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Moraga School District Considers Parcel Tax

By Sophie Braccini

Although the results of a recent survey suggest that a school parcel tax may be not be favored by a two-thirds majority of Moragans, the Moraga School District is starting to plan for placement of a parcel tax measure on an upcoming ballot.

The school district's governing board heard a report on May 10 from Brad Senden of the survey firm The Center for Community Opinion. Senden presented the results of a poll, conducted this spring, which are not overly optimistic for the District. Although Moragans overwhelmingly support small class sizes and enrichment programs, the survey did not show that a parcel tax measure would receive the two-thirds supermajority of votes required to pass. Moraga residents currently pay a school tax of \$313 per parcel; that measure passed in 2004 by a very narrow margin (66.8%) and has no sunset date. Homeowners in Orinda and Lafayette now pay over \$500 per parcel. "Our current parcel tax will no longer fund expenses in 2013-2014," said Moraga School District Superintendent Bruce Burns, "We have been successful in spreading current parcel tax revenue out over more years than planned. However, and when only focusing on the existing parcel tax, we will need to use general funds for the first time in 2013-14 to cover the costs of programs funded by the parcel tax. Maintaining small classes requires more teachers and the cost for teachers automatically increases every year."

"According to our survey, about 60% of the residents are in favor of a parcel tax," stated Senden. The survey involved 401 completed telephone interviews with registered voters in the Moraga School District. When given more information about the district's dire financial situation and potential programmatic cuts, the percentage of favorable responses rose to 63.3%, still shy of the required threshold.

By comparison, the results of a January poll in Lafayette showed 72% of Lafayette residents were in support of the Measure B parcel tax that would subsequently pass on May 3rd with 73.4% of the vote.

Although pollsters suggested amounts up to \$280 a year, respondents tended to favor lower figures. Senden recommended the potential tax be set at \$169 per parcel. Burns noted that the district's level of need is unclear because the State budget for 2011-2012 has not yet been established; the school board will determine an amount should it decide to place a measure on the ballot- the likely election looks to be in June of next year.

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[back](#)

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