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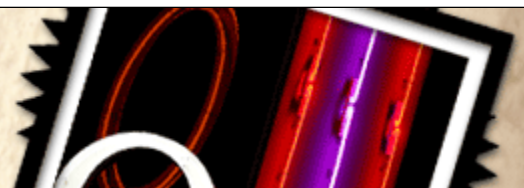
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NORTHWEST

Marana weighs 64% increase in annual budget

By Aaron Mackey

arizona daily star

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Several large construction projects slated to begin in the next year have pushed Marana's proposed budget to \$209.8 million, an increase of about 64 percent from last year.

The rapid spending increase — the budget has more than doubled in the past two years, from \$93 million in 2005 — is because the town is spending money on big-ticket items such as an Interstate 10 interchange, road widenings and other infrastructure improvements, town officials said.

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Marana's Town Council will consider approving the budget, an \$81.8 million increase from last year's \$128 million total, during a meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday.

Residents shouldn't expect the budget to continue to climb at such a high rate because many of the expenses in the past few years are one-time costs, said Town Manager Mike Reuwsaat.

"We will have a healthy (capital improvement budget) as other projects come on board, but probably less than what is projected for the next two to three years," Reuwsaat said in an e-mail.

Officials propose to use nearly 80 percent of this year's budget, or \$164 million, on roadway, airport and wastewater improvements.

Most of those projects, such as the Twin Peaks Interchange, would be paid for through a mix of bonds, special taxes and development fees.

Operating budget grows

While the town's improvement project budget has ballooned in recent years, the day-

By the numbers

\$209.8 million

Proposed budget for 2007-08

64

Percent increase from last year

\$164 million

Proposed spending on construction such as the Twin Peaks Interchange, airport and wastewater improvements

\$39.4 million

Proposed operating budget to cover to-day expenses

If you go

- What: Marana Town Council hearing.

- When: 6 p.m. Tuesday.

- Where: Marana Municipal Center, 11555 W. Civic Center Drive.

Marana Says

Do you think the cost of big construction in Marana justifies the budget increase of 64 percent?

 Yes.

 No.

 It's better to pay for those improvements now rather than later.

to-day operating budget has grown incrementally to correspond with population growth.

The town spent \$32 million in 2005 to cover personnel costs and other expenses associated with running the town. This year's budget would include \$39.4 million for operations.

To pay for part of the planned improvements and other increased costs such as employee benefits, officials plan to use \$42.6 million of the town's reserves.

The town has \$70.1 million in its reserves and would be left with \$31.5 million at the end of the next fiscal year, said Erik Montague, the finance director.

Marana is working to secure a number of water resources, including a wastewater treatment facility, and has requested \$42.6 million for the projects.

The town is trying to buy the county's Marana Wastewater Treatment Facility so it can control the effluent generated by the town.

It would use the water to count toward its 100-year assured water supply. Without the water, the town could be forced to slow residential development.

The county isn't interested in selling the plant, which is scheduled for expansion, though town officials might try to use a 1979 agreement between the two entities to gain control of the plant.

Road, airport projects slated

The budget also includes \$30.6 million for the long-awaited Twin Peaks Interchange, which would run over I-10 roughly halfway between the Cortaro and Avra Valley interchanges.

Officials estimate the interchange will cost \$90 million and will be funded over several years using a mix of town impact fees, state contributions and county funding through the RTA and Pima Association of Governments.

Other road projects slated for the next year include \$12.9 million to widen North Thornydale Road north of West Orange Grove Road to the Cañada del Oro bridge and \$16.4 million to widen North Silverbell Road between West Ina and West Cortaro roads.

Marana Regional Airport would get \$12.7 million for several projects, including money for land acquisition and a new taxiway.

The budget proposal also includes a \$1 million contingency fund that could be used for emergencies such as flood damage cleanup.

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The town's operating budget, which is funded primarily through sales taxes, would cover 20 new positions, including an economic development director and transportation administrator.

The town projects that it will save \$11.2 million from its general fund, part of a budget plan that requires at least 25 percent of the operating budget be conserved

- *Contact reporter Aaron Mackey at 618-1924 or amackey@azstarnet.com.*



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