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Balanced Budget Includes Extra Funding for Road Repair

By Cathy Tyson

With very little fanfare, and no public comment, the City of Lafayette's \$11.9 million budget for fiscal year 2012-2013 passed unanimously at a recent City Council meeting. Boasting a balanced budget with \$4,500 to spare, frugal Administrative Services staff improved on the very modest \$223 extra from the last fiscal year while funding programs at current levels. The city's reserve, or savings account, is very healthy, the estimated total for fiscal year 2012-2013 is \$8.9 million, \$3 million over their target amount, allowing for a release of \$1.1 million for pavement projects.

"While we predict that the General Fund will grow less than one percent next year, we have seen encouraging signs of growth in the local economy, suggesting that things are slowly improving," said City Manager Steven Falk in a staff report. Falk also pointed out that the city has weathered the recent economic downturn without laying off employees and maintaining existing programs, a feat "many, if not most, California cities have been unable to do." Police services are getting more expensive, going up five percent over the last fiscal year, at a cost of \$217,000. Even with one of the lowest staffing levels per capita in the County, the City of Lafayette spends more than \$4 million annually on police services.

What about money for roads? The capital improvement budget includes \$1.1 million from the General Fund reserve, with an additional \$975,000 from the annual operating budget. What's more, two grants are expected in 2013 that would pay for pavement management work and streetlight installation along Mt. Diablo Boulevard. The city also receives money from gas taxes and Measure J sales taxes. In the wake of the recent failed tax measure, there was agreement that dipping into the city's substantial reserve account was appropriate to start to address the road repair backlog.

Other notable highlights include the approval of modern "smart" parking meters that will be popping up downtown at a budgeted cost of \$200,000; remember that when you conveniently use a debit or credit card to settle up. Due to savvy renegotiating, the lease on the City Offices in Desco Plaza has been reduced annually by \$59,000. City employees had their salaries frozen for the past two years, and are currently in negotiations for a salary increase.

Massage Parlor Ordinance Approved

Also unanimously approved at the May 29 City Council meeting is an amendment to the Lafayette Municipal Code about massage parlors. There are currently 19 such establishments downtown. Chapter 4-501 establishes new standards that comply with California law and spells out certain minimum health and safety standards for those businesses and their employees. Simply put - all massage therapists and practitioners operating within the city must be state certified, and the businesses must be registered with the city. Ten pages outline who and what is covered, along with exemptions for other professionals like physicians, nurses, physical therapists, but also barbers, manicurists, nursing homes, health clubs and more. C. Tyson

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