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Pacifica council votes for ballot measure to protect local police, fire and senior services

Pacifica residents will vote in November on a ballot measure to update and expand the city's existing Utility Users Tax (UUT), without increasing the current 6.5 percent rate.

Monday night, City Council members unanimously voted to move forward with a proposed amendment to the existing ordinance, which would provide local funding that cannot be taken by the state for city services including fire protection, 911 emergency services, police protection, senior citizen services (including Meals on Wheels) and street and sidewalk maintenance.

"It will protect vital services that all of us who live in Pacifica want and love about this community," Ginny Jaquith, a retired Pacifica resident, told council members. "We want to be sure we continue services for seniors, emergency services, fire protection, as well as streets, sidewalk and pothole repair."

If approved, the measure, which would expire in eight years, would update and expand the existing UUT to include telecommunications services, close unintended loopholes and ensure that citizens who have similar services or equipment are treated the same, without increasing the current 6.5 percent rate paid by Pacifica residents. Voter approval would be required for any future increases or changes.

All funds from the measure would stay in Pacifica providing more local control to address community priorities including safety, senior services and road repair. Citizen oversight and mandatory annual audits would ensure funds are spent properly. The updated ordinance would continue an existing senior citizen exemption and the present \$500 cap for local businesses.

Several Pacifica residents on both sides of the proposed measure addressed the council at its Monday night meeting. Therese Dyer, Laurie Goldberg and Tod Schlesinger said they were against taxes and lacked trust in the city council.

Sue Vaterlaus, a 27-year Pacifica resident and a member of Financing City Services, a local citizen task force, explained that Pacifica had already made the task force's recommended cuts. "People complain about potholes and the need to save our services," Vaterlaus said. "Now, additional money is needed to keep our city the way we want it to be: safe."

Former Pacifica Councilwoman Julie Lancelle echoed those comments and urged the council to move ahead with the ballot measure. "Do we want our potholes fixed? Do we want our Police Department? We need local funding to provide those services," she said. "This is our chance."

Another Pacifica resident emphasized the need to protect Meals on Wheels and other services for seniors. “The \$26 million that the state has taken from our city is not coming back,” Cindy Abbot said. “Pacifica needs a source of revenue that can’t be taken by the state to provide a quality of life that is important to Pacificans.”

Kalimah Salahuddin, a Jefferson Union High School District trustee, volunteered to run a privately financed campaign to support the measure. She also urged the council to move forward Monday night.

“As a single mother of three children, my family has benefitted from critical services that make Pacifica a safe place to live, including police protection, after school youth programs and the resource center,” Salahuddin said. “I am volunteering my time to protect these services for me, my family and my neighbors.”

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