

Measure J – Parcel Tax Redux

By Cathy Tyson



From left, Elizabeth Domagalski, Teresa Geringer and Mary Newman, Yes on J Co-Chairs

Measure J is on the upcoming Lafayette November 6th ballot to renew the current parcel tax, which is set to expire in June of 2008. According to the District, "Revenue does not keep pace with the cost of maintaining our current programs. This is due to inadequate state funding, declining enrollment and increased cost of providing programs." The \$313 proposed tax includes a provision for a three percent annual cost of living adjustment along with an optional exemption for seniors 65 and over, who own and occupy a residence within the school district.

If passed, the money raised from the tax would go toward maintaining small class sizes, retaining quality teachers, improving science and writing instruction, purchasing textbooks and equipment for computer and science labs, and finally maintaining updated technology in the classroom.

Voters first passed a parcel tax in 1992; it was renewed and increased in 1999 to \$132. As it stands now, Lafayette has one of the lowest parcel taxes in the state. It's above Walnut Creek School District, which taxes \$82 per parcel, but significantly below Piedmont Unified School District at \$1,559 per parcel. Measure J, if passed would put Lafayette in the ballpark with the Moraga parcel tax of \$325 and Orinda at \$385.

"I believe everybody benefits from a strong public school system, therefore I think it's in the best interest of the entire Lafayette community to partner with our local school district by approving Measure J, which will ensure stable, locally controlled funding for schools," says Mary Newman,

Co-Chair of Yes for Excellent Schools. For more information, go to www.yesforexcellentschools.net.

It might surprise some Lafayette residents to learn that the state allocation of per pupil spending in the Lafayette School District is the 16th lowest of the 18 districts in Contra Costa County.

Today only 14.5% of local property taxes paid by Lafayette homeowners goes to the school district. Prior to the passage of Proposition 13, 51% of property tax dollars in Contra Costa County went to school funding. This coupled with declining enrollment help explain the financial situation of the Lafayette School District.

Since 1978 when Proposition 13 passed, school districts across the state have felt its ramifications. First and foremost, it requires a 2/3 majority to pass any local parcel taxes. Getting 66% of voters to agree on anything is quite a challenge. Equally daunting from the school district's point of view are the limits on property taxes. This held property tax rates to 1% of the assessed value of a home and a 2% cap on annual assessment increases.

"100% of the money raised from Measure J will serve our students," says Dr. Frank Tom, the Superintendent of Schools.

Those in favor of No on J argue that Measure J is an "unwarranted new tax increase." They represent, according to their website, a grass-roots, out of pocket effort to promote fiscal common sense and responsible school-district budgeting. For more information, go to www.NOonJ.net.

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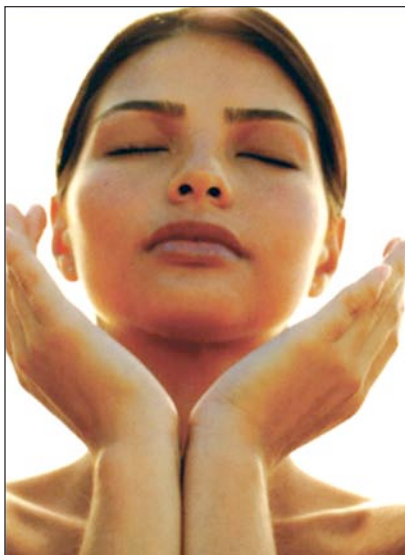
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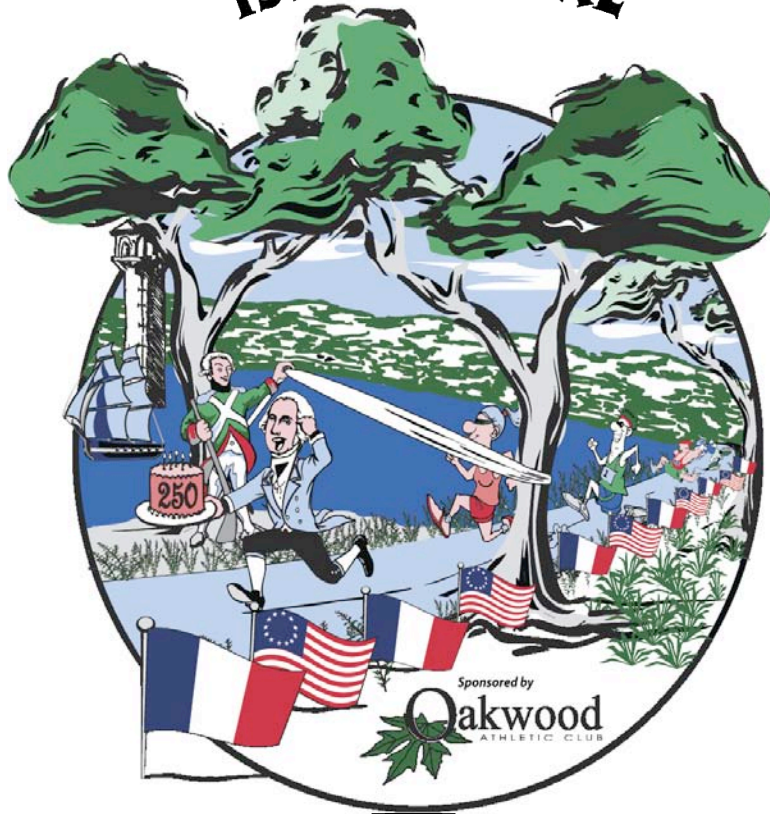
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