Mayor addresses budget woes with community

By Lorrene Gabbert
Senior Staff Writer

As the City of San Jose faces a $16 million General Fund deficit, tough choices are being made. Community Budget Meetings are being held in every council district with Mayor Chuck Reed, including the programs and community services at stake. The District 8 meeting was held March 29 at the Quimby Oak Middle School.

Encompassing $150 million in solutions, a preliminary budget reduction proposal was presented. If approved, branch library hours would be reduced to three days a week, and fire cutbacks would close the Police Department would lose 186 sworn positions and the Fire Department would lose 50.

Community and park services would be affected, including the loss of about 45 park rangers. The availability of park maintenance would be reduced, and the Senior Nutrition Program would end by June 2011. The Citywide Sports Program would be eliminated as well as funding support for Santa Clara County's Children's Park and the San Jose Holiday Parade.

"There's nothing in here anyone wants to do," said Reed. "but we have to close the gaps." Community-based organization funding is also at stake, including funding to Korean American Community Services, Respite and

Research for Alzheimer's Activity Center, OCTOREAC, South Science Institute, Boys and Girls Clubs, Career Training Center, YMCA Youth Programs, Inner City Games, Breakout Prison Outreach, Laporte Community Services, All Alternative Community Outreach, MACSA and Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County.

This budget meeting was just part of an outreach program in which the city seeks community input. The process began months ago with community meetings, workshops with neighborhood associations, special meetings with the city council and community polls.

"We're trying to engage people," said Reed, "to help make decisions about where the cuts have to be made and what the council should do." Photo by Lorrene Gabbert. Above right: Councilmember Rose Herrera addresses residents at the District 8 meeting regarding the city budget. Photo courtesy Angie Varoza.

Nearby travelers on the General Fund revenue to the police and fire departments. The mayor requested $75 million in budget reductions in staffing and services in those departments and 20 to 30 percent in other departments.

"We tried to avoid cuts to public safety," said Reed. "But this year, while we'd like to cut police and fire departments, we cannot solve the problem without dealing with the entire budget." Another contributing factor is that San Jose's per capita sales tax revenues have significantly lagged behind other cities. To increase revenue, the city is considering extending the hours of the San Jose Convention Center to attract bigger events and increasing sales tax for cardrooms and the number of tables they provide.

On May 3, City Manager Deanna Flagner must deliver a balanced Proposed Operating Budget to the city council, closing the $16 million gap. The council will deliberate for four weeks and in June, the mayor will publish a budget message, which will be voted on in mid-June.

"When we get to the end of the process, we will have a balanced budget," said Reed. "That doesn't make it easy, although it's a little easier to do when you know the gaps." For additional information, please visit the City's Web site at www.sanjoseca.gov and click on "About the Budget."

Make your voice heard for education

Visit to Sacramento scheduled for May 17

By Supervisor Dave Cortese
Special to the Times

Spring is here, the birds are singing and the allergies are kicking in again. For most of you, that means the summer break is almost here and your children will be out of school and off playing with their friends.

However, for elected officials such as myself, the beginning of summer is the time that we have to make the difficult decisions needed to balance the budget. Here in Santa Clara County, we are facing, at a minimum, $250 million in cuts. But that is not all that scares me. In addition, millions in deficit that our schools, the future of our children, are facing.

Last year when I took a group of over 100 local residents up to Sacramento to lobby for school funding, the worry was that sports, art and music programs, and other enrichment programs would be cut to save money. However, this year, the situation has become even more dire. As the State is trying to balance its budget, the school districts are sending out layoff notices and proposals are coming out to increase class sizes. I am already hearing from our local schools that many are being forced to increase their class sizes to 30 students or more. As a former school board trustee, I know firsthand how important it is to maintain appropriate class sizes so that our wonderful teachers can ensure that all students receive quality education.

With that in mind, I would like to invite you to participate in this year's 8th Annual Sacramento Bus Trip, co-sponsored by the Silicon Valley Education Foundation and join me in personally speaking with our state legislators to remind them how important it is to maintain school funding for our children's future. If your child is in a public school, if you work in a public school, or even just know a parent or child in the public school system, I urge you to make your voice heard in Sacramento. Last year we were joined by over 100 people, including 10 youth from the East Side Union High School District. Their heartfelt pleas to protect our schools from the devastating cuts were painful to listen to but very important because it gave the state legislators direct and personal insight into our schools locally in San Jose County.

This year's trip will take place on Monday, May 17, and as in years past, there is no cost to participate. We will board the bus at 6 a.m. from a location in San Jose and once we arrive in Sacramento, we'll take over a committee room in the State Capitol Building for a series of intense discussions with Assembly Members and Senators. Lunch will be provided FREE and attendees will be fully briefed on the topics for the day.

As an added encouragement, we will be offering a "participating organization" status to any community group that pledges to send five or more members on the bus trip. Participating organizations will be featured on all trip literature and in our correspondence to the legislators.

Furthermore, this year, we are adding a whole new dimension by hosting a pre-trip Educational Summit to discuss issues related to school budgeting for education and the impact that funding cuts have had on our schools. This summit is for both those of you who will be taking the bus to Sacramento and also for those who cannot make it on the bus, but would still like to make your voice heard by creating a foundation for our discussion in Sacramento. This summit will take place May 13 from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. In the issue, Newton Senior Auditorium at the Central Government Center and I hope you will consider attending.

If you would like more information or would like to sign up to participate in one or both of these events, please visit http://www.supervisorscortes.com and click on the Sacramento Bus Trip page or call my office at (408) 289-5670 for details. In order to ensure we have enough transportation, an RSVP is required to attend.

I am looking forward to another successful trip which will make a difference for our schools. In addition to making our concerns known to our state delegation, this trip is an excellent opportunity for residents to establish relationships with the state-sent leaders as well as with fellow education supporters from around the country. I truly believe that we must ensure that our schools provide our children the best possible education so that they can grow up to be our future leaders. I encourage you to join me in that mission and get on the bus to Sacramento.

As always, my office is open to you. If you have any questions or concerns, you don't hesitate to contact me at dave.cortese@broadband.net or by phone at (408) 210-5030.