

EDC budget not what supervisors asked for

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County's proposed budget that was released this week has zero dollars from the General Fund for roads and no money to build the public safety building for the sheriff's department.

This, in essence, was Larry Combs' parting gift to the county – a budget that does not reflect what the supervisors or department heads wanted. Combs was shown the door last week after nearly a year with the county. He worked part time while living in Auburn.

Now the five supervisors who supported Combs for much of his limited tenure are left to pick up the pieces. Helping them will be Don Ashton whom they hired last week to be the permanent chief administrative officer.

Following a presentation by Laura Schwartz, Chief Budget Officer, the Board provided a prioritized list of unfunded items and directed the Chief Administrative Office to return to the Board with additional details pertaining to those items at the Board's annual Budget Workshop beginning June 6, 2016. The list of prioritized items is as follows (Refer to Attachment A):

\$5,000,000 for Public Safety Facility Debt, Capital Replacement Fund and the Juvenile Hall Match (combined)
\$2,500,000 Roads
\$352,000 Property Tax System
\$150,000 Public Information Officer
\$250,000 Tree Mortality Grant
\$500,000 Marijuana Enforcement
\$100,000 Community Planning Effort
\$320,000 Depot Road Land Acquisition
\$225,000 Southeast Connector
\$25,000 City of Placerville Pool (added)
\$20,000 Fish and Game Commission (added)
\$2,500 Commission on Aging (added)

Supervisors Mikulaco, Veerkamp, Ranalli and Novasel were in favor of the above prioritization list with no exceptions.

Supervisor Frentzen supported all items shown with the following exceptions (not in favor of prioritizing): Public Information Officer, Depot Road Land Acquisition, Southeast Connector and City of Placerville Pool. Supervisor Frentzen also requested a list of services the county provides on Federal lands (pertaining to Payment In-Lieu of Taxes or PILT). Referring to a list of \$10,000,000 worth of contracts that do not come to the Board for approval (those contracts that are under the Purchasing Agent's signature authority), requests the CAO return with analysis of how these contracts are approved and identify any savings therein. Further requested information regarding salary savings achieved from improved efficiencies.

There was no formal vote, only general direction to staff.

--

Source: *April 26, 2016, EDC BOS minutes*

"As you know, this is the first step in the annual budget process and between now and September the county will need to make some difficult decisions. During this period, the CAO's office will be presenting the board with options and impacts relative to operating budgets and capital projects, including roads and the public safety facility," Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News*.

What those recommendations will be Ashton did not share with *LTN*.

One of the bugaboos with the sheriff's facility is that to qualify for the grant funding the county must show it has a balanced budget for the next five years. El Dorado County is forecasting a deficit in the coming years.

Neither Ashton nor Supervisor Sue Novasel could answer what this means for the public safety facility.

Technically the county is supposed to approve the budget this month before the start of the next fiscal year on July 1. Per standard operating procedure, adjustments are made through September. Normally planning for the next budget year then commences. That did not occur under Combs' watch. That is part of the reason the county is scrambling to come up with a coherent budget for 2016-17.

It was Pamela Knorr, human resources director, who brought in her friend Combs to be interim CAO. She has been working remotely in Texas where her husband has a job. This is something Combs allowed, but is unusual for any department head, especially one dealing with all employees on a personal level. She recently put her house on the market, signaling she may have seen the writing on the wall now that she does not have a friend as her boss to protect her.

As for the budget, it could still look very different than this first iteration. This document that was released to the public on June 1 was sent to the printer the morning after Combs left the county.

"The proposed budget you are referring to is the CAO's budget recommendations – and just that – recommendations," Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The BOS has not reviewed nor had a chance to talk about the budget – the budget talks will begin on June 13. At that time, the board will begin a review of the recommendations and start to make changes, revisions, and additions that they feel are necessary. I am going to be asking that we look at adding a PIO position along with including additional funding from the General Fund for road maintenance."

Asked what she would cut to fund the items she wants, Novasel said, "That is something that we will all be looking at – how much money does the county really have to pay for things that we, as a county, feel are most needed. We will be looking at our Strategic Plan as a basis for making those decisions. Of

course, we don't want to make cuts – but we also need to make sure that all programs and processes are in line with our Strategic Plan and the priorities contained within it.”

The budget hearing is June 13 in Placerville, a week later than previously planned – which was decided under the Combs' regime, though the supervisors unanimously agreed to this on May 17.

This means the budget hearings are after the June 7 primary, when they were supposed to be before the election.