



Editorial: Yes on Santa Clara County measures A, B

Funds for affordable housing, transportation need challenging two-thirds vote for passage

by Palo Alto Weekly editorial board / Palo Alto Weekly

Two important measures on the Nov. 8 ballot ask Santa Clara County voters to approve a \$950 million bond measure to build badly needed housing to serve homeless and low-income residents and a half-cent sales-tax increase to fund transportation projects over the next 30 years.

Together, these measures seek to provide some relief to the region's two biggest and most urgent problems, and we urge a "yes" vote on both. With two-thirds voter approval required for passage, the success of neither is assured.

Measure A, the affordable-housing bond measure, was placed on the ballot by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in a unanimously vote and is part of a larger initiative to reduce homelessness and provide subsidized housing for very low-income individuals and families. Most of the funds would go to projects serving the homeless and those with incomes of less than 30 percent of the county's median income. Smaller amounts would target those making up to 50 percent and moderate-income individuals who are seeking to become first-time homebuyers.

Current property-tax rates would increase by \$12.66 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation. A resident with a home assessed at \$1 million would pay \$127 per year more in property taxes; \$2 million assessed valuation would mean an increase of \$254 per year.

The funds generated would be leveraged to attract matching funds from state and local government as well as nonprofit and philanthropic investment, with the hope that as much as \$3 billion could ultimately be invested in new housing.

With a survey last year showing that the county had more than 6,000 unhoused residents and long wait-lists for federally subsidized housing,

Measure A is the result of extensive work by county leaders to put together a plan that would more aggressively tackle the housing needs of our most vulnerable populations, including veterans, seniors, the disabled, low and moderate income individuals or families, foster youth, victims of abuse, the homeless and individuals suffering from mental health or substance abuse illnesses.

Measure B would raise the sales tax in Santa Clara County by a half-cent to fund more than \$6 billion in transportation improvements over the next three decades.

It would be in addition to two previously approved transportation-related county sales tax increments totaling five-eighths of a cent, one for a half-cent expiring in 2036 and another for one-eighth of a cent expiring in 2042. With the passage of Measure B, the sales-tax rate in most cities, including Palo Alto, will rise to 9 3/8 percent.

This new tax, like those that preceded it, has been spearheaded by the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, an organization funded by major Silicon Valley companies, and the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA.) Its timing -- during a booming local economy and amid high frustration over traffic and commuting -- creates the best chance of passage by voters frustrated by the state of local transit, but the measure must overcome a lot of discontent about the BART-centric approach to the use of tax measures already in place.

To address this concern, Measure B has emerged as a consensus plan after some tough bargaining by cities, particularly in north and west county. These cities have felt burned by the allocation of funds raised from the existing sales taxes and made clear that their support for Measure B was dependent on firm limits to spending on BART and the commitment to fund transit projects local communities consider priorities.

The result is a spending plan that will provide funding for the BART extension to downtown San Jose but that caps the allocation for BART at 25 percent of the total estimated \$6.3 billion to be raised (in current dollars).

Funding for Caltrain improvements, including grade separations in north county, improvements to highway interchanges and expressways, local street maintenance and bicycle and pedestrian projects make up the bulk of the funding.

The VTA will issue bonds secured by the future tax revenues, a financing strategy that will reduce the total money actually available for projects but that will enable spending in advance of the receipt of the tax revenue. We have many concerns over the VTA and transportation planning in

Santa Clara County, but Measure B shouldn't fall victim to those frustrations. The region has severe transportation challenges requiring huge investments, and Measure B is a fair compromise of interests that will bring substantial improvements benefiting everyone, regardless of the means of transportation they utilize.

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