

Complicated Recommended County Budget Moves Forward

July 11, 2024



The Budget discussion was complicated, oft-times confusing and most certainly robust.

The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors directed staff to move forward on the ten appendages of the fiscal year 2024-25 Del Norte County Budget.

A modest public audience was in attendance with County department heads available to answer the plethora of questions coming from the Supervisors.

The marathon Budget discussion alone lasted almost 2 ½ hours.

A major bone of contention was the level of wages for County employees and the frustration level in having vital work performed on priority projects such as roads improvements.

1st District Supervisor, Darrin Short began his quest to determine specific line item issues. During Short's inquiries on recommended Budget items, Short expressed his disappointment in funding wages for the Roads Department. "the Roads Department is woefully understaffed, and can hardly put a flagging team together much less complete a project. I'd like to pay our Roads Dept more. I've reached out to truckers who declined working for the County due to low wages," lamented Short.

2nd District Supervisor Valerie Starkey followed up expediently, brought to the Public's attention the price of fuel in Del Norte includes a \$.50 per gallon state surcharge tax to fund SB 1 Roads improvements. Starkey reminded her colleagues \$1.5 million has been distributed but unspent to Del Norte County, due to the County's inability to attract Roads maintenance crew to perform the necessary work, projects cannot be completed. Starkey proposed significant changes in the salary schedule for Roads employees. Starkey shared, "Unfortunately, we can't get these improvements done because Roads is so grossly understaffed." Starkey continued, "\$18.77 to \$20.55 per hour entry level wages for Step 1 must be improved. Starkey praised Roads workers and asked her colleagues to significantly raise salaries in an effort to attract workers and keep our streets and roads safe. "The time is now to make Roads a priority."

Starkey's comments were met with cautious concern from Chief Administrative Officer Neal Lopez. "There is so much more to consider going into increasing wages. You have an overall County structure to consider. Other departments will be severely impacted by significant salary increases for just one department." CAO Lopez is the individual on the Budget Team for conducting comparable salary schedules and negotiations with Union-represented employees.

The frustration of attracting labor with admittedly lower wages was palpable.

Starkey remained focused and adamant. "How much is this (issue) costing the County in not having this work done"?

SEIU 1021 Union representative Norma Williams vowed she would oppose selective pay raises at the expense of her Union constituency.

After a series of false start motions, Supervisor Borges with a second from Chairman Wilson, introduced a motion to bring this discussion of wage adjustments to the second meeting in July after review with the Budget Team. The vote was unanimous.

Item six of the Recommended 24/25 Budget, adding a series Budget workshops for future fiscal year budget discussion was also approved.

All appendages of the upcoming budget were directed and approved for discussion and will ultimately be voted on in August / September.

The Board meets again July 9 at 10am at the Flynn Center.

<https://triplicate.com/news/589a676e-38c2-11ef-b716-0761a246af9e>

Printed October 8, 2026 · © Del Norte Triplicate