

Douglas County projects uptick in revenues

By Anne Knowles

MINDEN – Douglas County is back in balance.

Three years ago, the Nevada county had a \$3 million structural budget deficit that was projected out for several years. Since then, the county has moved to priority-based budgeting and made a few other changes, such as contracting out some services to Carson City and Storey and Lyon counties, that cut costs.

Now revenues are growing again. In 2016, its general fund revenue, consisting mainly of money from property taxes and the state's consolidated tax, is projected to grow 2.4 percent, in line with a 2.4 percent uptick in expenses, made up primarily of personnel and services, and supplies.

For fiscal year 2015-16, the county has about 500 full-time positions and a budget of \$136 million.

"In January, the board (of commissioners) held a workshop to update our goals and they added organization sustainability," Jim Nichols, county manager, told about 100 people gathered June 11 in the ballroom of the Carson Valley Inn to get an update on the county's financial health. "That includes retention and recruitment of staff."

Other good news included increases in home sales and home prices and a slight but welcome jump in property assessed values.

Assessed values are expected to increase 1.7 percent in 2016, to about \$2.6 billion, after a precipitous decline of 29 percent between 2010 and 2014.

“Twenty-nine percent is significant,” said Christine Vuletich, assistant county manager and chief financial officer. “I know everyone knows that.”

Nichols said the county still faces some challenges, including investments in infrastructure, particularly the county’s 171 miles of paved roads that for years have had a backlog of needed maintenance.

Nichols said he was also concerned that big business projects in the Reno area, specifically Tesla Motors’ battery plant and the Switch data center, which are expected to create about 52,000 jobs both directly and indirectly, could drain the local workforce.

Nichols also pointed to some achievements from the past year, including the opening of the 83,000-square-foot community and senior center, upgrades to the Zephyr Cove water facility, completion of the Elks Point Road to Round Hills Pine Beach stretch of the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail and the adoption by the county commissioners of the Tahoe Douglas Area Plan, which goes next to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency for approval.

Nichols praised private investment that is helping to revitalize the area, including Lake Tahoe Hard Rock Lake, Epic Discovery at Heavenly Mountain Resort, and Sharkey’s.

The county’s presentation concluded with its second annual Spotlight Awards honoring area businesses. The awards, in seven industry categories, went to Minden Meat & Grill, Minden; Ace Hardware, Gardnerville; Zephyr Photonics, Zephyr Cove and Minden; Heavenly Mountain Resort, Stateline; Park Heritage, owner of the recently opened Overland Restaurant & Pub in Gardnerville; Carson Valley Golf Course, Gardnerville; and Design Workshop, Stateline.

The county also recognized six employees for exemplary service: Marcie Schurke, finance; Anita Macgillivray, human

resources; Ron Roman, public works; Don Gerard, public safety and maintenance; Kathy Munson, library services; and Melissa Blosser, public information.