

EAST PALO ALTO

City sails through tough budget waters

Reduction in county deputies could be troublesome

by **Bill D'Agostino**

No longer a teenager, the city of East Palo Alto is faring better than most during these tough economic times: no layoffs or major service reductions are a part of the city's recently approved budget.

Still, the City Council had to use a \$2 million repayment owed from a loan given to the city's Redevelopment Agency for balance. Although the repayment is a one-time fix, the city is comfortable about the development since there is hope tax revenues will increase over the next few years as IKEA and the Four Seasons hotel open their doors.

The council, on a 4-0 vote, approved a \$19.4 million budget Tuesday night for the city's 20th year. Mayor Pat Foster was absent.

"There's a lot of bad news. There's a lot of things that are going to be tighter," Councilman Duane Bay said. Still, he added, "I believe we're going to manage our way out of this difficulty."

Councilman David Woods said the public will not see any changes in service from the budget cuts. A number of requests from department heads, though, are not being funded, including water and sewer line improvements, storm-drain upgrades and new police technology.

A last-minute request that was granted will allow the city to investigate a backlog of code enforcement violations. One such violation was an illegal addition that set fire last Christmas, killing two children inside.

The biggest cut to the city's

(continued on page 5)

East Palo Alto

(continued from page 3)

activities will likely come from a reduction from San Mateo County. Facing an \$80 million deficit, the county has proposed to stop funding a crime suppression team that patrols the city's hot spots.

Although crime statistics aren't significantly higher than recent years, resident Dennis Parker said crime appears to be on the rise. He theorized the reason the numbers are lower might be that a lot of drug activity isn't getting reported.

"When you turn in a drug dealer in your community, you're putting

yourself at risk," Parker said.

Like most California cities, East Palo Alto is holding its breath, waiting to see how the state's massive budget crisis will impact it. The council plans to revisit the budget on Sept. 16. ■

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