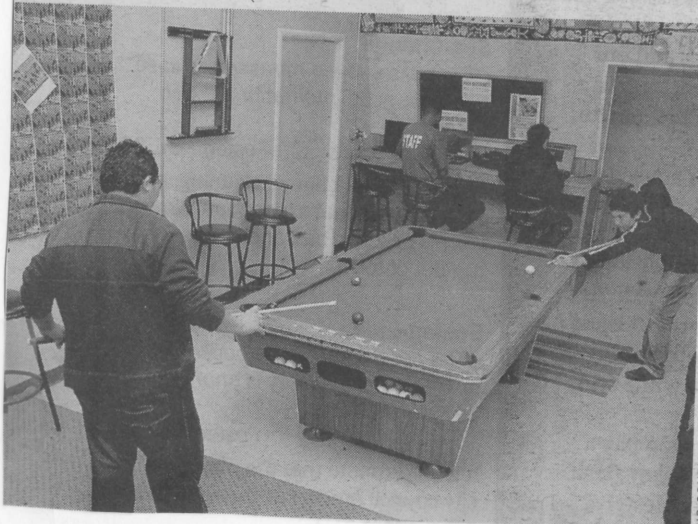


MONTEREY COUNTY WEEKLY

Salinas Blues

Firefighter, cops, library hours may be on chopping block.
By Zachary Stahl



Reckless Behavior: Salinas will consider closing its four recreation centers, including the Hebborn Heights center (left) to balance its books.

Faced with a \$9 million budget hole next fiscal year, Salinas will have to battle gangs with fewer city services. City officials pitched Measure K to hire more cops and beef up gang prevention programs, but on Nov. 3 voters overwhelmingly rejected the 1-cent sales tax hike. "The community basically said, 'For the time being you got to work with what you got,'" says Mayor Dennis Donohue. "With that statement comes the reality that we are going to have to eliminate some of the programs and services we currently have."

Salinas' four recreation centers could close. Library hours and after-school programs may be scaled back. Firefighters and civilian cops could lose their jobs. City Manager Artie Fields is looking for ways to save money immediately. Temporary and part-time employees could be on the chopping block, and Fields is planning to ask the council to reopen employee contracts at its Dec. 1 closed session meeting. "I don't want to leave any stone unturned," he says.

Fields has talked with the library department about a \$400,000 cut, including closing the libraries for two days a week. "We are just brainstorming at this point," Fields says, adding that the council hasn't discussed trimming back library hours yet.

The city is seeking public input on the budget gap at a Dec. 16 meeting with all city commissions at Sherwood Hall. "Every city department will create breakout sessions so that the public can talk about cuts that are being proposed," Fields says.

Leaders of the pro- and anti-Measure K camps have called on the City Council to form a blue-ribbon citizens' committee to scour the city's budget. Brett Landon, chairman of the No on K cam-

paign, and Steve Ish, co-chair of A Penny for Peace, want to bring together the opposing sides, along with representatives from labor, business, and accounting experts, to take a hard look at city spending, including employee benefits and outsourcing services.

Ish says it's clear from Measure K's failure that residents don't trust government. "What the blue-ribbon committee has the ability to do is act as that independent group to come in and verify what the city's positions are," he says.

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Landon hopes to find \$1 million in savings beyond the \$9 million deficit to apply toward the public safety shortfall that led the council to declare an emergency in July. "We need to find \$10 million," Landon says. "There isn't going to be a department we are not going to look at."

The council will consider forming the committee Tuesday, Dec. 1, Fields says. Ish says the committee would present its recommendations to council by March 1. "Wanting to come back and try a different version of Measure K very well could be an outcome," he says.

Donohue says a future tax measure is now in the community's hands, and the city needs to get residents involved with the budget. "We know these cuts will be painful," he says. "We want to invite the community so they are aware of them, because we got to make difficult decisions."

At least one community group is stepping up. Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, detailed its peace strategy of community policing, expanded recreational programs and parental involvement on Sunday, Nov. 22, at a convention attended by 800 delegates and Rep. Sam Farr. ✪