

California Watch

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Some redevelopment officials earn big money

February 22, 2011 | [Marie C. Baca \(/user/marie-c-baca\)](/user/marie-c-baca)



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As the state's redevelopment agencies face being shut down under Gov. Jerry Brown's recent budget proposal, the six-figure salaries some agency employees take home could come under increased scrutiny.

The state's 400 redevelopment agencies are under intense public pressure to prove that they should continue to receive roughly \$5 billion per year in property taxes to address blight. Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed eliminating the agencies to help close California's \$25 billion budget gap.

State Controller John Chiang [announced last month \(http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-redevelopment-20110125.0.7355022.story\)](http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-redevelopment-20110125.0.7355022.story) that the state would audit 18 redevelopment agencies to evaluate how they are using their funds.

While salary data from the 2010-11 fiscal year is not readily available, [online databases from the San Francisco Chronicle \(http://www.sfgate.com/data/\)](http://www.sfgate.com/data/) show that some Northern California redevelopment agency employees were well compensated for their work in 2009.

In San Jose, [Redevelopment Director Harry Mavrogenes \(http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2010/05/06/SanJosePay2009.DTL&appSession=045202530378735&RecordID=16&PageID=3&PrevPageID=2&cpipage=1&CPIsortType=&CPIorderBy=\)](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2010/05/06/SanJosePay2009.DTL&appSession=045202530378735&RecordID=16&PageID=3&PrevPageID=2&cpipage=1&CPIsortType=&CPIorderBy=) received \$271,198.35, making him the 16th highest-paid employee in the city.

Richmond's redevelopment director, [Alan Wolken \(http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2010/05/04/RichmondPay2009.DTL&appSession=93520253054552&RecordID=269&PageID=3&PrevPageID=2&cpipage=1&CPIsortType=&CPIorderBy=\)](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2010/05/04/RichmondPay2009.DTL&appSession=93520253054552&RecordID=269&PageID=3&PrevPageID=2&cpipage=1&CPIsortType=&CPIorderBy=), made \$149,574.91 that year. His salary ranked 143rd in the city.

Redevelopment Director [James Kennedy \(http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2010/05/03/ContraCostaCoPay2009.DTL&appSession=994202531800615&RecordID=375&PageID=3&PrevPageID=2&cpipage=1&CPIsortType=&CPIorderBy=\)](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2010/05/03/ContraCostaCoPay2009.DTL&appSession=994202531800615&RecordID=375&PageID=3&PrevPageID=2&cpipage=1&CPIsortType=&CPIorderBy=) of Contra Costa County was the 375th highest in the county at \$139,693.08.

The pay is comparable in other parts of California. The blog [LA Observed \(http://www.laobserved.com/\)](http://www.laobserved.com/) posted [a list \[PDF\] \(http://www.crala.org/internet-site/Jobs_Contracting/upload/CRA_Salaries.pdf\)](http://www.crala.org/internet-site/Jobs_Contracting/upload/CRA_Salaries.pdf) of salaries for all 250 employees in the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles. At the top of the list: Chief Executive Officer Christine Essel at \$223,256.00.

While noting that the hefty salaries aren't necessarily out of line for experienced government workers, LA Observed writer Mark Lacter says that agency officials looking to fend off Brown's cuts must "justify those 250-plus people and their relatively handsome salaries."

Late last week, budget plans nearly identical to Brown's were passed in key committees in the state Legislature, a preliminary indication that Brown's budget could be adopted. No changes were made to his proposal to eliminate the redevelopment agencies.

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