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The Price of Police Less Expensive Than Anticipated

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

short term. "One major development: the Deputy Sheriff's Association has not and will not return to the bargaining table, fearing that if they do, they will take a cut in pay and benefits," said Administrative Services Director Tracy Robinson. "The upshot is that, at least for the next year, Sheriff's costs will remain relatively flat. All in, we expect that costs for police services will rise only about 3% next year."

One of the options that Lafayette was exploring was to contract with the City of Walnut Creek for police services. Walnut Creek is not scheduled to negotiate with its police staff until next year.

The long term forecast is vague for the time being. Costs will depend on retirement obligations for new hires in Walnut Creek and for the Sheriff's office as well as how the County will pay its unfunded pension obligation. "It will be at least 18 - 24 months until we know more definitively about these various initiatives and how overall costs may be affected," said Robinson.

The official recommendation from City Manager Steven Falk to the City Council is to place on hold for two years a decision about police services until the County and Walnut Creek have completed their negotiations.

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Back in January, city budgeting staff had a five year budget model that projected a 12% increase in the cost of police services, due mostly to escalating pension costs. For years, Lafayette has contracted with the Sheriff's Department for police personnel and is happy with the level of service provided.

Although the city has a substantial monetary buffer set aside in case of emergency, at that rate of increase, reserves would fall below their target of 50% in fiscal year 2013/2014.

With 21 full time positions that include 17 sworn and 4 non-sworn City employees - Police services, at just over \$4,500,000 for fiscal year 2009/2010, eats up the largest part of the General Fund budget.

Initially anticipating the 12% per year increase, administrative staff started looking at options to reduce the cost of providing police services. Danville and Orinda share the same concern over this unsustainable trend. To that end, Matrix Consulting was hired to evaluate police service alternatives, with the three cities each paying one-third of the \$75,000 fee.

A couple of factors have influenced the situation - at least for the