

Placer County approves tentative 2013-14 budget

The Placer County Board of Supervisors approved tentative 2013-14 \$690.5 million budget is 5.4 percent less than the current year's budget.

The reduction is largely a result in how the county is budgeting multi-year infrastructure projects.

The proposed operating budget is up \$10 million, or 1.9 percent, because of projected increases of \$7.9 million, or 2.2 percent, in the general fund and \$3.6 million, or 2.6 percent, in the public safety fund.

More budget workshops are planned for August before the board is expected to adopt the final budget in September.

"I do think it's important that any of the budget adjustments we make throughout the year are reflected in documents we provide to the public," Vice Chairman Jack Duran said at this week's meeting. He suggested the county provide quarterly updates to allow the public to track mid-year changes.

The county budget team and board members pointed to several encouraging signs, including a \$60 million reduction over the last two years in the county's unfunded liability for post-retirement benefits other than pensions. Collectively, they are known as other post-retirement benefits and include medical, dental and vision benefits.

A new actuarial report places the unfunded liability at about \$136 million, down from approximately \$196 million two years ago.

"Hopefully, the economy will continue to improve," Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery said, "and, years into the future, we will

be able to build back some of our services and build back some of our staffing to really provide that top-notch level of service that we provide now, but we could provide even better with more dollars and more staff.”

In a report to the board, the county budget team pointed to several accomplishments over the past year, including:

- A stronger focus on communicating with the public and employees about the county’s priorities and plans for achieving them. A cornerstone of that effort is a transition over the next several years to priority-based budgeting, an approach that seeks to improve transparency in the budget process while helping ensure county resources are allocated based on priorities and results to county residents.
- An approved plan for a phased opening of the county’s new jail in Roseville early in 2014.
- Board adoption of a multi-year budget strategy focused on balancing county priorities with available resources and making sure the costs of county programs can be sustained in future years.
- A comprehensive approach to infrastructure planning that seeks to identify and fund high-priority projects.
- Using one-time revenue for one-time costs.
- Budgeting conservatively so the county has flexibility to handle revenue and cost fluctuations.
- Maintaining healthy budget reserves.
- Focusing on innovative, cost-effective approaches for providing public services.
- Relying on a pay-as-you-go approach whenever feasible so the county maintains a relatively light debt load.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*