

## COLTON: Balancing budget hinges on redevelopment funding

10:00 PM PDT on Wednesday, June 1, 2011

By DARRELL R. SANTACHI  
The Press-Enterprise

The Colton City Council has begun deliberations on a spending program for the coming fiscal year that is balanced, but hangs on the fate of the city's redevelopment agency.

City Finance Director Bonnie Johnson told a recent joint meeting of the council and several city commissions that Gov. **Jerry Brown's** proposal to eliminate local redevelopment agencies could tip Colton's budget out of balance.

The city charges \$900,000 of its personnel costs to its redevelopment agency.

City Manager Rod Foster told the council that reserves in the general fund have grown from a precariously small \$50,000 in 2009 to an estimated \$1.9 million. The general fund pays for most day-to-day expenses.

Proposed general fund spending for 2011-12 is \$27.2 million, about \$700,000 more than its budgeted revenue and \$3.2 million less than Colton is spending in the current fiscal year.

Johnson said \$5.8 million of the general fund budget will come from the city's electric utility, but that Colton is losing \$4.6 million it would be collecting if a utility-user tax had been extended. The tax is set to expire July 1.

Colton also will be losing \$100,000 in grant money that had been used to provide technical support for the Police Department and faces \$200,000 in prisoner booking fees it will have to pay **San Bernardino** County.

A big part of the city's balanced budget is at the expense of employees, including six police officers laid off, another three Police Department vacancies to be left unfilled and nine Fire Department positions to be eliminated in January. Positions in a host of other city departments also have been eliminated.

Remaining employees will be paying their full share of retirement benefits and will be subject to furloughs amounting to 5 percent pay cuts. Foster's pay was cut 6 percent in February.

Employee wage and benefit concessions total \$700,000, Johnson said.

The city plans to set aside \$1.8 million toward improvements related to the Colton Crossing, a \$202 million project to eliminate a freight bottleneck where **Union Pacific** and **BNSF Railway** lines cross in Colton. **Union Pacific's** east-west tracks would be raised, allowing BNSF trains to run underneath.

As part of the project, Colton wants to create a quiet zone, with improvements that would protect traffic and reduce the need for train engineers to honk their horns as they pass through town.

The coming year's contribution, Johnson said, brings the total the city has set aside so far to \$3.67 million of the \$5 million it will need.

Interim Colton Police Chief Steve Ward said his department will spend \$10.9 million in 2011-12, or about \$2.3 million less than this year.

He said he is looking for ways to provide school crossing guards that the Colton Joint Unified School District eliminated in a cost-saving move, along with a school resource officer.

Ward also warned that the department needs \$100,000 for gasoline and needs to set aside money to replace police cars. One-fourth of Colton's patrol cars have been driven at least 80,000 miles, he said.

Fire Chief Tom Hendrix said his department will have only 30 firefighters when layoffs are completed.

He said the city is negotiating with neighboring Loma Linda to share a battalion chief, which could save as much as \$12,000 a year.

*Reach Darrell R. Santschi at 951-368-9484 or dsantschi@PE.com*