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AUHSD Proposes Parcel Tax

By Angela LaScala-Gruenewald



Joni Avery and Susie Epstein, co-chairs of the tax campaign Photo Angela LaScala-Gruenewald

While politicians in Sacramento continue attempts to revive California's plummeting economy, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board met in Lafayette on Tuesday, February 2nd, to approve a resolution for an Emergency Educational Parcel Tax. Even with the passage of Measure G in November of 2009, the district still faces a \$4.8 million revenue shortfall for the 2010-2011 school year. To help alleviate this deficit, the resolution will present a five-year parcel tax to voters in April (as a May 4th mail-in ballot). The proposed \$112 per parcel tax provides for a citizen's oversight committee, offers a senior exemption and, if approved, would raise approximately \$4 million for the district.

The Board believes a parcel tax is necessary to avoid the severe loss of science, foreign language, English, social studies, arts, and mathematics classes. Board members voted unanimously to put forward the five-year tax that would begin July 1, 2010, and would reduce the district's budget deficit to \$800,000. If the measure passes, up to 50 teachers could retain their jobs. Even so, the future of Del Oro High School and several classified positions will be undecided and face possible elimination (See related AUHSD budget article on page S5.)

The meeting began with a public hearing. Speakers included tax campaign organizers, the President of the Teacher's Union and students from Acalanes High School's Save Our Schools (SOS) Club. Joni Avery, co-chair of the tax campaign, opened the hearing by voicing her concerns regarding the amount of the parcel tax, noting that the tax must be sufficient to offset the costs of financing a proper campaign but not so high as to seem unreasonable and fail to garner the required two-thirds supermajority of votes needed for approval. The Board agreed on the final amount of \$112 which is supported by survey results and voter trend analysis. Avery hopes community residents, especially those without children who are swing voters, will realize that passing a parcel tax to maintain the quality of the district's schools benefits everyone and keeps property values high.

SOS representative Michaela Tarpey also addressed the Board and pledged student support. "Our main goal is to help pass the parcel tax," she declared. Teachers Union President Jen Nickl assured the Board that teachers, counselors, librarians and nurses will be an "active and involved group... we will be a very authentic voice talking about how critically central this [tax] is going to be for our schools."

Board Clerk Tom Mulvaney warned that this tax will not ultimately save the district if deep cuts in educational spending continue to be made by the state. He urged the community to work together to preserve AUHSD's status as the best high school district in California.

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