

Fresno County supervisors get list of priority projects

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Fresno County supervisors have \$18.4 million to spend on projects around the county.

The only problem: the county has a priority list of projects that amount to more than \$55 million.

The county received money from the state in three separate funds. The first is from repayment of \$11 million that the county paid for state mandates during the budget crisis, money that was supposed to be paid initially by the state. The money can be used on any type of project.

The county also has about \$1.87 million from Proposition 172, money earmarked for public safety projects. The third pot of money is \$5.54 million in tobacco fund dollars, which also has certain restrictions for county use.

The projects being considered include a new animal shelter, a new sheriff's substation in southeast Fresno and ways to pay for a new district attorney's facility. Other projects include repairs and additions at Fresno County Jail and the Fresno County Coroner's Office.

The county also has a long list of maintenance projects, including several heating and air conditioning projects, roof repairs and electrical work.

"We have a number of facilities that have deferred maintenance needs for more than 10 years," said County Administrative Officer John Navarrette.

He said the board should focus on projects that will offer the most return on investment.

"All these issues we will have to address at some point, but you only have so many dollars," Navarrette said.

The funding is all "one-time" money, and board members said the county shouldn't spend money on projects that need funding year after year.

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John Navarrette, Fresno County Administrative Officer

Board Chairwoman Debbie Pochigian said deferred maintenance is an area that the board should seriously consider.

"Over the last seven years we've spent virtually nothing on upkeep of facilities, and I think a chunk of this one-time money needs to go to maintenance and repairs," she said. "With the budget issues we had, those were all put on the back burner."

Supervisors will likely reach no conclusions on projects, but it will be the first opportunity to learn where members place the county's priorities.

"I don't see us making decisions, but just react to the list, maybe come up with a short list or just keep talking about it," said Supervisor Henry R. Perea, who views a new animal shelter, district attorney's office and sheriff's substation as his top priorities.

Supervisor Buddy Mendes said he doesn't have any immediate priorities, but thinks the county should focus on

centralizing offices instead of having employees scattered in different parts of the community.

Supervisor Brian Pacheco said he is flexible when it comes to which projects are built, but he wants to live within the budget.

“I’d like to check off as many as I can, but we definitely have to live within our means,” he said.

Supervisor Andreas Borgeas views the district attorney’s office as a significant priority. Although the project has a price tag of \$15 million to \$19 million, he said there are ways to fund a project through a lease-purchase that won’t cost anywhere near that amount.

He also said the \$18.4 million available through these three programs is not the only money the county has for these projects.

“It’s a comprehensive list of projects, but this is only identifying a few funding sources and listing almost all eligible projects,” he said.

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