

## Mayor urges search for savings, revenue

Rick Orlov, Staff Writer

Confronting a \$245 million shortfall as he prepares for his first budget, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa laid out guidelines Monday for department heads to meet his goals of a safer, more efficient city.

In a letter to all general managers, Villaraigosa said the first budget sessions would begin next week and would look for efficiencies and savings - but also asked the departments to look at areas where they could generate revenue from fees and services provided by the city.

"Together, we face a structural deficit of approximately \$245 million and the challenge of providing the level and quality of service our citizens expect and deserve," Villaraigosa wrote.

"I am asking you, as general managers, to be leaders in the budget development process and to be passionate advocates for improvement and change."

The city this year has a \$5.9 billion operating budget and has faced annual deficits of between \$100 million and \$300 million in each of the past several years.

Department heads are set to have their first meeting on Thursday, with a budget workshop conducted by the City Administrative Office.

Villaraigosa said he wants the department heads to play a more active role in developing budgets and operational plans. They must make savings but only add new technology if it is justified with future savings or offset by other revenues, he said.

"Our focus must be living within our means and thinking and implementing imaginatively while investing in critical services," Villaraigosa said.

At the same time, he said, he wanted each department to follow his priorities, that include a safer city and expanded Police Department,

improved education through after-school programs, the creation of safe havens and reducing gang violence.

His priorities also include improving traffic flows, water quality, the environment and the local economy.

"Realizing these goals in the face of the city's complex community and fiscal

challenged will not be easy, but these goals are achievable," Villaraigosa said, adding he is calling the upcoming budget "The Year of Accountability."

Councilman Bernard Parks, who chairs the council's Budget and Finance Committee, said he has called for such steps over the years and is reviewing the mayor's letter.

It was Parks, out of concern of the structural deficit, who forced former Mayor James Hahn to scale back his plans to expand the LAPD.

He laid out a timetable for budget requests to be in his office by the middle of November. The mayor is scheduled to formally release his budget on April 20.

In between then, the mayor has planned a day-long budget workshop on Oct. 1 with the Congress of Neighborhood Councils to hear their spending priorities.

Rick Orlov, (213) 978-0390 [rick.orlov@dailynews.com](mailto:rick.orlov@dailynews.com)