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Council Passes 2009/2010 Budget

By Evan Ortega
Budget

The Manhattan Beach City Council voted unanimously to pass the city's budget for 2009/2010, opting to cut programs rather than dip into reserve funds or raise taxes.

Programs that have been suspended include Arts Manhattan, free downtown holiday parking, a variety of parks and recreation programs, and funding for the chamber of commerce. The budget preserves most city services, and spares most cuts to the police and fire departments. "What you don't see, and what the residents should not see, are any service level drops," Councilmember Richard Montgomery said.

Montgomery said one of the most common questions from members of the public was whether the Council balanced the budget. "In four years of being on Council, we have not gone through twenty-four hours of line by line adjustments; we didn't need to," Montgomery said. "The key to me is did we balance the budget, and we did that."

Council members spent dozens of hours in budget study sessions, dealing with a \$2.4 million drop in revenues since last year. "As I said in our last meeting, these are extraordinary times that require extraordinary measures," Councilmember Wayne Powell said. "We had to do a number of painful cuts and suspend some programs just because we, unlike the state, have to balance our budget."

The budget includes \$1.3 million that the Council gave the District to preserve programs and prevent layoffs. Councilmember Tell said the money was a necessary investment in the District that should continue. "We are here to look and understand and respond to their needs, as we can afford it and they require it," Tell said. "And we will be listening, and we will be looking to foster this partnership that has really developed in the last five years."

Former Hermosa Beach mayor and Redondo Beach resident George Barks told the Council to find ways to cut labor and administrative costs. "Controlling the employee costs is absolutely essential in order to overcome the chronic deficits," Barks said. "I think the union contracts have to really be looked at. The employee is going to have to pay more of their share towards their benefits. It has to be based on the ability of the city to pay."

Mayor Portia Cohen said 70 percent of the city budget is spent on labor, and 75 percent of the labor budget is covered by union contracts. She said that as labor agreements expire over the next few years, the city will have to make tough decisions. "This is just for survival, not fairness. It's just a matter of economics," Cohen said. "I look forward to exploring mutually beneficial ways of negotiating with our excellent employees, but that's going to be a big issue moving forward in terms of our solvency for a long time past the new contracts."

Green Building Codes

Buildings in the city are going to become "greener" after the Council voted unanimously to amend the Municipal Code to require public and large non-residential commercial construction projects to meet the standards of a special environmental certification.

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"Wow" is right!



The 17 finalists from the MBUSD being honored at the School Board meeting. Heather Hoffman was the chairperson for the MBUSD Reflections Art Contest for the 2008-2009 school year and is pictured with the finalists.

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Community Police Academy Continues to Educate

By Evan Ortega

Years ago, before he was elected to the Manhattan Beach City Council, Wayne Powell was chasing an armed suspect on a high speed pursuit when he crashed his police cruiser. Luckily for Powell, it all went down in a simulator, during a meeting of the City's first Manhattan Beach Community Police Academy. "A lot of classes that you sit through, particularly evening classes, can be boring," Powell said. "But the time in that class just flew by, it was exciting."

On June 2, the Council presented certificates of achievement to the 25 graduates of the City's eighth Community Police Academy. Students participated in lectures led by officers throughout the department, and each went on a police ride-along.

Chief Ron Uyeda said the police department offers the program to create an even stronger bond with the community, and to create a transparency into the police organization itself. "We've had eight graduating classes, which means 200 graduates all together," Uyeda said. "They volunteer throughout the city and it just really shows their passion for serving the city."

For Stephanie Allmon, the Academy offered a glimpse into the day-to-day operations of the police department and gave students an opportunity to meet many of the people who serve in it. She took the course with her sister Danika. "I think it was a really a good opportunity to learn not just about the police department itself, but the people in the department," Allmon said.

For Powell, the Academy is a chance for residents to have a better understanding of

the challenges police face on the job. "In my class we had one person who was a skeptic of the police," he said. "By the time we graduated from the class, he said basically what a lot of people said, which was that he had no idea the police were doing so much to protect the public."

Allmon and Powell agreed that their classes seemed to be representative of Manhattan Beach's population. "It was pretty much as diverse as Manhattan Beach is going to get,"

Allmon said. "In terms of age, there were people who were very young, just out of college like me, to people who were in the middle of their careers, to retirees."

Allmon noted that the Academy was interesting in that it not only revealed the glamorous aspects of police work, but the bureaucracy that makes a police department function. "It took at least eight weeks to learn about the

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MB Looks Out for Its Seniors

By Karen Russo

"It's not a matter of if, but when." You have heard that before. It is our fire and police departments' referring to the imminence of a major earthquake. "And if it is a big one on the San Andreas Fault," says Battalion Fire Chief Frank Chiella, "we'll be on our own for as much as three days." There will not be enough first responders. With just two engines and a paramedic truck in Manhattan Beach, for a simple house fire we rely on Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach and El Segundo for assistance. And of course we reciprocate. But come a disaster, those cities as well as the greater Los Angeles area will have

their own problems with no resources to share. This is the reason for Citizens Emergency Response Training (CERT), and Map Your Neighborhood. CERT is training for our citizens in survival and rescue skills. Map Your Neighborhood, managed by Neighborhood Watch, is training block captains to bring neighbors together and establish emergency plans.

The fire and police departments plan on having only 30 minutes to drive through the city to assess the damage and identify acute situations requiring most immediate attention. CERT has divided the city into four quadrants with a CERT vehicle

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