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### City shows its pricey way of life

How L.A. government spends your money  
BY KERRY CAVANAUGH, Staff Writer

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Printing and binding city reports: \$6 million.

Calligraphers to decorate proclamations and honors: \$550,000.

Pet food for animal shelters: \$529,000.

The cost of running Los Angeles city government: pricey.

The expenses are just a few among millions of detailed items that make up a \$6.8 billion budget the City Council is set to approve this week.

The massive budget needed to keep the nation's second-largest city operating translates into enough money to buy four NASA space shuttles at about \$1.7 billion a pop.

And after spending plans are adopted next month by departments that are run like proprietary businesses - including the port, Los Angeles World Airports and the Department of Water and Power - the citywide budget will top \$17.9 billion.

But while big-ticket items like expanding the Los Angeles Police Department get the most attention, tens of millions of dollars are spent each year on myriad little things that keep the wheels of government turning.

Take \$109,000 for portable toilets for a variety of work and construction sites.

Or \$130,000 for book binding by the library.

Or \$10 million for uniforms and at least \$48,000 for

uniform-cleaning services.

"If you are less familiar with the way the city operates, some of this stuff seems



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odd. But operationally you need to fund this stuff to make the city run," said Councilman Bernard Parks.

Parks heads the council's Budget and Finance Committee and has overseen more than 50 hours of budget hearings in the last month.

"If you fund just police and fire operations, you don't have a city. You need the cultural programs, the education programs, the small-business assistance programs."

Running a city that is larger than some nations is no easy - or cheap - task.

The city of Los Angeles has more than 37,000 employees, and two-thirds of the \$6.79 billion budget is dedicated to salaries and benefits.

Add in the port, airport and DWP, and there are 50,000 employees citywide. That's more people than the population of



Olympia, the capital of Washington state.

Cast of thousands

As the city's largest department with a \$1.2 billion allocation, the LAPD has 14,245 employees budgeted, including badge-carrying officers and nonsworn personnel.

But also among the LAPD's ranks are four gardeners and two cabinetmakers, and a nutritionist will soon be hired. The LAPD's chief psychologist, Kevin Jablonski, sought the new position to help improve the fitness of all police employees - but particularly recruits who are a little chubbier than their predecessors.

"We've got more recruits coming in who are overweight, and I want this person to work diligently to get them on track. We call it lifetime fitness," Jablonski said.

Meanwhile, over at City Hall, there is a little-noticed team of expert calligraphers. City Clerk Frank Martinez has a staff of nine in the creative-services group: four calligraphers, four clerks and the team's chief, who is also a calligrapher. Together, they decorate more than 28,000 resolutions, proclamations and commendations a year.

Staffing costs \$550,000 a year, with the mayor and council members, who request the honors, picking up the tab for supplies from their own budgets.

"Our stuff is well known throughout the country for the quality," Martinez said, proudly. "I've seen resolutions from the state and from the county. We think ours are the very best as far as impressiveness of artwork and calligraphy."

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This year's proposed budget will leave Los Angeles residents spending about 80 percent of every city-tax dollar on police, fire protection, wastewater treatment and other public safety and infrastructure services.

Cultural and educational programs make up 2 percent of the budget, with programs to fund book fairs and film festivals.

This year, the city is budgeting \$100,000 for the Latino and Pan African film festivals, \$290,000 for artists in residence and \$350,000 for festivities celebrating Asian Pacific Islander and other heritage months.

Taxpayer groups question the necessity of funding such programs, particularly in a tight budget year that includes fee increases and cuts to basic city services like street repairs.

"A lot of the spending priorities are driven by special interest and not by the public at large. If you put a lot of these things to the voters, I think a lot would be voted down," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

"A lot of city spending is feel-good spending. I know it feels good to help people - but not on the expense of taxpayers."

But city leaders said funding cultural and educational programs helps enliven Los Angeles and make it a more appealing place to residents and visitors.

"Delivery of services is important, but we also spend to make this a great city so tourists visit and spend money and we get the tax money to fix the streets and trim the trees," said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who is on the city's budget committee.

"The details matter in the city. Half a million here and a million dollars there make a big difference in how the city operates."

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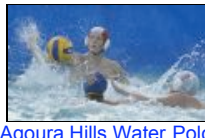
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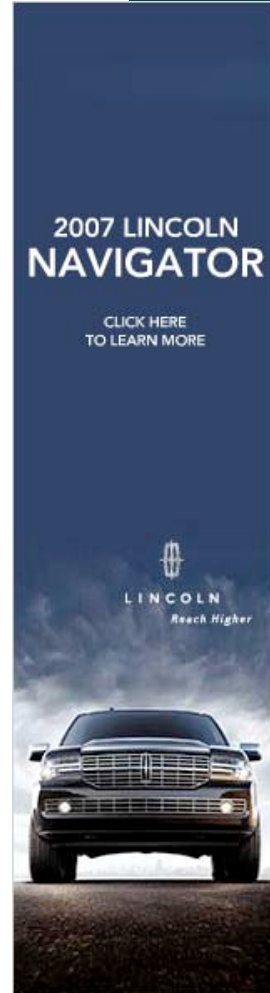
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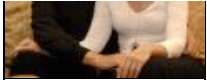


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