

Times-Herald

American Canyon three-year deficit elimination plan still on track

By *Rachel Raskin-Zrihen/Times-Herald staff writer*

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AMERICAN CANYON -- Some developers won't have to pay certain city fees until after their project is done and occupied, with the final passage of an impact fee deferral ordinance at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

Instead of having to pay public facility, park and traffic impact fees, developers will be able to remit mitigation impact fees, other than those for sewer and water, at the time of occupancy. Officials hope this will help convince developers to move forward with projects.

Council members also learned Tuesday that in its second year, the city's three-year budget deficit reduction plan is on course, despite a major portion of it not working out as expected. This is assuming the "fragile" economic recovery continues and the state "keeps its hands off our money," Finance Director Barry Whitley told council members.

The Napa Valley Casino has been unwilling to pay a \$2 admissions tax voters approved in November, arguing it's unconstitutional. The funds this tax were to generate for the city was a large part of the recovery plan. It officially kicked in during January and to date, the card room owes the city more than \$300,000, Whitley said.

Nevertheless, and despite lower-than-expected property tax revenues, the plan remains on track to produce a balanced budget with a small surplus by the end of the next fiscal year, Whitley said. Measures included the elimination of about a dozen city positions, 15 unpaid furlough days for employees and other cost-saving

measures. Higher-than-expected rents for city-owned properties is also helping, he said.

In the coming months, as the budget allows, City Manager Dana Shigley will consider hiring an

economic development coordinator, reducing the number of furlough days and filling the Parks and Recreation Director position.

Though several council members disagreed with the order in which these efforts should be undertaken, Shigley said she's looking at it "from a customer service point of view." Customer service and employee morale has suffered under the deficit reduction plan, she said.

Public Works Director Michael Throne said his staff has compiled a comprehensive list of projects discussed and not done in the past several years, so council members can revisit them, decide which remain viable and prioritize them as part of the city's first Five-year Capital Improvement Program since 2005. A public workshop is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. March 28.

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