

County supervisors add new positions, approve final budget

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy** From page A1 | September 30, 2015

WOODLAND — Yolo County supervisors on Tuesday unanimously approved a final budget for 2015-16, but only after a divided vote on funding some 20 new county positions spread across several departments.

Back in June, the board had approved a recommended budget featuring \$346 million in expenditures and growth largely limited to additional health and human services positions funded by state and federal sources.

Additional staffing requests before supervisors on Tuesday included an ag employee to inspect pesticide illnesses and complaints, a process server in the District Attorney's Office, an analyst in the Department of Financial Services and an investigator assistant in the Public Defender's Office, among others.

The positions ultimately were approved on a 3-2 vote with Supervisors Don Saylor and Jim Provenza of Davis and Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento voting in favor and Supervisors Matt Rexroad of Woodland and Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District voting against.

Yolo County has been operating with significantly fewer employees since the recession began in 2008 and the county cut more than 400 full-time-equivalent positions, leading to a lower employee-to-resident ratio than comparable counties. Yolo County still remains lower — with just over seven employees per 1,000 residents — than the nine employees per 1,000 residents back in the early 2000s, but that number has increased slightly each of the past three years.

In voting against adding new positions, Rexroad harkened back to 2008 and board votes to eliminate county jobs, calling the period “miserable.”

The county's finances are better now, he said, but “I anticipate a time, possibly during our next three years on the board ... (when) we're going to end up firing or laying off these people.”

County Administrator Patrick Blacklock acknowledged Rexroad's concerns about future budget crunches, but said the list of additional positions before the board had been pared down from what had been requested by county departments.

Saylor also said he appreciated Rexroad's concerns, but added that, “We cut many, many positions over the last few years and we're adding fewer.”

“I think that our people need help and I’m excited to have the opportunity to invest in them,” Saylor added.

Provenza noted that in addition to restoring some county jobs, the board over the past few years has consistently put additional funding into restoring reserves and contingency funds, and said, “It’s significant that we haven’t just gone back and said, ‘Let’s restore all those positions.’”

The county’s brighter financial picture also allowed the board this year to pay back funds borrowed from the Yolo County Landfill in 2010 earlier than expected and to invest additional funds in combatting homelessness.

The board had borrowed \$10.5 million from the county landfill fund in order to close budget gaps elsewhere five years ago and, thanks in part to reimbursement funds received from the state, will finish paying back the full amount this year.

“It’s good news to be able to pay this off,” Blacklock said.

Supervisors also voted Tuesday to allocate \$200,000 to expand the Bridge-to-Housing program to Davis and Woodland.

The first phase of the pilot project focused on West Sacramento last year, successfully moving dozens of individuals who had been living along the banks of the Sacramento River into permanent housing.

Phase 2 will build on that effort, with the county working in concert with Davis and Woodland on Housing First models that fit the needs of those cities, including by providing additional housing vouchers for residents.

A budget item before the board Tuesday would have allocated \$100,000 toward the effort, but Saylor recommended doubling that amount.

“I want the county to have enough of a stake in this that we can make a difference,” Saylor said.

Supervisors ultimately voted unanimously in favor of the higher amount.

Spending on health and human services remains the largest expenditure in the Yolo County budget at 41 percent, followed by law and justice at 25 percent, general government at 20 percent, planning and public works at 13 percent and capital projects at 1 percent.

Three major unfunded liabilities continue to be a concern: pensions, retiree health and road maintenance, which have a combined estimated liability of \$674 million, with almost half of that — \$305 million — for needed road repairs.

On the positive side, new numbers from the state and federal government show the county's job market continues to improve.

According to data from the state Employment Development Department, non-farm job growth in Yolo County increased by 2.5 percent in calendar year 2014, up from 2.4 percent in 2013. And since 2011, when payroll employment was at a 10-year low, Yolo County has added a total of 6,600 jobs.

Leading job growth sectors included manufacturing (1,300 jobs), government (1,300 jobs) and education and health services (1,200 jobs). Additionally, the farming and agriculture sector contributed 800 jobs.

Separately, according to county staff, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics recently reported that average weekly wage growth in Yolo County grew by 7.1 percent from the fourth quarter of 2013 to the fourth quarter of 2014, the 10th highest among the largest 339 counties in the United States.

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