

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

Cuts may force East Contra district to close fire station

By Rowena Coetsee
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 05/06/2010 04:31:20 PM PDT

Updated: 05/07/2010 07:05:07 AM PDT

Facing a third year of declining revenue, the East Contra Costa Fire District is considering cuts that would force it to close at least one station.

"We don't have a choice," board President Erick Stonebarger said, adding that whether the agency shuts multiple stations depends on how much money it slashes from next year's budget and how it decides to allocate what's left.

The action wouldn't affect Oakley's plans to build a fire station because that project will be funded entirely by developer fees.

If Stonebarger and his fellow directors don't reduce expenses in 2010-11 and the year after that, the district won't have any reserves left to pay its bills by June 2012, he said.

The East Contra Costa Fire District serves approximately 105,000 people over a 250-square-mile area that stretches from Oakley to Discovery Bay and Morgan Territory. A locally controlled board to govern the district was created last year.

The nine-member board this week considered a

draft budget that reflects a \$2.9 million deficit because of declining property values, which have translated into millions of lost property tax revenue in recent years.

Expenses for 2010-11 are projected to be \$11 million, with income of just over \$8 million.

To bridge that gap, the proposal is to reduce costs by \$1.1 million to \$1.8 million, as well as draw on its reserve, Stonebarger said.

East Contra Costa Fire is using \$1.3 million from that rainy

day fund this year as well, the first time it's had do that in recent years, acting fire Chief Hugh Henderson said. The agency is expected to have \$5.3 million of that money left by the time the fiscal year ends June 30.

Some of the cuts will have to come from the \$8.4 million earmarked for salaries and benefits, he said. That expense alone comprises 76 percent of the total budget.

Stonebarger doesn't expect layoffs, but he says it will mean paying firefighters less overtime to plug the district's 10 open positions.

There are 44 firefighters on the payroll, but the district funds 54 positions — six of which it created in April 2009 by earmarking money for overtime pay — so that two of its eight stations could have three people on duty around the clock.

The union representing these front-line responders, Local 1230 of the International Association of Fire Fighters, has suggested eliminating those additional half-dozen positions to bring the number to 48, to

Advertisement

Print Advertisement

Identity Theft Protection

ENROLL TODAY AND GET: 30 DAY RISK-FREE* TRIAL	USE PROMO CODE: ID
CALL NOW: 1-888-896-1878	

 **LifeLock.**
#1 In Identity Theft Protection*

*At the end of the 30-day free period your card will be billed automatically (\$10.00 monthly/\$110.00 annually) unless you cancel within the 30-day period. You can cancel anytime without penalty by calling 1-800-LifeLock. Offer is for new LifeLock members only.

Print Powered By 

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

save the sum the district is paying in overtime.

Gil Guerrero, union vice president and a fire captain based in Oakley, acknowledges that the reductions are necessary but warns that having just two people at each station would be risky.

"We operate here at a very minimal level already — there will be (an) impact," he said. "How serious we'll know in six months, if not sooner."

Three people per engine is the minimum, according to the National Fire Protection Association, and four is actually the industry standard, Guerrero said.

But cutting expenses is more feasible than bolstering revenue. Accomplishing that in the foreseeable future would mean getting district voters to approve a parcel tax, Stonebarger said.

"We don't think there's a chance that it will pass," he said. "I can't ask the community for money until we can prove that we can manage our current budget."

Directors are scheduled to adopt next year's spending plan at their June 7 meeting, although they might hold an additional, special session that month before making it official.

Contact Rowena Coetsee at 925-779-7141.

Advertisement

ProFlowers' MOTHER'S DAY SPECIAL		100 Blooms for Mom	
Mom's Time to Shine, Your Time to			\$19⁹⁹ <small>+s/h</small>
SAVE			
		Order ONLY at proflowers.com/happy or call 1.877.888.0688	

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™