

PROPERTY VALUES IN CALAVERAS COUNTY A MIXED BLESSING

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SAN ANDREAS - This year's bad news about Calaveras County property values is actually good news because it isn't as bad as expected.

Calaveras County Assessor Leslie Davis reported Tuesday that the value of property in the county declined 4.37 percent from the 2011 valuation. That change wipes about \$248 million in assessed value off the books and will reduce county government revenues by \$588,589 in the coming year.

Yet it isn't nearly as bad as the 10 percent decline in assessed value that Davis had forecast last spring. County leaders used that 10 percent estimated decline in value - and the resulting \$1.17 million decline in county government revenue - as the basis for the preliminary budget they approved at the end of June.

Now that Assessor's Office staff has finished the tax rolls for the coming year, things are looking better, said Chief Assistant County Administrative Officer Clay Hawkins.

"Our budget will see an additional \$584,881 in revenue," Hawkins said. "So it is a good thing."

Still, it's not enough of a good thing to inspire cartwheels. The \$139 million preliminary budget adopted for the fiscal year that began July 1 has a razor-thin contingency fund of only \$162,514. That's only about one-tenth of a percent, and far short of the \$2 million to \$3 million contingency fund staff recommend as realistic.

In other words, the additional revenue isn't even enough to supply a contingency fund, much less meet the requests of Calaveras County Sheriff Gary Kuntz and other department leaders for additional staffing.

Hawkins said Calaveras County Auditor Rebecca Callen is scheduled to close the books on the 2011-12 fiscal year Aug. 17. That's when he will know how much cash the county has.

Having a supply of cash on hand is especially important in the next year and a half as the county builds a new jail. Although the construction costs are being funded through local bond money and state funding, the construction requires the county to pay large bills and then wait for reimbursement.

"We would need substantially more than half a million dollars for that," Hawkins said.

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