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Substation tops list

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Two long awaited projects for El Dorado Hills residents - a sheriff's substation and senior center - moved to the top of the county's five-year capital improvement plan at last week's Board of Supervisors meeting.

Along with the planned expansion of the county's jail facilities in Placerville, the three items were pulled from a list of dozens of planned countywide projects and made priorities by District 2 Supervisor Helen Baumann in a motion that passed 3-1.

"There's a lot that needs to be done," Baumann told the Telegraph. "Our biggest function is (public health and safety), so it made sense to put the sheriff's substation at the top of the county's list" pending the results of last year's election.

Neves' desire is to locate the facility in the Bass Lake region. The county is currently conducting a needs assessment to determine viable sites. Earlier discussions involved the possibility of locating the substation on land belonging to the El Dorado Hills Fire Department.

With costs estimated at \$4.3 million and Neves ballparking the figure at closer to \$5 million, funding for the substation has yet to be identified.

Some developer dollars are being sought, said Baumann, which may come in the form of a public safety impact fee.

"Because the capital project needs of the county exceed the funding available, the CAO (county administrative officer) requested the Sheriff and the Auditor-Controller identify non-general fund monies for this project," stated County Auditor-Controller Joe Harn in a letter to the supervisors. "After discussions with representatives from the CAO, AKT Development Company, Parker Development Company, and the Building Industry Association, the Sheriff and Auditor-Controller determined that it was appropriate for your Board to consider a building permit fee pursuant to the Mitigation Fee Act. It is proposed the fee only be levied in the area served by the new substation."

Further along is a planned senior center in El Dorado Hills, with both the site and some funding already identified. The plan is to convert the former El Dorado Hills fire station building on Lassen Lane to a nutrition and day care facility for area seniors.

"(This) fell right under public health and safety as well," said Baumann, adding the center would provide countywide relief for a program that boasts "a huge waiting list. "We need to act and address that."

District 1 Supervisor Rusty Dupray said a senior center in El Dorado Hills has been a priority for the five years he has been on the board. The county is one year into a five-year, \$1 per year lease with the fire district.

Dupray said the county has to look at "whether or not it's going to be economical to move them in on a permanent basis or build a new one," but added they hope to have the senior center up and running before summer.

The cost is estimated at \$750,000, with another \$100,000 identified for road and site improvements. Baumann said the county has set aside \$200,000 in community enhancement funds.

While all three projects were approved as priorities, the five-year CIP will come back before the board in June for adoption during the county's midyear budget process.

"Both those projects are really needed in the western slope," said Dupray.

El Dorado Hills currently has a satellite office, which Sheriff Jeff Neves said was "simply kind of a storefront" with a community resource officer assigned to handle minor law enforcement issues.

Neves envisions a 12,000 square foot, full service facility with a staff of 45 to 50 law enforcement personnel working directly out of that building, giving El Dorado Hills and its surrounding communities a law enforcement presence it hasn't had since, well, ever.

"We just can't wait any longer," Baumann said of the planned substation, which became prime grist for last year's defeated incorporation measure.

While a timetable for completing the substation hadn't yet been developed, Neves said his hope was "that it be completed within the next 24 months."

The sheriff has been working on the project for two years already, with earlier efforts hamstrung by tough budget years, and then put off again.

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