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## Cash-strapped Antioch has money to burn

By Paul Burgarino  
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 05/11/2011 12:00:00 AM PDT

ANTIOCH -- A city where bankruptcy fears surfaced last year is trying to figure out how to spend some extra money.

But there's a catch.

Hammered by cuts to staffing and services over the past three years, Antioch has about \$1.7 million in funding remaining from a special tax fund called Mello-Roos.

That money can be spent only on construction at Prewett Family Community Park, finance director Dawn Merchant said.

Established by the Legislature in 1982, Mello-Roos is a special tax levied on property owners for public improvement. Antioch created a Mello-Roos district in 1989 to fund construction of eight schools and a park in the growing southeast area.

There are about 11,400 homeowners in the Mello-Roos district. They pay from \$657 to \$1,493 each year, depending on the size of their home.

The Mello-Roos assessment expires in 2016.

Mello-Roos taxes are separate from the city's general fund, which dipped from \$47 million to about \$35 million because of losses in sales and property tax. The city is trying to closed a projected general fund shortfall of \$1.8 million for the 2012-13 fiscal year.

"Given the magnitude of the city's finances, (the money) would have been very helpful," City Manager Jim Jakel said. "Of course, that's not possible."

The original commitment of Mello-Roos money included \$50 million for Prewett Park, board president Terry Ramus said.

Prewett Park's build-out included a water

park, hiking trails, burrowing owl habitat and community center, which opened in January. The center features a library annex and technology center, police substation, gymnasium and an outdoor amphitheater.

Mello-Roos board members mentioned some spending options for the additional funds last month. One idea was turf fields at the park, said Mayor Pro Tem Wade Harper, who sits on the board.

Other options include expanding the library annex, or improving the walkways and landscaping at the front of the park, adding an electronic billboard at the park's entrance on Lone Tree Way, or improving features at the pool.

"We're going to find a way to put it to good use," Harper said.

Mello-Roos board members said the city must proceed with caution. "We don't want to build something that's going to put an additional cost burden on the city, either in maintenance or staffing," Ramus said.

Officials also expressed hope that the city could leverage the remaining Mello-Roos money by getting corporate donations to match the amount spent on a project.

The Mello-Roos board is hoping to collect ideas to discuss at its next meeting, scheduled for July 11. The City Council will ultimately decide where the money is spent.



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