

Redevelopment to the rescue

Despite complaining, it's smarter to shift revenue than to cut core services.

Said one Long Beach City Council member about a budget proposal: "We have no choice in the matter, but how could you possibly think this would be OK?"

Nobody really said it would be OK, but in fact it will be. The city of Long Beach plans to dip into redevelopment funds to pay down its share of debt on the Aquarium of the Pacific and on the Convention Center. This will prevent cutting millions from core city services.

The councilwoman who made the comment was Rae Gabelich, who, knowing the proposal was much better than the alternative, voted against it anyway. So did three others, including Val Lerch (who is running for re-election) and Tonia Reyes Uranga (some of whose Westside constituents were agitated about it).

Let's look at the Westside, whose Redevelopment Project Area will get tapped for several million dollars, much to the distress of Reyes Uranga, who represents the area. But over the next five or so years that project area still would collect tens of millions of dollars, and hasn't even come up with plans to spend all the money that will roll in.

The Westside Project Area Committee didn't support the budget transaction, but the North Project Area Committee, which also would get tapped, did, and for good reason. It, too, will benefit hugely from Port of Long Beach expansion that will generate many millions in redevelopment tax revenue.

In all, the city will apply \$27 million toward paying off a loan from the Harbor Department that helped finance expansion of the Convention Center, and \$8 million of aquarium debt (the aquarium is paying off the other half). This is money the Westside and North Long Beach redevelopment project areas otherwise would get.

Not only is this better than chopping already depleted city services, there is a fairness issue. Tax revenue generated by port activity should benefit the entire city, not just areas that happen to be nearby or have redevelopment projects lined up.

The budget proposal passed, as predicted, 5-4. Those who wisely approved it included council members Dee Andrews, Gary DeLong, Suja Lowenthal, and, with only a little grumbling, Robert Garcia.

As for unhappy Westsiders, maybe Councilwoman Reyes Uranga can help come up with a plan for, say, underground utilities. That's something they've wanted for years, and the redevelopment money hasn't run out yet.