



# DAILY CAMERA

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## Nonprofits rallying to sales tax proposal

Social service groups  
concerned about budget  
cuts by the city

By Greg Avery

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Local nonprofit groups, concerned about city budget cuts, have begun to rally behind the idea of increasing Boulder's sales taxes next year.

Groups serving the poor, elderly, sick, disabled and abused are also lobbying the City Council to keep their clients in mind as the city decides how to cut \$12 million from its spending in the next two years.

The soft economy coupled with state-level budget cuts to human services has put nonprofit groups in a hard place, and now city funding is being reduced or, in some cases, eliminated.

"We're all seeing big increases in the number of clients we're serving because of the effect of the economy on them," said Robin Bohanon, executive director of the Boulder County AIDS Project and chairwoman of the Human Services Alliance, a coalition of 30 nonprofit groups that receive city funding. "We're having to serve more people with less resources."

The alliance and the Association of Agency Executives, a coalition of United Way-affiliated human service group leaders, are trying to organize nonprofit group members to support getting a tax on the ballot and voters to pass it.

The two overlapping groups include representatives of Boulder's homeless shelter, safehouse for do-

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CLIFF GRASSMICK / Daily Camera

**Shea**

wakes up from a nap at Boulder Day Nursery, a nonprofit. Nonprofits are banding together to ask the city of Boulder to spare them from budget cuts.

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mestic violence victims, low-income health care clinic and other organizations.

The city is expected to put a 0.15 percent sales tax increase for general fund spending on this November's ballot. The tax would replace the same-sized public safety tax that will expire at the end of 2004.

The city proposes cutting at least \$861,522 from the next two years' spending on affordable housing and human services. One of the biggest chunks is a \$116,000 cut in contributions to nonprofits that provide "safety net" services.

"This is not what we want to be doing," City Manager Frank Bruno told the City Council on Tuesday. But given the city's shortfall in revenue it's necessary, he said.

The cuts he proposed would reduce the Housing and Human Services Department's budget by slightly more than 9 percent, a smaller cut than other city departments except police and fire. Safety net

groups are among the first that would have funding restored if a tax passes.

Council members have voiced support for Bruno's approach.

Nonprofit leaders applaud the fact that city plans spare social services from some of the most severe cutting, but express worry that the cuts will hurt the least fortunate and eliminate some key services.

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, or RSVP, helps match seniors to volunteer work at hospitals, libraries and other organizations and then provides transportation to their jobs.

It also connects senior volunteer handymen with seniors needing home improvement projects and organizes free grocery deliveries to seniors who are homebound.

Next year, the organization isn't slated to get any of the \$12,000 it typically gets annually from the city.

The loss — 5 percent of its budget — will probably force RSVP to stop transportation service one day a week, mean-

ing many of the volunteers working that day will no longer have a ride to their jobs or to meet with their clients, said Emily Dusel, RSVP executive director.

"That will start to affect the senior, and this is at a time when they need us most," she said.

Groups that have yet to appear on the list of city cuts are joining to support the idea of the tax increase because the city doesn't forecast much financial improvement and that could mean future cuts that affect them, said Steve Callander, executive director of the Boulder Day Nursery.

The nonprofit, which has received city financial support for 80 years, provides day care services to low-income working families and isn't slated for cuts.

"We all absolutely sympathize with the situation Boulder is in," Callander said. "Boulder subsidizes human services to a degree that no other city its size does."

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