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Sarasota County initiates mid-year budget reductions

In preparation for a mid-year budget reduction on March 23, Sarasota County announced today plans to eliminate a total of 56 positions; 24 will likely be layoffs. This action is expected to reduce the size of the workforce by 309 positions since April 2007, mirroring 2002 staffing levels.

“The decision to eliminate positions is never easy and never a first step, but these reductions are necessary to help us gain efficiencies that will allow us to maintain acceptable levels of service to our citizens,” wrote County Administrator Jim Ley in a message to employees Tuesday afternoon. “That does not make the emotional aspects of the decision any easier, and I share with you a sense of loss.”

To offer affected employees more time to seek new job opportunities and transition their workload, Sarasota County has given early notification to the employees who will be impacted, and final notification is not expected to occur until March 24. At that time, employees will be offered two weeks pay in lieu of notice and will become eligible for the new COBRA subsidy offered under the federal economic stimulus package.

On March 23, Chief Financial Planning Officer Jeff Seward will present an amendment to county commissioners to decrease the overall fiscal year 2009 budget. According to Seward, the reduction is necessary to keep the budget in balance considering continued revenues losses in sales taxes, gas taxes, state revenue sharing, tourist development taxes and impact fees.

“We want to emphasize that the reductions we’re making now are a result of ongoing increases to efficiencies and a continuing dedication on higher performance that enables us to make these reductions without an adverse impact to the community,” said Seward.

“Making these reductions now will help us to not only offset current revenue shortfalls but also create some fund balance to meet continued revenues losses for our fiscal year 2010 budget,” added Seward. “At the same time, we will consider other options such as salary freezes and furloughs to lessen the need for further layoffs.”

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