SANTA CRUZ COUNTY BUDGET PROCESS

Overview

Santa Cruz County operates on an annual fiscal year running July 1 through June 30. Each year, the County Executive Officer (CEO) prepares and manages a comprehensive budget under the policy direction of the five-member Board of Supervisors. The budget reflects the County's priorities, mandates, and strategic goals — and is ultimately the community's key tool for understanding how public resources are allocated.

Key Players & Their Roles

Board of Supervisors	Five elected officials who hold public hearings, take public testimony, deliberate, and adopt the final budget. They set overall policy direction.
County Executive Officer (CEO)	Prepares and submits the Proposed Budget; manages implementation once adopted; serves as the primary budget authority.
Department Heads	Submit department-level budget requests to the CEO. Lead implementation of approved budgets within their service areas.
Auditor-Controller	Provides financial oversight and produces official budget documents and financial reports.
Community Members & Advocates	Participate in public hearings, submit written comments, meet with supervisors and staff, and monitor implementation throughout the year.

Annual Budget Timeline

The County budget follows a structured annual cycle. Key dates listed below are typical; specific hearing dates are announced via the Board of Supervisors calendar.

WHEN	MILESTONE
August-January	CEO and departments conduct internal budget discussions. Departments submit requests to the CEO.
Feb – Mar	CEO consolidates requests; economic and revenue forecasting work continues.
Early April	CEO presents a draft/preliminary budget overview to the Board of Supervisors (public meeting). Note that this can happen earlier than April.
Late April	Proposed Budget published and made available online and at County offices.

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May (typically)	Board of Supervisors holds public budget hearings (usually 2 days). Public testimony taken.
June	Additional hearings may be held. Board deliberates and makes amendments.
July 1	New fiscal year begins. Budget is typically adopted in fall after final adjustments.
Aug – Sept	Supplemental budget adjustments considered. Final Adopted Budget approved (often September).

How to Engage Before the Budget Is Final

The budget process offers multiple windows for public input — engaging early is most effective, before key decisions are locked in.

EARLY STAGE	Meet with Department Heads and/or Supervisors before the draft budget is published to provide inputs for consideration. Review the Proposed Budget once published. Identify line items affecting your issue areas. Connect with department staff or your District Supervisor's office to share priorities as early as possible before hearings.
PUBLIC HEARINGS	Testify at Board of Supervisors budget hearings. Hearings are public meetings — you may speak during public comment. Written comments are also accepted. Hearings are livestreamed and recorded.
YEAR ROUND	Attend Board of Supervisors regular meetings when budget-related items are on the agenda. Build relationships with your district Supervisor. Monitor department budget presentations and supplemental budget hearings.

PRACTICAL ADVOCACY TIPS

- Review the Proposed Budget summary (published online each spring) to understand allocations before hearings.
- Sign up for County news and Board of Supervisors agendas at santacruzcountyca.gov so you receive notice of hearing dates.
- Contact your District Supervisor directly. The Board of Supervisors is the final decision-making authority.
- If you cannot attend in person, written public comments and remote Zoom participation are available.
- Coordinate with allied organizations to present a unified message at hearings — multiple voices on the same ask are impactful.

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Key Resources & Links

- County Budget & Financial Reports — Proposed and adopted budgets, all fiscal years
- Interactive Online Budget (OpenGov) — Visualize spending by department and fund
- Board of Supervisors Meetings & Agendas — Find upcoming hearing dates and agendas
- County Executive Office — Budget preparation and strategic planning
- Subscribe to County News Updates — Get budget hearing notices by email

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Document prepared for training purposes. Budget documents and hearing dates are published annually.