S. Tahoe balances budget without using reserves

By Kathryn Reed

For the first time in five years South Lake Tahoe’s budget is balanced without using reserves, cutting staff or cutting services.

The $1 million ongoing deficit has been wiped off the books at least for the 2013-14 budget that will be presented to the City Council on Sept. 17.

“It’s because we have a different budget philosophy,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I was able to strip $1 million from the budget.”

A thorough scrubbing of the budget has been done. Budgeting is now based on expected expenses, not expected revenues. For example departments that every year budgeted $5,000 for supplies but only spent $2,000 will now get a line item of $2,000 for supplies.

South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry reviews budget documents. Photo/Kathryn Reed

While these excesses in the past were carried over each year in the unassigned excess reserve account, it also meant the budget did not reflect true costs. This excess is on top of the 25 percent reserve the council established in 2004. (In 2003 the city had zero dollars in reserves.)

There is still a balance in this excess reserve account. The city has allocated $700,000 from it to buy a building and vacant parcel in the industrial area with the goal of moving the fleet yard on Rufus Allen Boulevard there. This in turn would provide more recreation opportunities in that area. The property is in escrow.

The city's total budget is about $90 million, with approximately $30 million being the general fund. The general fund is where payroll and the day-to-day bills get paid.

About $20 million – or 64 percent – of the general fund pays for salaries, pensions, health care and other benefit costs. Police services cost the most, taking up 27 percent of the general fund, fire at 15 percent, and public works-general government at 8 percent.

Kerry said it makes sense for the city's greatest expense to be people because the city is in the business to provide services to the public and it takes people to provide those services.

While revenues are doing better, the approach is to be conservative and have a true midyear review in March. If there is "extra" money, then the council can decide if it wants to hold onto it or spend it.

The council will be asked to start thinking now about what it would want to do if it even had a small pot of cash like a couple hundred thousand dollars to spend in six months. Public input will be sought how to spend that money.

Not everything costs millions of dollars. A few years back the city spent about $30,000 to put in the popular dog park.

Hal Cole and Brooke Laine are on the council’s budget committee. Their ideas include dedicating money to improve the look of Highway 50, putting a percentage toward recreation infrastructure, and money for roads.

“We need to look at our core values and needs,” Laine told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She would rather have the discussion early about what to do with “extra” money than wait. This allows for a more thoughtful discussion.

What Kerry is proposing is to change the way the city operates. Instead of spending everything in the good years and struggling in the lean years, be prudent every year. This also means using the public’s money for public projects – this includes infrastructure, recreation and then people.

“Employees need to realize that investing in the public is investing in themselves,” Kerry said.

That doesn’t mean the employees aren’t being considered. In the budget is money for a full time fire chief, after having funded this position on a part-time basis the last fiscal year.

Property, hotel and sales taxes are the city’s three main revenue sources.

Property taxes have taken a serious hit as the value of housing has gone down. However, the median price of a single-family residence in South Lake Tahoe has increased 23 percent from July 2012 to July 2013. The city is forecasting 1 percent to 2 percent increases in property taxes through 2018.

While occupancy has been higher at South Shore hotels for the past two summers, national indicators are that the economy is still sluggish. That is why the city is not banking on transient occupancy taxes dramatically increasing. But they are on an upward momentum. The budgeted increase is 1 percent for a total of $4.85 million.

The expenses that are nearly crippling the city are what it has to pay for employee pension and health benefits. And that doesn’t even take into account the city’s $53.6 million unfunded pension liability or $45 million unfunded health care liability.

The city pays $3.6 million a year into the California Public Employee Retirement System. As of Oct. 1, 2012, all employees pay their share of PERS – which ranges between 7 percent and 9 percent of their salary.

Public entities are not allowed to change the formula for current employees. This must be done by the Legislature. Change is slow, and what change has occurred affects new hires who have not been part of CalPERS before. And it is not reasonable for entities to abandon CalPERS.

Kerry is proposing the adoption of a pension trust fund to help balance the good and bad investment years. This philosophy has a lot to do with seeing the employer rate jump 155 percent from 2004 to today.

“The real problem is health care,” Kerry said.

There are 785 people receiving health benefits from the city. Only 170 of them are active employees. Half of that total number never worked for the city. This is because years ago a city manager thought it a good idea to give spousal benefits to retirees that continued even after the employee died.

The city is self-insured. This means it pays all the medical bills. It comes out to more than $4 million a year. (This is 13 percent of the general fund.) Employees don’t pay any sort of monthly premium for their health care. They have a $750 deductible with a maximum annual payment of $4,000.

To begin to solve the problem the city is having Medicare-eligible retirees use Medicare supplements as their secondary insurance rather than the city’s plan as their secondary insurance; the goal is early retirees who are not 65 will be able to have health plans through the Affordable Health Care Act; and the city will look at options that could include having a provider and not being self-insured.

Kerry warns that without those three changes the city may have to only offer catastrophic health care benefits.

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This is a copy of Kerry’s budget message that will be discussed Tuesday at the council meeting, which starts at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Caregiver abuse cases puts Calif. patients at risk

By Ryan Gabrielson, Center for Investigative Reporting

California regulators routinely have conducted cursory and indifferent investigations into suspected violence and misconduct committed by hundreds of nursing assistants and in-home health aides — putting the elderly, sick and disabled at risk over the past decade.

In 2009, the state Department of Public Health quietly ordered its investigators to dismiss nearly 1,000 pending cases of abuse and theft — often with a single phone call from Sacramento headquarters. The closing of cases en masse came after officials determined their swelling backlog had become a crisis.

Four years later, state investigators are opening and closing investigations into suspected abuse without ever leaving their desks, the Center for Investigative Reporting and KQED have found. In some instances, caregivers who have sexually assaulted or abused patients have retained their licenses and moved to other facilities.

Brian Woods, former director of the Department of Public Health's West Covina office, says don't count on the government. Photo/Adithya Sambamurthy/Center for Investigative Reporting

An estimated 160,000 nursing assistants and in-home health aides are employed throughout California. These workers – all regulated by the Department of Public Health – are certified to work in hospitals, nursing homes, mental health facilities, developmental centers and private homes.

Since the mass dismissal of cases in 2009, the overwhelming majority of allegations of abuse and misconduct have been closed without action. The state also has dramatically reduced the number of license revocations for aides suspected of abuse and misconduct.

And it mostly has stopped referring cases to the California Department of Justice for possible prosecution of crimes, according to state prosecutors and the Department of Public Health.

In addition, the department’s Southern California investigations office, which once had 11 full-time examiners, is nearly empty. Internal documents show abuse cases from Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara and Riverside mostly now go to Sacramento headquarters. There, investigators rarely receive approval from supervisors to visit nursing and group homes where abuse and neglect have been alleged.

For some who have worked in the system, the state has abandoned its duty to protect the vulnerable.

“I would tell anybody, do not count on the government taking care of you,” said Brian Woods, former director of the Department of Public Health’s West Covina office.

From 2004 to 2008, the state’s health regulators accumulated more than 900 cases in Southern California, including alarming allegations that involve suspicious deaths.

“I was appalled,” said Marc Parker, who was the public health department’s investigations chief for much of the past decade. “There were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of unassigned, uninvestigated complaints in file drawers.”

Then, on top of their normal workload, investigators were ordered by supervisors in Sacramento to begin clearing the backlog at a rapid pace, until they were nearly all dismissed by 2011. On average, cases had lingered for two years before they were cleared.

Little is known about theses cases because they were not fully investigated. But internal case logs kept by the state in Sacramento offer a chilling, yet faintly detailed outline of allegations – including suspicious deaths, severe injuries, numerous sexual assaults, egregious neglect and theft of belongings.

One log entry lists a caregiver who allegedly “hit, peed on and seduced” a patient, but does not list a facility, city or county. Another notes a nursing assistant at an unnamed Los Angeles facility who was accused of exposing himself and asking for oral sex from a resident. Both caregivers still are working at the facilities.

More than 230 log entries simply read “physical or sexual abuse” and little else beyond a date and county where the alleged incident took place.

Public health regulators have all but stopped alerting the California attorney general’s office of patient deaths alleged to involve abuse. The attorney general has an entire division – the Bureau of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse, which has 41 lawyers – that specializes in prosecuting such cases. By law, health regulators are required to report all suspected crimes to the division.

From 2007 to 2009, the department referred a total of 88 deaths to state prosecutors for investigation into elder abuse, according to figures from the attorney general. During the following three years, that number dropped to 14.

Regulators sent two death cases to prosecutors in 2011 and three in 2012.

One case that has remained unsolved is the suspicious death in 2006 of Elsie Fossum, a 95-year-old woman who lived at Claremont Place Assisted Living in Southern California. Fossum was a teacher and librarian in eastern Los Angeles County for most of her life and moved into Claremont two years before she died.

Although she had been found severely injured on the floor of her bedroom, the California Department of Public Health dismissed it as an accidental fall from bed. The department closed the abuse allegation in February, classifying it as unsubstantiated.

With injuries to her mouth so severe that she stopped eating and drinking, Fossum died of dehydration in a hospice three weeks after she was found injured. A nursing assistant at the facility who was caring for Fossum at the time of her injuries — and who had made repeated disparaging remarks about the elderly woman, according to state records — quit soon after the injuries and took a similar job at a nearby facility.

Now, seven years after Fossum died — and following questions from reporters — the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has opened a criminal inquiry into the death. The case remains unsolved, and the nursing assistant, Sabrina Bengoa, has not been charged with a crime. She did not respond to requests for comment by phone or at her home.

"When you've got agencies looking at it, you figure they're going to find something if something's there," said Jim Fossum, Elsie's nephew, who lives in Brainerd, Minn. "Not that they'd just put the thing away and forget about it, essentially."

Records show the public health department rarely takes action even in the face of damning evidence. Under the administrations of Govs. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jerry Brown, the number of nursing assistants and in-home health aides removed from the job for crimes against the sick and vulnerable has declined sharply.

In 2006, the department revoked or denied a caregiver's certification in 27 percent of complaints it investigated. That figure shrank to 7 percent three years later as regulators eliminated the backlog.

Meanwhile, the number of cases closed without action has soared. Statewide, public health investigators in 2012 finished 81 percent of their cases without taking action against an accused caregiver, up from 58 percent in 2006.

The Department of Public Health is fixing how it handles allegations against nursing assistants, Anita Gore, an agency spokeswoman, said in a prepared statement. “Organization and operation of the Investigations Section, including Southern California, are currently being addressed.”

State officials said they can’t explain why there has been a steep drop in the number of abuse deaths forwarded to law enforcement.

“We don’t understand that decline in numbers,” said Dr. Ron Chapman, director of the Department of Public Health. “It’s very concerning to me, and we’re looking into it.”

Chapman said the backlog of cases was “inexcusable (and) should not have occurred.”

“We’ve made lot of progress since then,” he said. “So today, any complaints that come in, they get screened within 48 hours, and we’re not building a backlog today.”

Mark Zahner – California’s chief prosecutor on elder abuse cases until August – said he had not asked the Department of Public Health why there are now so few cases. In an interview in April, he said he did not believe state regulators were withholding death cases.

“It would be weird,” Zahner said, “because I don’t see how that would do anybody any good.”

Nevertheless, Paul Greenwood, head of the San Diego County district attorney’s elder abuse unit, said public health regulators long have refused to provide his office cases to prosecute. The drop in abuse death cases sent to state prosecutors is shocking, Greenwood said, and worrisome.

“I don’t know how many nursing homes there are in California or how many deaths a year there are in the facilities, but the number is going to be huge," Greenwood said. "And to think there are only two suspicious deaths, I just frankly cannot believe that."

Phoning it in

The Department of Public Health is in charge of keeping dangerous people out of the health care business.

In a well-run department, when there is an allegation of abuse, inspectors immediately should open a case, visit the facility, collect law enforcement records, interview people at the scene and make a determination about what happened. If they uncover abuse, the department is required to revoke the certification of any accused caregiver and report the matter to law enforcement and the attorney general's office.

Parker, the former investigations chief, said his boss, Evon Lenerd, wanted complaints closed efficiently and quickly. Lenerd ordered Parker's staff to conduct nearly all investigations by phone, without visiting care facilities where abuse allegations have arisen.

But Parker said investigators find the most severe problems when they walk through health care facilities. They often find new cases that haven't been reported.

"Good investigators have big eyes," said Parker, who retired in December 2011.

Closing cases by phone is "just ridiculous," he said. "They're missing huge amounts of information. The job is not being done."

Listen to an insider's view

Marc Parker, the public health department's former investigations chief, talks about closing cases over the phone.

Lenerd, head of the professional certification branch, declined several interview requests.

The Department of Public Health denies directing investigators to close cases primarily by phone. “If preliminary phone calls and other reviews during a desk investigation determine a field component is warranted, then a field investigation is conducted,” wrote Gore, the department spokeswoman.

She wrote that investigations have been delayed due to a “change in resources.”

In July, the California State Auditor criticized the Department of Public Health for being slow to investigate allegations of misconduct at state institutions for the developmentally disabled.

Also, the department never has released a report detailing its enforcement activities, which state law mandates. Therefore, the auditor wrote, “the effectiveness of its enforcement practices, particularly those related to developmental centers, remains uncertain.”

Investigative shortcomings, however, extend everywhere Californians receive care.

Internal state records and court files obtained by the Center for Investigative Reporting show the Department of Public Health has failed repeatedly to strip nursing assistants of their certification until years after confirming they had harmed patients.

Despite evidence of serious crimes, one of the least-active offices is the department’s southern branch, established to pursue allegations from Bakersfield to the Mexican border. Just off Interstate 10 in the suburbs east of Los Angeles, the investigations section is on the ninth floor of an office tower encircled by chain restaurants and retail.

The branch once employed 11 full-time investigators. It appeared deserted when reporters visited on a weekday afternoon in late July. No investigators were present; rows of cubicles sat empty. Another visit months earlier revealed a single person working in the office.

Chapman, the public health director, said there are supposed to be investigators working in Southern California. “As far as I know, there’s staff down south,” he said.

Even when employees filled the office, Southern California cases received little attention for years. A department examination in 2010 – written by Kim Krazynski, then the branch’s new investigations director – detailed disarray. She compared the branch to an engine to explain the problems’ severity.

“If a single factor is malfunctioning, the engine will misfire and organizational performance will suffer,” Krazynski wrote. “In the case of the Southern Region Office, all components that make up the engine are either malfunctioning or are completely absent.”

One misfire came in March 2008, when nursing aide Jason Joslin physically abused one or more patients at a Riverside County health care facility, according to internal case logs. The department opened an investigation immediately. Details of the case were not available.

No action followed until November 2011, when the state spiked Joslin’s California certification and decided to add his name to the federal exclusion list, maintained by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ inspector general to alert the public to bad caregiver.

The revocation came too late.

Joslin moved to Seattle in March 2010 and quickly obtained a temporary nursing assistant license from Washington state, regulatory records show. By August of that year, Joslin was fully credentialed in his new state.

Joslin did not respond to written interview requests sent by email and social media.

His license is active through mid-January 2014, and his record appears clear. The Department of Public Health has not yet included Joslin on the exclusion list.

Criminal convictions

Not even criminal convictions ensure swift action.

On Oct. 5, 2007, a 59-year-old female patient was lying awake on her bed at the Del Rio Sanitarium in Bell Gardens when Ricky Diocampo assaulted her. Diocampo, a nursing assistant, pushed his hands under the woman’s clothes to fondle her breasts and genitals, investigation records show.

The patient is diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, a debilitating mental illness that causes delusions and mood swings. Because of her mental health condition, she cannot legally consent to sex.

On that October day, a third person was in the bedroom. Another employee stood in a corner on a ladder, painting ceiling trim, when he made eye contact with Diocampo. His presence didn’t deter the nursing assistant, records show.

Seven weeks after the assault was witnessed, the state Department of Public Health assigned the case to investigator Reginald Mitchell, who also was the investigator on the Elsie Fossum case.

A year passed before the attorney general’s office filed three criminal charges against Diocampo, who was arrested and spent four days in jail. Two of the counts – for sexual assault and battery of an institutionalized person – require convicts to register as a sex offender. The third count was for abuse of a dependent adult.

Diocampo, under an agreement with the Los Angeles County district attorney’s office in 2009, pleaded guilty to the patient abuse charge. He received two years of probation and wasn’t designated a sex offender.

Diocampo remained an authorized California nursing assistant and home health aide for three months after his conviction, when his certificate expired. Such a deficiency can be explained to employers as a paperwork error with the state.

The criminal proceedings did nothing to spur Mitchell, the public health investigator, to strike Diocampo’s certification, according to department case logs and email correspondence.

Mitchell did not check on the sexual assault case for almost two years after Diocampo pleaded guilty. A new supervisor took over the Department of Public Health’s office in West Covina in early 2011 and asked Mitchell for an update on his oldest open investigations – nine cases from 2006 and 2007.

Regarding the Diocampo case, Mitchell responded in a March 23, 2011, email that he was “waiting on a return call back” from the attorney general’s office.

The state revoked Diocampo’s certification five weeks later.

No significant regulatory hurdles blocked Diocampo from working with vulnerable patients during the three-and-a-half-year investigative delay. It is unknown whether he was employed at health care facilities during that period.

He was convicted of domestic violence in Los Angeles County in April 2012. Diocampo did not respond to calls and notes left at his home requesting an interview.

Diocampo is now on the federal exclusion list. Prospective employers quickly would learn that Diocampo is barred from working at health care facilities, should he apply in the future.

The public health department's handling of these cases is unacceptable, said Parker, the former investigations chief. However, he added, with investigators today working cases primarily by phone, many abuses by nursing aides likely are closed with no action or never discovered.

Parker's 2011 retirement after two decades with the department was an earlier exit than intended, he said, but he couldn't abide by cursory reviews of violent crimes.

"I couldn't stop what was happening," he said, "and I couldn't protect the public."

Calif. set to raise minimum wage to $10/hour

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

A bill to raise the minimum wage in California to $10 an hour raced forward at the Capitol on Wednesday, with Democratic lawmakers poised to approve the measure and Gov. Jerry Brown announcing he would sign it.

The increase in the state's minimum wage from $8 to $10 by 2016 would be the first since 2008, when it was raised by 50 cents to $8.

"The minimum wage has not kept pace with rising costs," Brown said in a statement. "This legislation is overdue and will help families that are struggling in this harsh economy."

The Democratic governor’s announcement came after Assembly Bill 10, by Assemblyman Luis Alejo, D-Watsonville, was amended Wednesday to raise the minimum hourly wage to $10 sooner than previously proposed. The bill is moving through the Legislature as lawmakers near the end of session this week.

The measure would raise the minimum hourly wage from $8 to $9 on July 1, 2014, and then to $10 on Jan. 1, 2016. Under an earlier version of the bill, the minimum hourly wage would not have reached $10 until 2018.

Read the whole story

Debt remains from Nev. Fire Safe Council

By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

Firefighters and small businesses in Nevada and California have a simple request for the federal government.

Pay up.

They cleared brush, chopped down trees, and then submitted invoices in expectation that they’d be paid soon after. But that was more than two years ago, and they’re collectively still owed $2.56 million.

Lake Christopher in South Lake Tahoe has trees removed in 2011. Photo/LTN file

Meanwhile, lawmakers such as Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., have decried the role of climate change in the wildfires ravaging the West and Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., has called for more fire prevention funding in a year when such funds seem to have dried up.

But those who have already performed the work are hoping that their simple request to be compensated for it will become a priority for the government.

“It’s work completed, and I haven’t been paid, so yeah, it’s not good,” said James Piercy, owner of Arbor Care, a Lake Tahoe small business that did some of the brush work in the Tahoe basin. “For the last two years, we called them on a weekly basis following up in what the status of payment was going to be and they strung us along forever, and this year we just pretty much gave up on trying to call them.”

Read the whole story

‘Patient dumping’ results in lawsuit against Nev.

By Laila Kearney, Reuters

SAN FRANCISCO — The city of San Francisco is suing the state of Nevada for busing patients, many of them indigent and mentally ill, from a public hospital in Las Vegas to the Bay Area without plans for continued care.

The lawsuit, filed on Tuesday in San Francisco Superior Court, seeks $500,000 in reimbursement of public funds claimed to have been used to care for the out-of-state patients as well an injunction barring Nevada from dumping more patients in California in the future.

“Homeless, psychiatric patients are especially vulnerable to the kind of practices Nevada engaged in, and the lawsuit I’ve filed today is about more than just compensation. It’s about accountability,” San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera said in a statement about the lawsuit, filed as a class action but not yet certified as such by the court.

The state-run Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital in Las Vegas came under fire in April, after the *Sacramento Bee* reported that hospital staff had given as many as 1,500 patients one-way bus tickets to California and 46 other states between 2008 and 2013.

Read the whole story

Ex-cop Poland to spend 18 mos. in prison

Former South Lake Tahoe police Officer Johnny Poland is going to prison for 18 months.

The sentence came down Wednesday. Poland must turn himself in to the Bureau of Prison on Nov. 6.

Poland had pleaded guilty in May to one count of obstruction of an official proceeding. The maximum sentence he could have received was 20 years behind bars.

Former South Tahoe Officer Johnny Poland receives 18-month sentence. Photo/LTN file

The 45-year-old has been on the other side of the law since June 2007 when he was initially fired by the local police department because of an incident in November 2006 at South Tahoe High school.

He fought that termination and was reinstated in fall 2009.

A federal investigation began in November 2011, at which time Poland was put on paid administrative leave. He was indicted at the beginning of this year.

Poland started with SLTPD in 1998. He resigned after admitting guilt and his position has since been filled.

“Mr. Poland ended his career in law enforcement by abusing his position of trust at every turn,” U.S. Attorney Benjamin Wagner told the court. “When faced with the consequences of his misdeeds, he then attempted to influence witnesses who were called to testify against him. Such behavior cannot be tolerated. Mr. Poland stands in contrast to the other outstanding men and women in law enforcement who conduct themselves with dedication and honor every single day.”

Court documents, on June 29, 2011, Poland interfered with a federal investigation of a South Lake Tahoe gang member. Poland persuaded the gang member’s girlfriend to conceal and destroy evidence. In October and November 2011, Poland tampered with this witness in an investigation into his own conduct as well as the conduct of the gang member. Poland instructed another witness to conceal and destroy evidence rather than provide it to federal authorities. Poland admitted that he corruptly attempted to alter, destroy, mutilate, and conceal evidence material to an official proceeding.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. on verge of changing environmental law

By Adam Nagourney, New York Times

SACRAMENTO — A landmark law that has been a symbol of California’s tough environmental philosophy for more than 40 years is facing an unlikely challenge from Democrats, including Gov. Jerry Brown, who contend that regulations protecting the environment have been abused and are thwarting legitimate development.

With the Legislature moving toward adjournment this week, prospects of weakening the law, known as the California Environmental Quality Act, seem stronger than in recent memory, lawmakers said. Brown called rewriting the law "the Lord's work," and the effort has won widespread support from newspaper editorial boards.

State Sen. Darrell Steinberg, the Democratic leader, said Tuesday that he was confident that his proposed changes to the law would win legislative approval this week and be sent to Brown.

Read the whole story

More funny money business with State Parks

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

State investigators have found unreported cases of an illicit program that let state parks employees trade leave time for cash and, despite extreme media and government scrutiny, "still has not done enough to prevent such practices from occurring," according to an audit released Tuesday.

The 43-page report sampled operations at five park districts within the $574 million Department of Parks and Recreation and found a budgeting system so disorganized that district administrators make an educated guess at how much money they'll receive when the fiscal year starts each July. They reset their budgets, sometimes several months later, when they find out how much money they have.

Expenditure tracking also is so poor that four of the five districts had their own systems for watching their expenses.

Read the whole story

LTCC needs more students to balance budget

By Kathryn Reed

When classes start Sept. 23 at Lake Tahoe Community College officials hope to see a lot more students than last year. The budget the board approved Tuesday night is banking on it.

Enrollment dropped dramatically last school compared to the previous year. The 2013-14 budget is calling for 1,750 fulltime equivalent students.

Lake Tahoe Community College's finances are not quite on solid ground.

Photo/LTN file

“Until we know the FTES, the budget is only as good as the assumptions it was built on,” LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

FTES history:

- 2008-09 – 1,935
- 2009-10 – 2,021
- 2010-11 – 1,834
- 2011-12 – 1,819
- 2012-13 – 1,530.

Between 2008 and 2010 the college had a dramatic drop in the number of Lake Tahoe Basin residents attending the college. This is based on a study done by ZIP codes. In 2008-09, 5,925 basin residents took classes at LTCC, while in 2012-13 that number was 3,766.

People keep moving out of the area, fees increased, the number of classes declined, the state changed how it calculates FTES, the good neighbor policy with Nevada went away – those are some of the reasons for the decline in numbers.

Online classes have helped increase the enrollment for people living outside the basin.

While Sept. 10 was the public hearing on the budget, no one showed up.

The board has discussed the budget extensively, with a tentative budget presented at the June 25 board meeting, lots of talk at the Aug. 23 retreat and then again at a study session on Sept. 5.

The college is taking $403,408 out of reserves to balance its budget.

In Murillo’s summary of the budget she wrote, “The major goal of the budget development process has been to create a budget that more accurately reflects the fiscal outlook, knowing that it does not benefit students or the college if the organization does not have a true picture of the budget when making decisions.”

Murillo has been working to establish a realistic budget since she came to the college. The previous practice had actual expenses coming at about $1 million less than projected. She and Jeff DeFranco, vice president of administrative services, have strived to make the budget more factual.

“There’s no longer fluff,” Murillo said. “It’s as close to real as you can get.”

A potentially fluctuating number is what the college pays out in health and welfare benefits. The agreement with all bargaining units for that segment of their contracts expires Nov. 30.

The college pays for the entire premier health plan for each employee. This comes to $17,350 annually per employee.

(Murillo and two board members have opted for the school to pay for the standard plan for them.)

It is the college’s desire to have all employees go to the standard plan. A committee has been formed to come up with a proposal that would be presented to Murillo who would in turn bring it before the board.

The board on Tuesday agreed to set aside $10,000, if need be, to have a consultant compare the current options available to LTCC through the health and welfare joint powers authority it belongs to to others in the state.

In other action:

• The college has tentatively set June 7 as the date to celebrate its 40th anniversary.

Increasing number of Nevadans going hungry

By Catherine Van, KOLO-TV

Too many Nevadans are going hungry.

According to a study done by the U.S. Department of agriculture, Nevada is ranked No. 8 in the nation low food insecurity.

The percentage of households in Nevada that faced food insecurity jumped from 9 percent to 16 percent in 10 years, which is the largest increase in the nation. Local charities are even feeling the impact.

Food insecurity is a struggle that 3-year-old Maya and her mother, Trinity face every week. Trinity has a part-time job at a retail store, but with a child to raise on her own, bills start to add up and she's worried she can't feed her family.

"I would just like to be able to have her eat a good meal, a good three meals every day," she said. "I'm worried she's not getting enough of nutritional things."

She spends about $40-$50 a week on groceries, but sometimes health falls on the wayside.

"It's almost cheaper to like get stuff off the dollar menu."

She's one of more than 300,000 Nevadans dependent on food stamps or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Programs.

Read the whole story