

City Council
The Independent
May 12, 03

Survey says voters won't pay for parks

Task force asks Belmont council to take better care of existing fields

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Survey results have confirmed the City Council's suspicions: Voters will not approve a bond measure for open space.

"We all intuitively knew in this economy it would be hard to meet the threshold of this bond," Mayor Paul Wright said.

The council accepted the Outdoor Recreation Task Force's final report Tuesday on maintaining city athletic fields and preserving undeveloped open space. The report said the community would likely reject a tax to purchase open space.

The task force expressed disappointment with survey results that showed all bond measures, ranging from \$20 to \$126 a year, would likely fail to reach a two-thirds majority in Belmont this November. The task force had hoped to raise more than \$10 million with a bond.

"Our hopes were not set very high to come up with funding," said task force member Joan Dentler.

Overall, voters seem pleased with the services already provided by the city and generally do not feel that athletic fields or open space ranked high enough on their priorities right now.

"The sample group didn't have firsthand knowledge" of the fields, Dentler said.

Council notes

- Fleet maintenance: Belmont has a one-year trial agreement to provide repair services to the Mid-Peninsula Water District's vehicles. The city expects to make \$25,000 per year in the contract.
- No sale: The council postponed discussion on the sale of city property to Ralph Kirberg, who has a business at 1020 Old County Road and would like to purchase a lot at the corner of Old County and Ralston to expand his business. The council opted to wait until at least after the city's vision process is over.

In lieu of the bond measure that would generate tepid interest, the task force recommended that City Council keep the issues of fields and open space on its priority calendar. The committee suggested that the city raise the level of maintenance on its eight athletic fields to \$12,000 per acre, or \$100,000 total. Currently, the level of field maintenance is \$7,000 per acre.

"We need to stop the bleeding," Dentler said. "We're just asking for basic maintenance

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to improve the current conditions."

The task force hopes the changes would make the fields safer and more useable. There are 280 adult and youth sports teams that make use of the fields.

The Outdoor Recreation Task Force also suggested that the city contribute \$20,000 annually to the San Juan Canyon Preservation Trust, a private organization that aims to acquire land to preserve open space. The money would pay for a director to "be vigilant to pursue donation of land," Dentler said.

Councilmember Dave Bauer opposed that recommendation to fund an independent organization.

The trust has already received \$30,000 in seed money, and members say they have doubled that initial amount.

"They need to acquire funds on their own," Bauer said. But his colleagues argued that the trust is analogous to School-Force, the foundation that stepped in to raise money for the elementary school district after the parcel tax failed.

"It's another organization that can accomplish the goals the community wants," Councilmember Dave Warden said. "It would be disingenuous for us as a city to turn our backs on the one organization" that could acquire open space.

In other business, City Council received a status report on the City Hall and police station project. The city expects to receive its permits on July 21 and have its groundbreaking in September.

The project has received criticism from some in the community who think the council should have a contingency plan if the costs run up again. The project has had a history of setbacks when bids in the past came up higher than expected.

"Better to be prudent than be surprised," said resident Warren Lieberman.

The council tried to assure residents that the city has been cautious throughout the whole process.

"If we're off-track, I'd be extremely surprised," Wright said.

"I have a lot of faith in the people who are involved in the process," Warden said. "I didn't have that the last time."

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Belmont streets are under construction over summer

Work being done on Ralston and Alameda de las Pulgas includes improved surfaces.

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Motorists can expect detours and delays this summer as construction crews work on repairing and smoothing road surfaces in Belmont.

Beginning Monday and lasting until October, workers will descend on Ralston Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas

and give two of the city's busiest thoroughfares a facelift.

"There are some inconveniences associated with it," admitted Ray Davis, public works director.

Drivers should be prepared to look for alternate routes because there will be road closures and traffic reduced to one lane along some stretches. Work will be done on Alameda from Carlmont Drive to the northern city limit and on Ralston from Cipriani Boulevard to El Camino Real. Some lanes will

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STREETS: Expect delays in Belmont

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be closed on Ralston, and there will be detours on Alameda.

The total cost of the project is \$765,000, and the city has received three federal grants totaling \$520,000 to cover most of the expense.

"We recognize there will be inconveniences during construction, but the long-term benefit to the community will be significant," Davis said.

To extend the life of the pavement, crews will be putting on a slurry seal, a thick black paint sealing the sur-

face on Ralston from Alameda to El Camino and on Alameda from Carlmont to the city boundary. In addition, there will be significant construction work on Ralston from Cipriani to Alameda, where crews will be installing an asphalt concrete surface.

New turn-lanes will be added on Alameda. The city hopes new striping on the two major roads will make for more orderly traffic in and out of the Carlmont Shopping Center, the Immaculate Heart of Mary complex, Notre Dame Avenue, Chula Vista Drive and the entrances to

Notre Dame de Namur University and Twin Pines Park.

The city has a pavement management program, which evaluates the condition of the streets and assigns them a grade from 0 to 100. A consultant from a pavement engineering firm told the City Council in April that it is more cost-effective for the city to take preventative measures incrementally than to reconstruct whole roads that are no longer acceptable.

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Council doles out reduced community grants

Belmont groups struggle in economic downturn

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — There is less in city coffers to go around for diverse groups that provide affordable housing to seniors, food to those who can not afford it and a written history of San Mateo County. As part of its budget process, the City Council had to decide Tuesday how to dole out \$105,000 to community groups who asked for funding for one-time projects. There were more needs than money avail-

able; the 21 community groups' requests totaled more than \$170,000. None of the groups got all the funding they wanted. The community groups had submitted applications earlier in the year and a description of how the money would be used. Representatives were disappointed but were generally happy to get what they received. Due to budget constraints, the city has cut back the amount of grants available by 10 percent. "A lot of cities are making a lot more austere cuts," Councilmember Dave Warden said. "We have a commitment to try to fund as much as we can."

Two groups, the Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association and Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, did not receive any money. Laura Fanucchi from HIP Housing, which places residents with low incomes or difficult situations in affordable housing, said the economic climate has put brakes on their fundraising efforts. "(The partial funding) is to be expected," she said. Rod Carpenter, a representative of San Mateo County Historical Association, hoped to get money to continue a twice-a-year publication for history buffs. His organization had

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Council notes

- Speed limits: The City Council followed staff recommendations to increase speed limits along Ralston Avenue. From Christian Drive to Alameda de las Pulgas the limit rises to 40 miles per hour; Alameda de las Pulgas to Highway 101 rises to 30 miles an hour.
- Emmett House: The city received a formal go-ahead to relocate the Emmett House and to develop it with four one-bedroom apartments. The city gets to preserve a historical building for future generations and adds to its number of housing units.

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hoped to secure \$3,500 to write a scholarly piece on Belmont in the 1860s, but it will have to make do with \$375.

Parents from Central Elementary School had asked for \$3,000 to go toward the purchase and installation of a playground set made from recycled materials but received a third of that amount. "It's better than nothing," parent Terri Murai said.

Chamber of Commerce President Pam Clarke said the money the chamber received would go toward improving community outreach. A community fair is planned for this August, the group's first in Belmont, and an online bulletin board should be working soon. The chamber got about half of the \$41,000 it asked for.

Carol Kittermaster, from Sustainable San Mateo County, an educational organization dedicated to the vitality and quality of life of the county, echoed what many have said about securing funding at a time when those giving grants have been cutting back.

"I'm glad we got something," she said. "It's been hard all of a sudden. Funding is terrible."

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The Independent
May 31, 08

Belmont finds fund balance

Council hears presentation on \$57.6 million 2004 budget

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Barring any unforeseen action from state legislators, Belmont residents can expect city services to continue as normal this summer.

In presenting a balanced budget for the next fiscal year to the City Council Tuesday, city staff is confident that Belmont will be financially stable in the next few years. Keeping the status quo, the \$57.6 million budget calls for no cuts in staffing or reduction in services.

Council notes

- Youth commission: Councilmembers decided not to form a youth commission without first consulting school officials.
- Four-track system: Ian McAvoy, deputy chief of development at SamTrans, explained the agency may build two additional tracks to accommodate a Caltrain baby bullet train from San Francisco to San Jose.

its minimum of \$2 million. The mid-year plan reversed a trend of rapidly depleting reserves, and in the next few years, the city is confident that the reserves will begin to grow closer to its goal of 20 percent of its general fund balance.

In its projections for next year, the city is assuming that the current recession will ease and that the state will not severely reduce local revenues. However, in the event that Sacramento will take away additional funding earmarked for cities, Belmont does have a strategy in place to make up the difference. This plan calls for closing city hall between Christmas and New Year's and losing two additional police officers, a dispatcher and a community service officer, among other actions.

Kersnar also summarized Belmont's top 12 priorities. Several projects, such as the construction of Fire Station 14, the replacement of the police facility, the implementation of performance budgeting and the update of the general plan, are currently underway or expected to begin soon.

"Not all 12 are going to be done next year, but notable progress is being done," he said.

Of the dozen goals to accomplish, one, the bike and pedestrian bridge over Highway 101, lags behind because the money still has to be secured.

"One positive that I noted is that this demonstrates the breadth and depth of things going on in the city," said Mayor Paul Wright.

The councilmembers will make their adjustments and address funding to various community groups at their next meeting on June 10, when the public is also invited to comment. The council plans formal adoption on June 24.

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BELMONT: Money woes

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The long-term financial health of the city is good, according to the city's staff, buoyed by their optimism that the economy will turn a corner soon.

"If the worst of the storm is over, we can be proud that we weathered that storm," City Manager Jere Kersnar said. "Lots of other cities have it much worse."

In part, Kersnar attributes Belmont's success to corrective measures the council has already taken, most notably a package of cuts and fee increases in February. Three months ago, the council voted to retire one of the police dogs and to reduce by 10 percent the funding made available to community non-profit groups.

The \$1.3 million corrections "have put you in very good stead in your finances," he told the council.

One of the highlights of the budget is rolling out of performance standards for all city departments for the first time. In the new format, all of the city's responsibilities are broken down into very specific tasks, which the staff members hope will make the city more customer-driven. The city staff envisions that by focusing more on outcomes, departments become more accountable because they can measure how well they are performing.

"It's unusual for a small city to move to performance budgeting," said Finance Director Thomas Fil. "We're doing this so we're communicating in clear terms what the services are."

However, the council and the staff will have to wait a few years before the success of this new format can be determined. In three or four years, there will be enough data and standards to measure against, Fil said.

Another highlight is that Belmont will have \$2.2 million saved for a rainy day, exceeding

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The Independent
April 12, 03

Council digs underground utility plan

Merchants and homeowners eager for improved aesthetics in neighborhood

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — City Council gave its unanimous support Tuesday to the city's proposal to place cable, telephone, power and other overhead wires beneath Old County Road and one block of Masonic Way.

"We have been waiting for this moment," said resident Wilma Kartman.

The move is an effort to improve the aesthetics of the corridor. Another expected benefit is less frequent power outages. The \$2.1 million project will be paid with PG&E money the company collects from all city residents in their regular power bills. PG&E typically holds the funds until cities tell the company they want to create an underground utility district.

Several residents and business owners spoke in favor of the plan at Tuesday's public hearing. They said they have been waiting for this for as long as 35 years and that the work would enhance life in Belmont.

"I'm looking forward to this project starting as soon as possible," resident Ali Nofal said.

In the spirit of beautifying the area, Robert Fansler, one of the property owners along Old County Road, urged the council to look at ways to enforce city ordinances. He feels other property owners have failed to

Council notes

- Reversed decision: The Council overturned the Planning Commission's decision on the Extended Stay of America Hotel sign. The hotel, currently under construction at 120 Sem Lane, had asked to put up a 50-foot-high pylon sign. The Planning Commission shot down the proposal in January, since the size would violate the city's ordinance. However, the council said that a smaller sign would put the hotel at an economic disadvantage.

- Appointments: The Council made 15 appointments to the Economic Development Strategy Committee. The new group will make proposals for the city's general plan.

keep up their land, leading to unsightly blight in the area.

"I follow the rules," Fansler said. He said that he has spent more than \$30,000 over the years to make sure he has landscaping and adequate parking at his building, but he said other owners were not doing their part.

"I'm totally for beautification

UTILITIES

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and raising property values of apartments and buildings," he said. "But prior to spending money, I would like to see other city ordinances enforced."

City staff members already held an informational meeting with the property owners. Some of the concerns they heard included costs of reconnecting the services and lack of access to their properties during construction.

The councilmembers threw their support behind the project. Some said they were incredulous at first because the proposal seemed too good to be true — there are enough funds in PG&E accounts to pay for the project. Councilmember Dave Warden said he could not find a reason to oppose the work.

"We are in line to proceed," said Ray Davis, the city's director of public works, assuring there is more than enough money.

It will take crews nine months to design the underground project and another nine months to complete the construction. The council also decided against asking merchants to pay for reconnection. Consequently, property owners are not expected to pay for any part of this project.

Belmont council needs another tiebreaker

Elected officials say benefit to community is worth aggravation

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Wanted: A deciding vote on the Belmont City Council. No agenda required but successful applicant must have a vision for the community. You must play well with others. You can expect long hours and low pay. Oh, and you may be razzed by your pre-teen daughter.

The fifth seat on the council has been open since Terri Cook stepped down in November following her election as City Clerk. While a few people have picked up papers to qualify for election, at presstime no one had yet filed for the job.

Is it any wonder? Mayor Paul Wright recalls his first few nervous Tuesday nights in the council chambers. The proceedings were broadcast live to his living room via cable television, where his then 9-year-old daughter sat transfixed ...

counting the number of times her daddy cleared his throat.

His honor, critiqued by his daughter.

"Why put yourself in that position?" he said.

Good question. But one he and others on the council can answer.

The civic responsibility is open to any Belmont residents over 18 and willing to work for \$390 a month, plus some health and retirement benefits. Applicants must live here but they need not be longtime residents. The filing period for

the open council seat began last week and will continue until March 7.

Running a campaign is not for the timid. Wright said that getting his name known in the city three years ago was a scary and challenging task, given that ringing doorbells and introducing himself runs counter to his introvert nature.

"Every day I would go out, I was a little bit nervous," he said. "I rang 4,100 doorbells."

Wright credits his victory partly to the fact that he shook

hands early and often. For him, it paid to be organized and persistent. For a November election, he hit the pavement every weekend beginning in August, and by September, it was every night after work.

"I lost 18 pounds by walking," he said.

Some of the current councilmembers say that they were motivated to run when they felt they could do a better job. Dave Bauer said he was tired of complaining along the sidelines and felt that his new face

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COUNCIL: Vision and track record

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might be welcome at a time when past councils had the reputation of being nasty to each other.

"I knew I was more capable than the people who were sitting there," he said. Wright said that it was his experiences, coupled with the possibility of enacting change, which pushed him to run.

"I ran because I believed the council at the time lacked some perspective and views that I could bring to the council," he said. "That was what motivated me to do it."

Because being on the City Council could be a full-time job by itself, councilmembers say they learn how to juggle priorities. The added responsibilities of the city, with a normal dose of attention given to the family and one or two full-time jobs, can make for long days. But it's not just work and no play. Even family members get a share of the glory sometimes.

"My wife was called First Lady at work," Bauer said. "She was digging that."

Those who have been through it once have some words of wisdom for those thinking of

'I knew I was more capable than the people who were sitting there.'

Belmont Mayor Paul Wright

mounting their first campaign. There is life beyond the election, Wright said.

"I'm a serious guy, but I would have more fun at it," he said. He added that while the details of his campaign ruled his thoughts for several months, he was surprised to know that the rest of Belmont knew little about his worries about how he appeared to voters.

"Politics and the election are not the most important things

in people's mind," he said.

The council is currently an all-white, all-male group. Members say they would encourage women and people from other cultures to give it a shot.

"We're fortunate that we live in an area where we have some cultures and groups of people that we, as individuals, benefit from to make us who we are," Bauer said.

The council will not have a final colleague until June, but members have an idea of what qualities are best suited for the position. For George Metropoulos, an ideal candidate would be one who has a direction for Belmont but will not be wed to it.

"I look for people who have vision," he said. "I look for people who have contributed and that I can see their track record, see their integrity."

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City Council
The Independent
Feb 27, 03

Belmont approves Atrium density plan

Developer convinces city to amend plan to allow greater use

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — The Atrium office and retail project remains on track after the City Council voted last week to amend a community plan that otherwise would have outlawed so many offices on so little land.

The project, slated for 877 Ralston Ave, is to be a 17,290 square-foot, three-story building with retail on the bottom floor and offices upstairs. At present, there is a 10,900 square-foot one-story doctor's office complex at the site.

"I've lived in Belmont for 46 years," Sal San Filippo said. "I don't want to look at that building for another 50 years."

Supporters carried the day in an animated public hearing last week, urging the council to let the project move forward. Many argued the city would regret it if it let potential development slip by.

"If this opportunity is lost, Belmont won't recover," Ric Denman said. "This would be a significant improvement to the character of downtown Belmont."

"You'll condemn downtown to look like it does for years to come," Denny Lawhern said.

However, opponents said that the community is rushing too quickly to embrace the project simply because it means some sort of downtown development.

"They just want to get it going for the sake of getting something going," Alec Little said.

The council at first appeared evenly split. In the end, the appeal of private development in the city's downtown carried the day and the city agreed to amend planning documents that didn't allow the density of such a project.

Mayor Paul Wright said that the debate about the amend-

ment is much ado about nothing.

"This doesn't seem like as big a deal as we're making it to be," he said. "We need to stop talking about philosophy and start talking about decision."

Councilmember George Metropulos said voting for the amendment only approved the project's scale and did not mean outright support for the Atrium as designed. He urged the developer to continue working with the Planning Commission on elements of the design.

The project, which has been in the works for three years, hit its latest snag in December when city planners discovered the Atrium brought more people and cars to the acreage than was allowed by code. Building owners have so far refused to scale it down.

"The current proposal is based on what's necessary to make it work financially," said John Ward, the consultant on the project.

Last week's City Council decision overruled a previous Planning Commission vote. The planning board voted against amending the downtown specific plan, which governs development standards in the area. But the City Council has final say over such policy questions.

Richard Jordan, one of the property owners, was relieved at the City Council's vote. He said he and the other owners have invested too much time and money in this project and were ready to scrap their plans if the council did not allow the change to the city's code. Going into the meeting Jordan was not confident of the vote.

"There's still a lot of work to be done, but I'm very pleased," he said. He added the completion of the Atrium project would be a fulfillment of his father William's wishes. William Jordan was one of the original property owners and a doctor who once practiced at the current site.

Belmont mayor says city can weather crisis

Citizens asked to help with planning process

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — Despite a gloomy economic forecast, Paul Wright visions a bright future for the city.

During his state-of-the-city address Thursday, the mayor said Belmont has laid out its priorities and is well equipped to face any challenges that lie ahead.

"We have set the framework to deal with changes, and I feel

very confident this council and the staff can deal with them," he said.

Wright pointed out the pillars he said are necessary to lay the groundwork for Belmont's future. He told audience members they can look forward to taking part in directing Belmont's general plan this spring. The plan defines the city's direction for the next few decades.

"The general plan sets the framework for us to articulate our vision for our community," he said.

He also said that a healthy

relationship among his fellow councilmembers and city staff was responsible for positive changes in the city's organizational culture. He praised the city's departments for their work.

"I'm hearing differences about what our customers, the citizens, say about us," Wright said.

Wright promised to continue working the council's priorities, a task he likened to running a marathon. Among the highlights: A new library built with funds the city has in its coffers and a new fire station

to be completed this fall.

Wright also said that while plans for a new police facility have suffered from several setbacks in the past, there is good news ahead. The project just got an infusion of cash from U.S. Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, who has secured \$250,000 toward the project.

"If anybody's been in the police facility during the rainy season, it's unacceptable," Wright said.

He said the council would also be working on developing a housing strategy for low- and moderate-income resi-

dents, though he admitted it will be a challenge.

"We're a built-out community," he said.

Wright addressed the city's traffic woes, saying that the council is working together with the public works department to institute speed bumps and road narrowing projects that deter speeders. The city has already implemented pilot programs on some residential streets and, depending on the success of those efforts, major streets may also see some traffic-calming measures. One

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out of every three cars rumbling down Ralston Avenue comes from outside Belmont, he said.

"Being a neophyte three years ago, this was the easiest to understand and the most difficult to do something about it," Wright said.

But amid the city's healthy long-term outlook, residents are certain to face a cut in services. Tonight the council will be reviewing a package of more than \$1 million in cuts, which accounts for 10 percent of the city's operating budget. But Wright was more worried about additional reductions from Sacramento.

"My bigger concern is the state takeaways, which is what we don't have control over," he said.

If Gov. Gray Davis does go through with his controversial proposals to fix the state deficit, Belmont might need to axe another \$1 million.

Wright expressed confidence that the city will be able to weather the storms.

"A year from now, George Metropulos will have an easier time," he said, referring to the next councilmember in line for Wright's largely ceremonial post.

The key to minimizing the tough times ahead may be cooperation between city leaders and community members, according to those in attendance.

"Let's work together as family and neighbors," said Pam Clarke, president of the Chamber of Commerce. "That's how we can be successful."

Councilman of the year: Dave Warden

THERE ARE many councilmembers around the county who do make a difference in their city governments. But the one I have chosen as the San Mateo County Councilmember of the Year — Belmont's Dave Warden — has made a difference in a number of areas of the community.

When Warden served as mayor last year he dropped a letter in the mail on March 25, to Congress member Anna Eshoo. In that letter he told Eshoo the local police facility was dilapidated and was being moved into City Hall, which then needed to be retrofitted.

Warden explained that bids for the project came in 52 percent over the estimate and budget. He said that federal funds could be used to augment local funding for the facility and asked for \$1 million — a small fraction of the total project cost, which would be more than \$6 million.

He concluded with this plea, "Please work with your colleagues in the House and Senate to provide \$1 million in federal funding for a new essential services facility in Belmont."

Warden shared the letter and his request with Assistant City Manager Dan Rich. Letters making the same plea went out to U.S. Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. Rich followed up Warden's letter with calls to the staff of all three elected officials.

On April 25, 2002, Warden received a letter from Eshoo saying that, based upon his request, she had formally requested funding from the appropriate members of Congress for the project. "I shall do everything I can to make these projects successful," she wrote.

On Feb. 14, Eshoo announced that she had secured \$250,000 for Belmont's police facility, approved by the House in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 2003. She also obtained \$275,000 for Sam-Trans of San Mateo County, toward a train tracking

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system notifying train arrival times for passengers.

East Palo Alto got \$700,000 to expand and improve bus service in the city. Eshoo delivered \$2.885 million to San Mateo and Santa Clara counties for purchase of new fuel cell buses, \$200,000 for Pillar Point Harbor to repair damage to the West Arm of the breakwater and \$675,000 for cleanup and revitalization of the Ravenswood Industrial Area. And there was \$100 million for BART to SFO.

Warden also spearheaded the City Council vote on holding a referendum on whether to build a new city library, when consultants warned that their polling showed the voters would not approve. The voters overwhelmingly, by about 70 percent of the vote, did approve the measure.

Warden, in his State of the City speech when he became mayor, set the tone for a council of cooperation, casting aside years of contention that had epitomized Belmont's image for so long. It was Warden and former councilmember Eleanore Hahn who took the San Juan Canyon off the firing line when they recommended and got the council to approve lot mergers and hillside slope density in open space. Warden also held up the Summerhill project until the develop-

ers came up with another \$700,000 for mitigation costs that went to the city.

Finally, Warden, who is a software engineer, also doubles as a geometry teacher at Ralston Elementary School. He was awarded the outstanding new teacher award for his efforts. Warden has his own business, so he doesn't need the job at Ralston, but does it because he enjoys it.

When it comes to vision and leadership, Warden has demonstrated that he is proactive on the Belmont City Council, where he has made a difference. Here is a guy who just doesn't pussyfoot around when he is either for or against something. That's leadership.

Mayor - City Council Warden
The Independent
Feb 25, 03

Belmont City Council
The Independent
March 1, 03

City leaders find new budget cuts

City to save \$1.3 million by eliminating services, raising fees in other areas

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — City Council approved some fiscal fine-tuning Tuesday leading into the next budget year.

City officials will spend money on a part-time police dispatcher and roof repairs at Barrett Community Center as well as improvements to storm drains.

But the bulk of the night's discussion was about the \$1.3 million the city will have to cut because of the soft economy. City leaders said a drop in sales and hotel taxes, coupled with increased costs of the retirement system for public employees have forced the city to cut back on services and raise fees. Once again, they reiterated that the cuts are manageable and that the city will be able to

withstand the corrections.

"Belmont is managing through tough times, but I'm confident that we will make it," City Manager Jere Kersnar said.

The council agreed to cut funding for consulting in the Public Works Department and eliminate printing the community calendar and activity guide. Councilmembers think voters will not miss these services.

Councilmembers also made light of the Police Department's loss in funding for training with weapons of mass destruction. But Kersnar said that the reality is that the Belmont police force is understaffed and unable to carry out extra services.

"In these tight times, with no

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federal money, we're not in a position to do anything locally," he said.

Belmont also has a \$1.1 million provision in place if Gov. Gray Davis enacts his proposal to use city dollars to fix the state deficit. That worst-case plan calls for more drastic measures, such as shutting down City Hall during the winter holidays, losing two police officers and setting a utility tax that would require voter approval.

"These are sacred cows," said Councilmember Dave Warden.

The city hopes to make up part of the difference by raising fees for alarm permits and day-care permits. The city will also raise garbage rates, which would translate to an average increase of \$23 a year. Water fees are also going up — but less than \$7 a year for the average household.

Warden expressed concern at the city's

goes without

decision to make up the shortfall with increased fees, saying he would prefer to put the revenues as part of a package that would be triggered if the city loses more money due to legislative action in Sacramento.

Kersnar said the decision to increase fees now was a tactical one, designed to best demonstrate to state lawmakers how their votes would cut services in the city. It would have less impact in Sacramento, if they waited until the legislators enact their plan to collect more city fees, he said.

"Frankly, we should put the legislators in a position of knowing how taking away money will affect us. If we increase fees, that's not skin off their nose," Kersnar said. "We should put the city in the best position vis-à-vis our legislators."

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CITY COUNCIL
THE INDEPENDENT
MARCH 1, 2003

City leaders find new budget cuts

City to save \$1.3 million by eliminating services, raising fees in other areas

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — City Council approved some fiscal fine-tuning Tuesday leading into the next budget year.

City officials will spend money on a part-time police dispatcher and roof repairs at Barrett Community Center as well as improvements to storm drains.

But the bulk of the night's discussion was about the \$1.3 million the city will have to cut because of the soft economy. City leaders said a drop in sales and hotel taxes, coupled with increased costs of the retirement system for public employees have forced the city to cut back on services and raise fees. Once again, they reiterated that the cuts are manageable and that the city will be able to

withstand the corrections.

"Belmont is managing through tough times, but I'm confident that we will make it," City Manager Jere Kersnar said.

The council agreed to cut funding for consulting in the Public Works Department and eliminate printing the community calendar and activity guide. Councilmembers think voters will not miss these services.

Councilmembers also made light of the Police Department's loss in funding for training with weapons of mass destruction. But Kersnar said that the reality is that the Belmont police force is understaffed and unable to carry out extra services.

"In these tight times, with no

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MARCH 1, 2003

federal money, we're not in a position to do anything locally," he said.

Belmont also has a \$1.1 million provision in place if Gov. Gray Davis enacts his proposal to use city dollars to fix the state deficit. That worst-case plan calls for more drastic measures, such as shutting down City Hall during the winter holidays, losing two police officers and setting a utility tax that would require voter approval.

"These are sacred cows," said Councilmember Dave Warden.

The city hopes to make up part of the difference by raising fees for alarm permits and day-care permits. The city will also raise garbage rates, which would translate to an average increase of \$23 a year. Water fees are also going up — but less than \$7 a year for the average household.

Warden expressed concern at the city's

decision to make up the shortfall with increased fees, saying he would prefer to put the revenues as part of a package that would be triggered if the city loses more money due to legislative action in Sacramento.

Kersnar said the decision to increase fees now was a tactical one, designed to best demonstrate to state lawmakers how their votes would cut services in the city. It would have less impact in Sacramento, if they waited until the legislators enact their plan to collect more city fees, he said.

"Frankly, we should put the legislators in a position of knowing how taking away money will affect us. If we increase fees, that's not skin off their nose," Kersnar said. "We should put the city in the best position vis-à-vis our legislators."

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CITY GOVERNMENT
THE INDEPENDENT
MARCH 8, 2003

Citizens rush to advise Belmont elected officials

City leaders pleased that so many find time to participate

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — If the number of people who have been stopping by the City Clerk's office is any indication, interest in public service is running high these days.

The city had been recruiting residents interested in serving on advisory commissions and lately the office has been inundated. There are 14 positions

open in the Arts, Finance, Parks and Recreation, and Planning commissions, and 25 residents have submitted their names for consideration.

"It pleasantly surprises me that many people are stepping up," said William Dickenson, who is vying for a seat on either the Planning or Arts commissions. "That's good."

Commissioners advise City Council on policy matters. While commissioners get satisfaction from helping to shape their community, not every meeting is full of fun and games. There is the dry minu-

tia of city affairs to consider.

"Most of the time, it's interesting and challenging. There's a little bit of boredom and, sometimes, sheer terror," said Planning Commissioner Warren Gibson, who is seeking a second term on the commission.

The city can thank the tanking economy as one of the reasons people are suddenly willing to participate in Belmont's affairs. Some unemployed residents want to put their professional skills to good use.

"I've climbed as high as I wanted to climb," said Garde-

nia Kimmey, a computer scientist who was laid off two years ago. Kimmey said she has enjoyed her time as a homemaker and a mom, but she would also like to translate her appreciation of the symphony and the theater into something good for the city.

"I don't want to continue the career I was trained in," she said. "My priorities have changed. I'd like to do something for people."

Observers said that interest in city-related affairs comes and goes, but this year, in particular, with financial con-

cerns affecting all parts of Belmont, public service may be more crucial.

"With the budget problem, people are focusing more on schools and the city," said Planning Commission Chair Phil Mathewson. "There's a lot of renewed interest in the city of Belmont and people want to be a part of that."

"Belmont has gone through a cycle, and people are caring about the community," Dickenson said.

CITY COUNCIL
THE INDEPENDENT
MARCH 15, 2003

OVER

Council ranks its priorities

Belmont staff can use planning tool to allocate resources wisely

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — City Council decided to re-examine commercial zoning, restore creeks and sidewalks and develop an arts center at Ralston Middle School during a six-month planning review Tuesday.

"These are community needs that come up a lot," said Councilmember George Metropulos.

These are nonetheless newer projects that were left off the list when the council last reviewed its priorities six months ago. The city already has major projects in the works, such as the completion of the fire station, the replacement of the police station and City Hall and the update of Belmont's general plan, all of which have been ongoing for some time or are to take place in the coming year.

"At the next meeting, we will see how they fit in with existing priorities," said Mayor Paul Wright.

Wright said that the ongoing projects might continue to take priority over the newer ideas.

"I don't know that there's anything on that list that will jump to the top," he said.

However, one of the priorities speaks to easing the city's financial situation, a welcome topic these days. Revising the list of permitted uses in commercial zones could broaden the economic development for the city and, consequently, bring in more sales and hotel taxes.

"Because the revenues are so important to cities, we can go forward to have more control of our financial destiny," Wright said.

While the city may not get to these newer priorities, which are a mixed bag of project development and policy evaluation, the council said the ranking process gives the city's staff guidance on how to best allocate their resources.

"Without the priority process, we have little objective way to decide where our staff should direct its efforts," Wright said. "We're trying to run the city as effectively as possible."

Other items that received attention from the councilmembers last week included updating parking standards, adding young people to the city's Arts Commission and relaxing the city's standards on

PLANNING: Priorities set twice a year

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granny flats — cottages in backyards with their own entrances that can be rented out. The list of these priorities originated from comments and concerns that the council, commissions, city staff and citizens bring up on a regular basis.

“Parking hits the hot button in a lot of ways,” said Planning Commission Chair Phil Mathewson.

City Council has been reviewing priorities twice a year for the past couple of years, but Wright said it might end this biannual process. Priorities should not change that fre-

quently, he said.

“The consensus is that doing the process once after the November council reorganization is more than enough,” Wright said.

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CITY COUNCIL
(YOUTH COMMISSION)
THE INDEPENDENT
MARCH 18, 2003

Belmont shows interest in youth commission

**Councilmembers
impressed by young,
interested candidates**

By MICHELE LEUNG
Independent Newspapers

BELMONT — City officials see the advantage of adding young guns to their arsenal.

By adding volunteer spots for young people on existing advisory boards and even a youth commission, Belmont officials hope to benefit from some fresh ideas.

Five students applied for the two youth positions on the

Parks and Recreation Commission. The councilmembers said they were impressed by the candidates' interest and poise.

"We're missing out on talent and on teaching them how the government works," said Councilmember Dave Bauer. "I don't want to lose touch, and I won't want to lose their fire."

City Council was only able to pick two, but some felt the city could benefit from the creation of a separate body of young people who advise the council, just as other commissions would.

"We realized that a lot of kids

were really good," said Councilmember Dave Warden. "It was hard to pick between them. I felt it's really hard to say no to kids that want to get in government."

Emily Shine was one of the first two students to sit on the Parks and Recreation Commission. As a senior at Notre Dame High School, she finished up her term this month and wholly supports the idea of a full-fledged youth body in Belmont's government.

"More ideas would be put into the mix," she said. "You never know with kids, they put

all their efforts into one idea. The pace would be quickened."

George Kranen, a former commissioner, first pushed for the idea two years ago. His goal was to bring a younger perspective to city affairs.

"There are all kinds of things and issues that are important to young people that aren't important to me as an adult," he said. "People who serve on City Council are old fogies."

Kranen would not care particularly about a youth hangout, but that is Erica Goodwin's objective — to get a teen center in Belmont.

"That's my ultimate goal," said Goodwin, the other current youth commissioner. Goodwin is a freshman at Carlmont High School and has been reappointed for a second year.

San Carlos was one of the first local cities to have official youth participation in government, according to Assistant City Manager Brian Moura. Its Youth Advisory Council has been around since 1992. City leaders have relied on their youth commissioners to test ideas and gauge the youth

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population's temperature in San Carlos. For example, it was the youth commission that came up with the SCOOT shuttle name.

"What we're finding is that if there are kids who are going to use it, we have got to go to the youth advisory committee for their input," Moura said "They're the consumers."

The San Carlos Youth Advisory Council has been involved organizing a Youth

in Government Day later this month, so that interested kids can meet with various city departments and learn more how a city operates. They have also developed a partnership with their counterparts in Calgary, Canada, hosting them for a teen conference San Carlos put on.

"The kids are in it for the same reason you and I would do something, and that's to provide service to the community," said Barry Weiss, San Carlos director of parks

and recreation. He added that those who are involved simply to pad resumes are spotted fairly quickly and screened out.

San Carlos' Youth Advisory Council may be more established, but Belmont's current youth ambassadors are willing to work through the initial hurdles so that their concerns and issues may be brought to the forefront.

Goodwin continues to work towards a center where young people can congregate

in Belmont. And she is pushing for it just like her San Carlos neighbors pushed for theirs. While finances may slow her efforts, getting her hands dirty in the process is still worthwhile.

"I like getting involved and being able to speak up to adults and shape my own future," Goodwin said. "I want to be a lawyer."