

'Modest' budget proposal focuses on public services

The \$375.6 million budget allocates about \$50 million for police and fire services

By Parker Howell
News Reporter

Eugene won't face significant reductions to its public service levels based on budget shortfalls for the first time in several years.

City Manager Dennis Taylor presented his budget proposal for the 2004-05 fiscal year at a meeting before members of the Budget Committee on Monday, outlining a plan he said will maintain current service levels bankrolled by the city's General Fund.

The \$375.6 million budget calls for redirecting money from city administration to fire and police services, as well as maintaining current expenditures in other departments. The proposal also includes a 2.4 percent increase to the net operating budgets of all departments.

Taylor said the General Fund, historically the city's "most-challenged fund," will increase 2.1 percent from last year, rising to \$126.7 million.

Taylor said the budget benefits from past decisions to maintain millions in reserve money.

"This budget benefits from tough choices the Budget Committee and council made over the last few years," Taylor said.

Taylor called the plan a "very modest budget proposal," warning the committee that future cuts may be around the corner. He advised committee members that rising personnel costs and inflation may necessitate service reductions for the 2006-07 fiscal year, urging them to continue their "tradition of fiscal discipline" with this year's budget.

"Please stay the course," Taylor said. "We have daunting challenges ahead."

Police and fire budgets totaled \$49.8 million, or about 50 percent of all department expenditures. Personnel costs also comprised a large portion of the budget, making up 72 percent of the General Fund.

The budget included \$1,272,000 in savings, with reductions from inflation estimates, Central Services and police making up most of the money.

The proposal also reallocated \$1,371,360 to various department budgets. It gave \$370,100 to the

police budget to fund additional patrol officers and 911 operators for half of next year. It called for one-time expenditures of \$326,860 and \$74,400 for police vehicle and equipment upgrades and support for the federal Weed and Seed grant, which provides prevention and intervention programs for at-risk youth.

The budget listed \$62.3 million in property taxes as the largest source of city revenue, making up 66 percent of all current revenue. Taylor said the average homeowner can expect a \$30 increase in property taxes next year, from about \$1,442 to \$1,472.

Ward 2 City Councilor Betty Taylor was one of several committee members who expressed concerns that the city relies too heavily on property taxes for income.

"We need some different stable forms of revenue," she said.

Budget Committee Chairman Bruce Mulligan agreed.

"Living on property taxes is not the way to survive," he said.

Taylor's proposal included measures to contain costs, such as a 1 percent salary adjustment for employee groups without bargaining contracts and no increase in the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System rate. He added that costs are also being kept down by the retirement of city employees, saying that other solutions will have to be found in future years.

Taylor also stressed that the city is working on finding ways to reduce costs by "working smarter" and making better use of technology.

Taylor said the budget proposal does not solve issues relating to expanding staff levels at Fire Station 9 on Goodpasture Island Road to include a permanent crew and increasing police patrols and special teams. He also said the budget does not account for the expiration of a local option levy providing money to the Eugene Public Library, nor the maintenance of recently added parks and open spaces.

Mulligan said the budget allocated funding based on spending priorities identified by the committee over the past few years, such as preserving public safety, transportation and general livability in the city.

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LANE COUNTY

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jail time and are tried in city courts.

Among the drug-related crimes that won't be prosecuted are some involving marijuana. Harclerod said manufacturers and mid-level and above dealers of substantive quantities of marijuana will still be prosecuted, but people who possess or sell small amounts of marijuana won't be brought to court unless the charges against them are violations prosecuted by the city.

"We will have no ability to prosecute those cases," Harclerod said.

Harclerod said his staff currently works about 48,000 hours annually and must deal with around 8,000 cases, leaving only six hours per case if each case was to be prosecuted. Under such strict time constraints, Harclerod said it would be impossible for attorneys to deal with cases involving severe crimes.

"The message here is that I've got 1,000 to 1,500 cases that blow the six hour figure right out of the water," Harclerod said.

Sgt. Pete Deshpande, a detective with the Eugene Police Department's Property Crimes Unit said his unit will be affected by the reduction in the number of prosecuted cases. Property crimes, especially those classified as misdemeanors, are the largest number of crimes committed nationally, Deshpande said. He said despite the reduction in cases that will be prosecuted, police officers will maintain

their normal operations.

"We're going to continue to do our jobs fully," he said.

However, Deshpande said many theft cases will have to be handled by municipal courts, which may result in "tremendous backlog and delays."

Deshpande also said victims of property crimes may not feel a sense of justice if the crimes committed against them go unpunished.

"The sense of violation (victims) feel, the sense of intrusion they feel after they've been broken into, is a very real thing," he said. "If these cuts actually take place, it's going to be a very sad thing for the community."

Department of Public Safety Interim Director Thomas Hicks said it is unclear how the cuts would affect DPS. He said most charges in cases involving DPS are handled by the Eugene Police Department, which actually makes the arrests.

"We're not exactly sure what the impact is going to be with us," Hicks said.

He said certain services provided at the county level, such as mental health counseling, may not be available to those convicted of crimes at the city level.

"I certainly think it's important that the citizenry recognize all the services offered through the Lane County District Attorney's Office that are in jeopardy," he said.

Contact the city/state politics reporter at parkerhowell@dailyemerald.com.

CAMPUS BUZZ

Tuesday

Human Resources Workshop entitled "Immigration Regulations Related to International Scholars and Faculty," EMU Alesa/Coquille rooms, 10 a.m.-noon, preregistration required.

Employee Awards Reception, Alumni Lounge, Gerlinger Hall, 3:30-5 p.m. University President Dave Frohnmayer will speak at 4 p.m.

Kevin Cohen, founder of Bene Gourmet Pizza, will give a talk entitled "Starting and Running a Green Business," Lillis 232, 6-7:30 p.m.

"Race: The Power of An Illusion" series, EMU Ben Linder Room, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

"Islam in America" series, Browsing Room Knight Library, 7 p.m.

Community Conversations: Nanotechnology, Dunn Hall Lounge, Hamilton Complex, 7:30-9 p.m.

Paul Taylor 2 Dance Concert, Dougherty Dance Theater, Gerlinger Annex, 8 p.m.

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