

City wants to cut budget 3 percent

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Gillette will need to tighten its belt this coming budget year but there still are a lot of projects that will get done, even as much of the country heads into a sharp recession

City Administrator Mike Muirhead said Monday that he has asked the city's departments to cut 3 percent out their operating and capital budgets. He also gave the City Council a preliminary infrastructure budget that is \$22 million less than the \$40.3 million originally requested by the departments, but said the budget still is sufficient to get the city's high priority projects done.

"The city is still financially very stable and we still have a lot of new projects planned, but this is a good year to focus on finishing the projects already under way and to reduce our capital budget," he said.

Most of the city's infrastructure projects are paid from the Optional 1 Percent Sales Tax fund. Of the \$22 million saved, \$19 million was in the 1 percent fund and \$3 million was from projects that would have been paid for out of the city's general fund.

Muirhead said the city was able to cut the \$22 million either by cutting projects or by moving projects around so that the funding for them was broken up and budgeted for future years. This will give the city the flexibility to accommodate national economic changes.

At the same time, the city will be busy with projects ranging from repairs to the Gurley Avenue overpass to new pathways to a massive sewer pipeline overhaul, he said. The state also will be spearheading the new Burma Avenue overpass and expansion and the reconstruction of the northern part of South Douglas Highway. Ongoing work at the Gillette College Technical Center and the Recreation Center also will continue.

The end result is that Gillette is not going to look much like a city in recession.

The biggest projects on the horizon are, as usual, road oriented.

One that will impact residents is the repairs to the Gurley Avenue overpass.

"This is going to mean the overpass will be shut down for a month sometime in about mid-June or July after the schools are closed," said Jim Evensen, city engineering and building supervisor.

The Gurley Avenue overpass is aging and needs to be shored up to be safe. It is also one of the city's few north-south crossings over the railroad and closing it will put more pressure on the other crossings.

"That's going to be tough on the public," said Councilman Everett Boss. "The trains can block Brooks (Avenue) for hours. I wonder if there is any way to get the railroad to stop blocking Brooks for so long, at least during the construction."

Evensen said he would talk with the railroad about the issue.

Gillette's parks also will get a lot of attention this year. The city will be putting in \$390 million of pathways, \$629 million of park improvements, and will expand the Little League Field.

Major 2009 ROAD PROJECTS

- Country Club Road
- Cocklebur Road
- Slate Street
- Foothills Boulevard
- Enzi Drive

- Boxelder Road
- Burma Avenue overpass and extension
- South Douglas Highway, northern half
- A large project to replace the Stonepile Creek sewer pipe also will impact streets from Fourth Street and Gurley Avenue to the Foothills area.