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24 of East Palo Alto's 110 employees get layoff notices

By Jeff Brazil
Times Tribune staff

Twenty-four East Palo Alto employees, including five police officers, were laid off this morning as part of a plan to help bail the city out of its financial problems.

City Manager Stanley Hall, who drafted the dollar-crunching proposal, revealed that about 25 percent of the city's 110 employees received layoff notices early today.

Affected most by the cuts was the Police Department, the city's largest and most costly department.

Twelve positions were eliminated in the Police Department, five in Public Works and four in community services, Hall said. In addition, three vacancies in management services will not be filled, he said.

Asked if there would be future layoffs, Hall replied: "We'll see."

Police Chief Dan Nelson said the layoffs leave the department with a skeletal crew. He said he had hoped the city could make the cuts somewhere else.

"I recognize the city has to make an adjustment," Nelson said. "But we'll be down to the absolute minimum number of officers."

Under the layoff plan, the department will lose five officers and five of its seven civilian personnel, Nelson said. Also, one of the de-

partment's two commanders will be demoted to sergeant and one sergeant will lose his rank to become a patrol officer.

The cuts leave the department with 18 officers, five sergeants, one commander and the chief. At full force, the department employs 34 sworn officers, including the chief and command staff.

"We need a minimum of 18 officers and four sergeants to patrol the city," Nelson said. "If you drop

below that, I think you'll be endangering the citizens."

The detective division will become a one-man operation, Nelson said.

A single sergeant will investigate all the city's violent crimes, which numbered 429 from June 1985 to May 1986.

Officers, in addition to their patrol duties, will be forced to follow up and investigate cases involving non-violent crimes.

"We'll be down to basic patrol," a police source who did not want to be named said. "We'll have to have officers doing paperwork instead of being out on the streets where they belong."

Councilman Warnell Coats criticized the layoffs. He said some positions he believes should be on the list are not, while some that are shouldn't be. He gave the city's

Works had quite a few positions cut, too. That's the second biggest department in the city."

"We do have to bite the bullet and make some hard choices," she said. "It saddens me. But that's the reality."

The city's \$204,000 monthly payroll is simply "too much," she said.

Hall, who has refused to elaborate on the city's financial ills, has described the city's condition as a "cash-flow" problem.

The City Council instructed Hall to begin considering layoffs in August after it was revealed that the city needed a \$600,000 loan.

After being spurned twice by San Mateo County officials, Hall asked the East Palo Alto Sanitary District for a \$400,000 loan. District officials are considering the request.

community relations position as one that should be eliminated, especially when weighed against the importance of police officers.

Of the police-related cuts, Coats said, "I don't have so much a problem with the civilian personnel, but I do have a problem with cutting police officers."

On the other hand, Councilwoman Barbara Mouton described the cuts in the Police Department as unfortunate, but inevitable.

"It's the biggest department in the city," Mouton said. "That's why (it has the most cuts). Public