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## Staff and council acknowledge maintenance and asset replacement systemic shortfall

By Sophie Braccini



Graphic provided

The figures have not changed, but the attitude and framing may have. For years, budget presentations focused on the town's balanced operating budget, minimizing the asset replacement needs. This year, however, Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg opened her presentation by indicating the cost of the shortfall - \$1.5 million a year - and promised that staff would come back in the coming months with a strategy to fill in the gap.

During its final June 28 budget presentation town staff explained that the operational budget of \$9.5 million was balanced but that it had estimated the unfunded asset replacement needs for roads, drains, facilities, parks and equipment to be about \$1.5 million. The city manager said that there simply was not enough money; only \$100,000 from the operating budget is allocated to capital improvement.

Council Member Kymberleigh Korpus said she would rather not wait for staff's future analysis and midyear revisions and would want all possible money to be allocated right now to what Council Member Roger Wykle calls the big five: roads, storm drains, the unfunded pension liability that continues to go up, the asset replacement fund that has not been funded in years, and new legal challenges. Korpus wanted to reconsider all the priorities, including the money allocated for improvements to the Hacienda to bring the building into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; the way finding plan; the livable Moraga Road corridor plan; and electronic information signs.

Wykle also asked that the issues of the rampant longstanding shortfall be day lighted, and more prominently communicated to the public. One resident who was in attendance at the meeting and shared that desire for transparency, Steve Woehleke, acknowledged that there is a shortfall in infrastructure investment, but asked why this was not covered in the current budget. He said that not addressing the gap at this time was creating a credibility gap and that it was a town council issue, not a staff issue.

Battenberg explained that the town was required to present a balanced budget, but that her team would look in more detail to the shortfalls within two months, and strategize with the council on how to address it.

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