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County budgets continue to reel

Stanislaus County unveils final budget with more cuts

Stanislaus County, CA – A devastated local economy, soaring unemployment, dramatically decreased property taxes and takeaways from the State of California are once again pounding not just California, but the central valley in a crippling way. The County of Stanislaus has just released its Recommended Final Budget for Fiscal Year 2010-2011 that will go to the County Board of Supervisors on September 14th for consideration. And the budget highlights the trouble local government is facing.

A Public Hearing to adopt the Recommended Final Budget has been scheduled for 9:05 a.m. on September 14, 2010 to be continued if necessary on September 15 and 16, 2010 at 9:00 a.m. The meeting will take place at 1010 Tenth Street in Modesto in the basement Board Chambers.

The Final Budget recommended by the Chief Executive Officer totals \$918,752,492 in total spending. This is an overall decrease of \$39,294,033, or 4 percent, from the Adopted Final Budget for 2009-2010. Local discretionary revenue is unrestricted money the County is free to use for things like law enforcement, healthcare, roads and other services - no strings attached. Unfortunately, discretionary revenue, which is largely driven by sales tax and property tax revenue, has continued to fall. While discretionary revenue was at a high of \$181 million in 2007, the final budget shows \$143.9 million in revenue, down nearly 21% from its high.

"The past three years have been an incredibly painful time for all of us," stated Rick Robinson, Chief Executive Officer for Stanislaus County. "For more than three years, the County has been cutting and restructuring to deal with this economic crisis. We have let go of valued County employees, many of whom committed their professional lives to serving our community. But, the fact is, as painful as this is we aren't done cutting and the bottom is not in sight."

Painful cuts

With the adoption of the Recommended Final Budget, 857 approved positions will have been eliminated from the County workforce since the County started preparing for the financial meltdown more than three years ago. And those numbers will continue to grow. County staffing peaked at 4603 approved positions in 2007 and was budgeted for 3990 positions in the Final Adopted 2009-2010 Budget. With adoption of the Recommended Final Budget, there will be 3746 approved positions for the County, a decrease of nearly 19% from the high.

Program Impacts

Program impacts include reduced office hours for the Assessor's Office, the Library and the Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office, the closure of 270 beds at the Honor Farm, reductions in the number of prosecutors available to staff courtrooms, and a reduction in services at the Assessor's Office. Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS)-Alcohol and Drug Programs and Public Guardian services will be impacted, In-Home Supportive Services case management and Child Welfare supportive services along with reduced maintenance service levels at parks and County facilities will change as well.

"Every County department has been looking at how to streamline and re-structure operations," stated Monica Nino, Assistant Executive Officer who is responsible for the County's budget. "We know we have to look dramatically different from the past and change how we operate. The State budget crisis will continue to negatively impact us."

Even with downsizing and cuts, the County must rely on \$15.6 million in one-time funds to balance the general fund of the 2010-2011 Recommended Final Budget.

The Stanislaus County 2010-2011 Recommended Final Budget is available for public review. It can be viewed at the Board of Supervisors Office of the County of Stanislaus at 1010 10th Street, Suite 6500 in Modesto. It is also available on the County's web site, www.stancounty.com/budget or at any of the thirteen libraries located throughout Stanislaus County.