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June 15, 2018

Recommended County budget sustains services; invests in capital projects, builds reserves

VENTURA, Calif. – The Board of Supervisors was presented a preliminary budget of \$2.23 billion for Fiscal Year 2018-2019 on June 5, 2018. They are expected to approve a final budget following two hearings for public comments on the budget on June 18.

“The budget is balanced but tight,” said Mike Powers, County Executive Officer. “We’re sustaining our services, even in the areas where we’ve recently expanded, like mental health, child welfare and homelessness. However, we are also preparing now for what will likely be an economic downturn in the future. We didn’t base the budget on the high watermark of revenues, departments are keeping overhead rates low and we continue to build our reserves.”

Overall, next year’s total budget is about level with this year’s budget. The budget sets aside funds for continued investments in infrastructure and technology while at the same time, increasing the unassigned, or the “rainy day” fund, to \$144 million, the highest level in County history.

The budget has increases in Public Safety, the District Attorney’s Office, Public Defender, Sheriff and Probation Agency. These departments are allocated roughly 60 percent of the increased General Purpose Revenues. Safety departments are also receiving funds to assist with projects such as the Todd Road Jail Health and Programming Unit and an online, paperless information system for the District Attorney and Public Defender’s offices. Fire stations in Fillmore, Upper Ojai and Newbury Park are also in the development or construction stages.

The budget also has increases for Health and Human Services, the Area Agency on Aging, the Medical Examiner’s Office, Behavioral Health, Public Health and Animal Services, though departments continue to absorb reductions in state contributions for In Home Supportive Services.

While the budget maintains funding for the Ventura County Medical Center hospital and clinic system, the system, the leadership, physicians and staff, in partnership with Huron Consulting, are focused on capturing all revenue sources, controlling expenses and increasing volumes through system efficiencies. Though the operating budget is projected at break-even for next year, it includes one-time Health Realignment reserves of \$4 million. Health Care Agency Director Johnson Gill believes “the financial situation for VCMC will stabilize.” From a service perspective the system plans to expand its services in 2018 by opening two new operating rooms, reopening the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and opening the expanding the Emergency Department.

“Homelessness is a continuing priority in our community and for our Board, and this budget helps address some of underlying issues that the community faces,” said Powers. “The HCA’s Whole Person Care pilot program focuses on improving care and lowering costs for the highest utilizers of services, many of whom are homeless. VCMC Clinic’s ‘Healthcare for the Homeless’ program served 14,500 patients last year through their One-Stop clinics. The Homeless Management Information System is funded and utilized by homeless service organizations who participate in Pathways to Home, the countywide coordinated entry system. This system improves access to services and provides



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coordinated case management for individuals and families by collecting data and making direct links to housing and service providers.”

The County is continuing its partnerships with cities and the Continuum of Care to assist homeless persons, including funding the RAIN Transitional Living Center. Additionally, the County continues to provide rental assistance through the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program and has committed to providing matching funds to help cities establish year-round, full service shelter programs. An infusion of state funding will be administered by the County and Continuum of Care to fill gaps in services and help establish an effective crisis response system to address unsheltered homelessness in Ventura County.

The current fiscal year general fund budget is on track and departments are projecting to come in a collective \$15 million under budget. These funds will be allocated to reserves. The County’s Lean Six process improvements program has resulted in cumulative savings of \$33.4 million since its implementation in 2009. The pension systems’ funding ratio has also increased to 86.9 percent, with savings from pension reform.

“The managers and employees are doing a great job of managing their budgets and staying within their budgets,” said Powers. “Under the Board’s direction and support, our employees have reduced costs, enhanced revenues and lowered overhead while still doing things like home-delivering more than 213,000 meals to seniors.”

The County’s long-term commitment to fiscal discipline continues to be rewarded as both Moody’s Investor Services and Standard and Poor’s maintain the County’s Issuer Ratings at their highest levels, lowering the cost of borrowing to the County.

Capital projects are also part of the approved budget. They include:

- Todd Road Jail Health and Programming Unit (medical/mental health facility)
- Property Tax system upgrade
- Road and transportation projects funded through Senate Bill 1.
- Completion of Fire Station 27 in Fillmore
- Camarillo Airport apron and hangar construction
- Design and Completion of the Harbor Administration Building

“We will continue to apply the Board-established priorities in the County’s strategic plan to improve the quality of life for the people of Ventura County. This budget reflects that commitment,” said Chief Financial Officer Catherine Rodriguez. “And we will continue to be transparent with our finances and maintain a structural financial balance as we invest in our employees, infrastructure and technology.”

The public is invited to the following budget meetings:

Public Hearing – Monday, June 18 at 1:30 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors Hearing Room

Public Comments – Monday, June 18 at 6:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors Hearing Room

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