

Opinion: Fiscal ineptness continues in EDC

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County's roads are literally falling apart, especially with the significant precipitation the county has had in the past four months. For the last eight years the county has allocated between \$1 million and \$2 million annually to attempt to keep up with EDC's road maintenance.

But that ended as the Board of Supervisors, led by then Chairman Brian Veerkamp, adopted a budget policy that no General Fund money will be used for road maintenance at the budget meeting on Sept. 14, 2015. According to EDC residents and taxpayers, road maintenance is the No. 2 priority of the county after public safety. That No. 2 position was confirmed by the recent survey of EDC residents.



Larry Weitzman

The lack of general fund money is becoming a significant problem as at the latest BOS meeting (March 8) the BOS approved the purchase of 30 acres of land near the Missouri Flat industrial park for about \$2.65 million to build a new sheriff's headquarters. The money for the land was planned and allocated, but the much bigger issue is that the money to build a \$40 million to \$50 million sheriff's HQ has not. There is nothing in the budget for that. There is no question a new HQ is needed as the current HQ on Fairlane near the government

center is on the cusp of becoming a superfund site. While that might be a slight exaggeration, we have needed a new HQ for years.

With the exception of Supervisor Shiva Frentzen and to some extent Supervisor Ron Mikulaco, the EDC board hasn't a fiscal clue as demonstrated by what was said at the BOS meeting of Feb. 23, item 33, the mid-year budget report.

Receiving significant discussion was the lack of road maintenance as Supervisor Mikulaco said "that the most important asset that this county has that everyone uses every single day is our roadway network." He went on to say "if this board was going to adopt putting \$3 million into the road fund (from the General Fund) ... that's something I would support."

Supervisor Mike Ranalli went on to kick the can down the road (but with all the potholes that might be hard) when he said, "Um, I would prefer at this juncture, though, to kind of see all of the needs and totality before any specific recommendations." Ranalli doesn't have a clue, especially about the budget. That's because at that final budget meeting last September he voted to end General Fund road maintenance and to successfully end five-year budget forecasts along with the rest of the board. Didn't Ranalli read the citizens survey? It's the No. 2 priority behind public safety. Maybe when his car's wheels, tires, suspension, alignment and/or engine (rock through the oil pan) get destroyed, he will look at his political mumbo jumbo differently.

Supervisor Sue Novasel chimed in with respect to Supervisor Frentzen's motion for a five-year budget projection and a \$2 million transfer of General Fund money to road maintenance: "I agree with Supervisor Frentzen that we have to keep our infrastructure going. That should be No. 1 goal ... those two are huge and I realize and I do agree with you Michael (Ranalli) that we really need to take a look at the whole budget." (Novasel also likes to play kick the can.) "But that

being said I would also really like to see an increase, (at) least \$2 million, maybe \$3 million in our roads when we get there. Again I will again thank Supervisor Frentzen for bringing up the five-year projection." Novasel voted against Frentzen's motion later just as she didn't support it at the budget meeting last September.

At the Sept. 14, 2015, budget meeting it was Veerkamp leading the charge as BOS chairman to delete road maintenance from the General Fund budget along with the practice of preparing budget projections even against the pleas of Supervisor Frentzen. Without those projections the BOS has no idea of the future. This is just one of the consequences of the outrageous 15 percent raise to EDC employees and unnecessary employee hiring (budget projections reveal that outrageous cost) about two years prior which Veerkamp supported and voted for. But it gets worse.

Frentzen at this Feb. 23 BOS meeting made a motion for five-year budget projections to start again and for a transfer of \$2 million to the road fund. Mr. Kick the Can (Ranalli) says, "I'm supportive of the items but I am not gonna support the motion at this time. I think when it comes to forecasting, certainly there are some items that need to be looked at in five years." On the contrary, the record shows that it was Ranalli who didn't support Frentzen's motion of continuing the requirement of five-year budget projections last September. First Ranalli votes against the idea of five-year budget projections and then uses not having the budget projections as an excuse for not using General Fund money for road maintenance. Circular logic. Because of his fiscal malpractice, Ranalli is not qualified for his job.

Frentzen's motion to provide the BOS with a five-year budget projection and to provide the road fund with \$2 million in General Fund money is seconded by Mikulaco. With two yes votes from Frentzen and Mik and three no votes from Veerkamp, Novasel, and Ranalli the motion is given the kiss of death.

But this quote from interim CAO Larry Combs highlights this meeting: "Since, I have not had a chance to look at the budget and the projections for revenue, I can't forecast what effect taking \$2 million out of the General Fund (for road maintenance) would mean. But, that's approximately the amount that's going to be needed for debt service on the Public Safety facility. So, I would not recommend your board giving me that direction."

Combs has been here eight months and says he doesn't know the budget or its future. He even presided over the September budget meeting where he told the BOS budget projections are worthless. And on March 8 he recommended to the BOS to spend \$2.65 million for a sheriff's HQ property and he doesn't know if we have the resources to pay for the \$40 million to \$50 million HQ structure or even for the debt service of \$2 million or more annually if our county were to go into debt to build it. Why do we pay this guy almost \$100,000 annually for this level of incompetence – especially when he only works part time?

More circular logic.

At the end of this fiscal year (June 30) EDC will have spent an additional \$77 million on salary and benefits since June 30, 2013, due to additional hiring and a 15 percent compounded raises. For four years' prior, the county salary and benefits budget remained level at about \$118 million. Nearly 70 percent of our general fund revenues now goes to salary and benefits. And they are going up. Without that expense, we could be driving on glass smooth roads and have the best sheriff's HQ in California without going \$40 million into debt.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.