

Supervisors clash over funding additional deputy

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ Friday, July 6, 2012

District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli's attempt to add another deputy to the sheriff's department hit a roadblock at Thursday's special meeting of the county Board of Supervisors.

Tofanelli was unable to get the required four-fifths vote from the board to add the authorization to the recently adopted preliminary budget.

District 5 Supervisor Darren Spellman was absent and District 4 Supervisor Tom Tryon voted against Tofanelli's motion to add funding to the sheriff's department so the hiring could take place.

Tryon balked at the request because the county's projected contingency fund is too low.

The projected contingency fund is at \$138,000 and compares to approximately \$1.5 million at the same time last year.

Tryon said it was his understanding at adoption of the preliminary budget a couple weeks ago that all extra funding found between now and passage of the final budget at the end of summer would go toward building up the contingency fund to an acceptable level.

Before hiring, "we need to know if we're financially solvent," Tryon said.

Capt. Jim Macedo of the sheriff's department explained the additional funding was needed to hire a replacement for the position the board already authorized to assist the probation department in overseeing the state-mandated early prisoner release program.

While there is money from the early release program to fund one deputy who will accompany probation officers on check-ups of those released from prison under AB109, the sheriff's department is really losing a patrol deputy because there has been no back-fill to cover the original patrol position, Macedo told the board.

The department is reluctant to release the deputy from patrol duties, and assign them to assisting probation, because it would create a major void in the patrol division, Macedo said.

District 2 Supervisor Steve Wilensky said the sheriff's department is under a great deal of pressure due to the early release program, an increase in the methamphetamine use and surge in related crimes.

While he could understand Tryon's concerns about the contingency fund, he hoped his fellow supervisor would see the need to leverage \$21,000 out of the reserves to match the \$70,000 in federal funding to hire another deputy, Wilensky said.

Tryon disagreed with Wilensky's reasoning and said the \$70,000 should go into the general fund to help build the reserves to a higher level, preferably to more than \$1 million.

Tryon added Tofanelli's request should be considered when the final budget comes up for adoption and year-end carryover figures are more exact.

Tofanelli defended his action to bring the matter to the board as soon as possible when he learned the county would receive \$70,000 more in federal in-lieu of tax payments.

As board chairman, Tofanelli received a letter from the federal government saying the in-lieu payment would be \$198,000, not \$128,000 as projected in the preliminary budget.

His prompt action was based on public and deputy safety grounds, and not politically motivated as Tryon had insinuated, Tofanelli said. Both supervisors are running for re-election in the fall.

Tryon questioned administrative staff as to the latest revenue projections and how much the county will have in reserves at the end of the fiscal year.

Staff was unable to give any definite figures, but said it was possible the carryover could be near the \$1 million-plus mark at the end of the last fiscal year.

"I can't believe I voted for a (preliminary) budget with only \$132,000 in contingency," Tryon said, when the county realistically needs \$1 million to \$1.5 million for contingencies before adding any new positions.

Tofanelli said he would not have bothered the board with the request if there were no indications the contingency would be much higher than originally anticipated.

District 3 Supervisor Merita Callaway said she was a bit nervous, but it was a minor risk for the county to move forward and fund the position at this time.

Before casting the one vote defeating the request, Tryon said, "in my opinion it is fiscally reckless" to fund the additional deputy unless there is a substantial change in the contingency figures.

The board agreed to continue the funding request to Tuesday's regular meeting where additional financial information may be presented to convince Tryon to support the request or Spellman could be present and cast the necessary fourth vote.