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Published January 18th, 2012

## Moraga School District Plans May Parcel Tax

*By Sophie Braccini*

After a convincing presentation by the Campaign Committee, the Governing Board of the Moraga School District voted unanimously on January 10th to set an amount of \$225, with no sunset, for a new parcel tax to support low class sizes and strong academics in its three elementary schools and one middle school. A \$275-per-parcel tax was proposed by the Revenue Committee earlier, but concerns over the approval rate and uncertainty of State funding led the committee to propose the lower amount. Moraga residents will be asked to vote on a mail-in ballot on May 8th rather than on the June or November ballot to avoid confusion with other tax measures that are anticipated for the fall.

"We would rather pass a \$225 parcel tax in May of this year, than take the risk of asking for \$275 as the Revenue Committee recommended," said Campaign Committee member Dave Miller. "\$225 may already be a stretch; we are concerned that failing this May would result in the need for a second effort in 2013 that would be very costly to the District and the volunteers."

Superintendent Bruce Burns began his comments that night by reiterating the facts that the reduction of State funding has had a dramatic impact on the district over the last eight years and that the trend continues to be uncertain. The need for a parcel tax has been on the Board's radar since last year. Residents already pay a \$325 tax to the Moraga School District, but the funds generated will no longer fund expenses in 2013-2014, according to District staff.

The five members of the Board, whether or not they previously favored a \$275 tax, all rallied around the new figure and the May ballot. "I recently ran into Council Member Dave Trotter and he mentioned that the Town might have a measure on the November ballot for the roads," said School Board Vice-President Charles MacNulty. Board Member Dennis Kelleher agreed that avoiding confusion with other tax measures such as what the State might propose in November was a better option.

A parcel tax needs the approval of a 2/3 majority of voters. The last one was passed with a narrow margin of 66.8% in 2004. When residents were polled at the beginning of 2011, the recommended amount was \$169. However, during his presentation, Miller seemed confident that residents placed enough value on small class sizes and quality education to support the measure.

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