

Senior meals, law-justice, library – on EDC hit list

By Kathryn Reed

If the \$5.5 million in budget cuts El Dorado County plans to make before the new year are approved as presented Tuesday by CAO Gayle Erbe-Hamlin, say goodbye to the senior nutrition program throughout the county, look for library hours to be reduced, roads to not be repaired, and \$1 million eliminated from the sheriff's department budget.



The Board of Supervisors on Oct. 19 was given the grim news. Erbe-Hamlin called it "ugly."

It's been well documented the county is facing an \$11 million deficit for fiscal year 2011-12, which begins July 1.

Click on proposal to see what was presented Tuesday in Placerville.

If the \$400,000 for the senior nutrition program were cut, that would wipeout the five centers the county operates. This includes the food program at the South Lake Tahoe Senior Center and meals-on-wheels. These programs can be the only meals seniors receive.

Daniel Nielson, who runs the Department of Social Services, was not available to talk about the food program late Tuesday.

At the South Lake Tahoe branch library, the half position that has not been filled is scheduled to be cut. Expect hours to be slashed, too. A Sept. 20 PowerPoint presentation to the board

outlines ways to trim the library budget.

The goal of the supervisors is to tackle half the deficit in the coming weeks. A special board meeting is scheduled for Nov. 3 to solely talk about the budget. Next week county staff will be in South Lake Tahoe to brief basin residents about the financial woes.

If the board doesn't resolve the issue the day after Election Day, it has regular meetings Dec. 7 and Dec. 14, but is dark the previous two weeks and last two weeks of December. Another special meeting could be called.

The remaining \$5.5 million is likely to be dealt with right after the first of the year.

"We'll have a more clear picture for the 2011-12 year once the first \$5.5 million is addressed. Then we have to do it again. This is a difficult conversation now and in February it will be harder, I think," said Jim Mitrisin, assistant to Chief Administrative Officer Erbe-Hamlin.

Mitrisin cautioned the proposed cuts are "very preliminary."

Still, with the time line the supes want to follow combined with the cuts in services and staff that have been made in recent years, the low hanging fruit was plucked long ago.

Some say the financial abyss the county finds itself in is a result of the state trying to balance its budget on the back of local jurisdictions.

El Dorado County can also point to a significant drop in property valuations decreasing the amount of property tax it collects, along with sales tax dropping during the recession.

There was a time when construction was robust on the West Slope. Now it's practically at a standstill.

Although supervisors have said law and justice were sacred,

that's not entirely so with Erbe-Hamlin's proposal on Tuesday. Her idea is to find more than \$1.6 million in savings by mandating a 2.7 percent cut each for sheriff, probation, district attorney, and public defender.

Sheriff Fred Kollar did not return a call Tuesday.

Perhaps the diminishing flow of cash is why the CAO has said the economic coordinator position can be scrapped. However, the nearly half million dollars in promotional funds – which is discretionary income from the hotel tax – is not slated to be touched.

Follow what the county is doing via the Board of Supervisors' webpage.