

## **County wrestles with where to cut**

By Jonathan Edwards  
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WOODLAND — Yolo County supervisors are struggling to do their job.

They started their Wednesday budget seminar with a plan from County Administrator Patrick Blacklock to close a \$15.2 million deficit next year.

A projected \$24 million deficit popped up in February after property taxes came in 6 percent lower than estimated. But Blacklock worked with supervisors and department directors over the past two months to find \$9 million in savings and chop the gap down to \$15.2 million.

Instead of closing the deficit, however, the Board of Supervisors started the day by nixing two pieces of Blacklock's plan. They gave District Attorney Jeff Reisig a second- in-command at a cost of \$215,000. They also agreed not to touch the district attorney's reserve fund to close the budget.

The changes threw next year's budget out of whack by \$315,000.

"We're much better at identifying places we want to restore, not things we want to cut," said Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis. "It's natural. It's the kind of people we are."

Not Matt Rexroad. While he agreed with Reisig's requests, Woodland's supervisor has been pushing the board to pull the trigger on the tough decisions no one wants to make.

"All we've done is increase expenditures for next year," Rexroad said toward the end of the seminar. "We're spending our way into a further deficit. We're spending more money than we're bringing in — still."

Provenza flirted with cutting some programs, including Cooperative Extension, a joint project between the University of California and the county.

Extension farm advisers relay agricultural research to farmers. UC pays the salaries of the advisers while the county houses them in a Woodland office and fronts the cash for clerical staff.

"I like this program, everything about it," Provenza said, "but ... we don't have enough revenue for everything."

Provenza said the Sheriff's Department, the D.A.'s office and social services are all higher priorities.

"Extension's less of a priority than prosecuting murder or providing mental health services," he said.

Canning one of the three workers paid by the county could save \$30,000, said Kent Brittan, Extension director.

At this point, "every amount is meaningful," Provenza replied.

Brittan balked, however, at making more cuts, saying he would tell UC to shut down the program if the county sliced into his budget any deeper. Employees already suffered a 20 percent furlough, and they're scrambling to capture grant money.

"We've done everything we can possibly do to get us through this," Brittan said.

Supervisor Helen Thomson of Davis, board chair, disagreed with Provenza.

Cooperative Extension "has been a major partner and collaborator in the success of agriculture in this county," she said. "This is not a place I'm interested in cutting any further."

Rexroad pushed the board to cut its own \$1.6 million budget. Each of the county's five supervisors gets two deputies to help them with the day-to-day grind of crafting public policy.

Cut one of them, he said. "We have a leadership role and a morale role ... within our 1,300-person organization that we're leading," Rexroad said.

County administrators are trying to negotiate a 10 percent pay cut countywide.

West Sacramento Supervisor Mike McGowan said he needs both deputies to do the job voters elected him to do.

"The citizens and the residents have the right to be adequately and appropriately represented," he said. "They expect us to work 24/7 full-time and provide them with full service."

The board backed McGowan. Thomson said cutting their second deputies would be a "serious mistake."

It's not personal, Rexroad said. "It's a question of what things are more important than others. Not everything is of equal value. We have to make decision about what we're going to do and what were not going to do."

The supervisors voted to form a subcommittee of Provenza and McGowan to pick through the board budget.

Provenza said he didn't feel comfortable telling his colleagues what to do with their budgets. However, he said he'd look at cutting down to one deputy. He also said he'd team up with the county auditor to comb through the board's \$100,000 travel budget.

The supervisors finished their seminar despite having scheduled three days of meetings. Blacklock said he'd return with a recommended budget during the board's final budget hearings, which are set for June 15-17.

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