in more toward the roads."

Blacklock also said a general reserve of \$7.3 million and \$2 million in contingency funds will be available, which would help in sustaining county programs and staff.

Meanwhile, about \$61.6 million in revenue is anticipated next year, which will be supplemented by state and federal funding sources.

Supervisor Matt Rexroad was pleased by a long-overdue \$650,000 payment to the county's landfill loan.

"We borrowed 10 million basically from our credit card for the landfill," he said. "We're eventually going to need that room on our credit card so I am most excited today that we are paying off about half of the remaining balance."

One of the additions to the budget included the Family Partnership Program designed to reduce the number of youth in foster care.

According to Joan Planell, director of employment services, Yolo County is averaging about 20 new foster children each month, but that number is increasing.

"In the last 19 days we have brought 19 children into foster care," Planell told supervisors before describing the program, which would facilitate meetings with extended family, neighbors and faith-based community members to explore placement options outside the foster care system.

Planell has seen this program work in other states, including Arlington, Va., where Planell worked previously.

"We started program with about 150 children in care," she said. "By the time I left several years later we had 80 children in care. This is what I would like to implement here to reduce the number of children in foster care."

Along with the program, the board approved four new social worker positions, using realignment funds.

Despite recent Grand Jury scrutiny, Yolo Supervisors approved five additional positions within the Sheriff's Department to help reduce workloads.

"Overtime in that department has been a problem every single year," Rexroad said.

When the recommended budget was adopted in June, supervisors moved to fill dozens of other county positions, which left some supervisors questioning their decision.

At the June meeting, Supervisor Duane Chamberlain was concerned the state and federal funding for the approved positions may subside or run out in the future.

"I don't want to lay people off," he said previously. "I don't want to hire people that I am going to have to lay off."

Despite these reservations, supervisors unanimously approved the adopted budget Tuesday, which added 24 new jobs.

Although all five supervisors supported the overall budget, they disagreed on funding for YoloArts, an organization which has supported the arts throughout the county since 1981.

The YoloArts Council sought \$120,000 each year for the next three years to help expand programming.

In particular, YoloArts would branch out and merge existing programs with those rooted in agriculture, supporting the Yolo County General Plan.

"I have mixed feelings about this one," said Supervisor Don Saylor, who noted the county recently transferred property to YoloArts.

Meanwhile, Provenza moved to support the program, but with a one-time payment of \$48,700 to supplement two new programs that incorporate agriculture, which was approved in a 3-2 vote, Supervisors Saylor and Rexroad dissenting.

"I think the arts thing was a mistake in terms of spending money and the process and everything," Rexroad said, noting he is worried the county is spreading itself too thin.

"It was a bad time in Yolo County five years ago, when we were going through this," he said. "When I first got elected, it seemed like every meeting we were doing something exciting, kind of like what we're doing now, and it kind of scares me."

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