

City needs to trim budget to deal with shortage

As you all know, the economy is in bad shape. The stock market has plunged, the foreclosure crisis is still burning through neighborhoods and the jobless rate is climbing. The unemployment rate in Merced County reached 18.9 percent for the month of January.

The local economic picture reflects the national trends. We have seen sales tax revenues dry up and property tax revenues shrink.

Even the money the City gets from gas taxes are down as cars get better gas mileage and people drive less because they have less money in their pockets.

Sales tax receipts are expected to drop by 7 percent in 2009 due to declining sales in the City, and property taxes are expected to be down by at least 10 percent due to foreclosures and reassessments.

What this means is the City is facing a \$10.2 million budget shortage.

Budget priorities have been placed on preserving public safety services and youth programs.

While Police, Fire and Code Enforcement are being asked to cut 12 percent from their budgets, the rest of the City departments have been told to cut 15 percent.

City departments have been looking for ways to save even more money, be even

A message from City Manager John Bramble



more efficient and to cut even more costs. Thirty one positions that have opened up this year have not been filled. That's on top of almost 20 positions that went unfilled last year. This represents about 10 percent of our workforce.

We are deferring replacement of vehicles and equipment to save money. We are doing little things like cutting back on the amount of paper used and big things like getting energy audits for our buildings.

There are other options being explored: cutting back on City holidays, adjusting employee benefit plans, furloughs, early retirements, salary cuts, delaying the hiring of top management and even layoffs.

We are asking city employees to help come up with ways to provide good government services with less money.

These are the people directly providing

services to City residents, and they have first-hand experience in the field and behind the counter.

We are asking our refuse truck drivers, accountants and secretaries for suggestions. We are seeking ideas from our police officers, planners and purchasing agents for ways to improve the efficiency of our operations.

Cutbacks and empty positions are going to affect the services we provide. The phones may ring a few more times, or the wait in the line might be a little longer.

The City of Merced will continue to provide the vital services that you expect from us.

When you turn on your water faucet, you will continue to get fresh, clean water. When you dial 911, police and fire will still be responding, but they may be slower to come out to barking dog complaints.

We don't have a crystal ball that tells us when our economy will improve, but we do know that it will recover. It's just a matter of time.

Until then, we will tighten the belt, take a deep breath, and work together to get the job done. We will need your understanding and assistance over the long haul to make this a better community for all.

Don't be a mosquito breeder, eliminate standing water

The mosquitoes are already out, and they can be more than pesky, they can be deadly. Mosquitoes can carry the West Nile Virus, a disease that has affected City residents in past years.

The disease has been found this year in Southern California, and is expected to spread northward again.

Most people don't experience any symptoms with the disease, but some have flu-like symptoms. For about 1 in 150, it is life-threatening. For more information on the disease go to www.westnile.ca.gov.

Experts say the best advice to eliminate mosquitoes is to "dump and drain." Dump any containers with stagnant water. They breed in anything from planters to old tires, even children's toys can be used by the bugs.

Also be sure that your swimming pool has a working filtration system and the proper levels of chemicals to prevent it from turning green.

If you know of a house with a green pool or standing water, call the Merced County Mosquito Abatement District at 722-1527.



Standing water like this 'green pool' encourages mosquitoes to breed.

Merced City Council

Mayor Ellie Wooten
Mayor Pro Tem John Carlisle
Joe Cortez
Michele Gabriault-Acosta
Noah Lor
Jim Sanders
Bill Spriggs

Contact the City Council by email at Citycouncil@cityofmerced.org, by calling 385-6834. You can write to Council members at the Civic Center address listed below.

Council meetings

The Council usually meets on the first and third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers in the Civic Center. The agenda is at www.CityofMerced.org.

Contacting us

The Web site, www.CityofMerced.org, contains City Council information, the Municipal Code and General Plan and other information. To contact the Newsletter, e-mail newsletter@CityofMerced.org, call the Public Information Office at 385-6232 or write:

Merced Civic Center
678 W. 18th St.
Merced CA 95340

The Civic Center is open Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., except holidays.

Call us

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney	385-6868
City Clerk	388-7100
Airport	385-6873
Code Enforcement	385-6861
Finance	388-7900
Inspection Services	385-6861
Personnel	388-7100
Planning Department	385-6858
Public Works (7:30-4:30) ...	385-6800
After hours	385-6905
Recreation/Parks	385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Fire Department	385-6891
Police Department	385-6912

Ask the City: Graffiti vandals do get arrested

Ask the City is an ongoing column answering questions that have been submitted to us by mail, email or phone. Readers can submit questions to the addresses in the column on the left.

Why don't you stop those punks when they spray paint the City. Why do they get away with it?

Anonymous, Merced

Graffiti frustrates everyone, and we all suffer because of the visual blight it creates. It makes the community literally look bad.

The Merced Police Department has an officer who is assigned to investigate graffiti crimes. Last year, City police arrested 185 people on graffiti charges.

We continue to make arrests with 39 this year.

The public has been helpful in turning in the vandals.

If you see someone in the act of defacing property call 911 immediately.

If you want to report graffiti left behind, call Tag-busters at 385-8807 or the Police Department's dispatch center at 385-6912.

Spring Clean Up is here

City residents can clean house — and the yard — and get rid of trash at the annual Spring Clean Up.

Yard waste, old furniture and lots of other debris can be deposited at locations throughout the City. Residents will be required to show some ID or a utility bill to prove residency.

The Spring Clean Up will be held April 18-19 and also April 25-26.

Electronic waste such as computers and TVs will be collected and recycled. There will be a fee for large appliances such as refrigerators. Hazardous wastes, such as batteries are not taken.

Check the flier that came in the mail or the City web site for more details on the Spring Clean Up.

Think Green

Try an energy audit

Do you know how much energy you use, and how much of it is wasted? Are you heating and cooling your house and having that air gush outside?

There are a variety of steps that can be taken to reduce the energy use at home, from stopping air leaks to switching to CFL lighting.

To get more information on conducting an energy audit, and improving the energy use in your home and business go to Flex Your Power at www.fypower.org or go to energystar.gov.

Think Green is a regular feature in the newsletter to provide residents with ideas for living a life that uses fewer resources and puts less wear and tear on our planet.

Wal-Mart EIR comments sought from the public

The draft Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Wal-Mart Distribution Center is available for public review and comment.

It can be reviewed at the Merced City Clerks Office (first floor) and the Planning Division (second floor) at the Merced Civic Center, 678 W. 18th St., Merced.

It also is available for

review at the Merced County Library, 2100 O St. in Merced.

It is on the City's web site, www.cityofmerced.org, with a link under Public Information.

A CD-ROM of the document and technical appendices is available at no cost at the Planning Division.

Comments on the draft

EIR must be in writing and can be sent to Kim Espinosa, Planning Manager, 678 W. 18th St., Merced, 95340

They can be emailed to espinosak@cityofmerced.org or faxed to (209) 725-8775.

The deadline for the comments is 5 p.m. April 27.

After the comment period ends, public hearings will be scheduled on the draft EIR.

More gang workshops scheduled for schools

The Gang Awareness Workshops presented by the Merced Police Department and ComVIP are winding up for the school year.

Everyone is invited to attend any of the presentations, and area businesses are encouraged to set up workshops at their place of business for their employees.

Contact Lt. Tom Trinidad to set up the workshops at 385-6233.

The workshops are from 7 to 8 p.m.:

April 2	Chenoweth School, 3200 Parsons
April 9	East Campus, 1900 G St.
April 16	Valley High School, 1850 Wardrobe