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Thorny Ballot Counting Shows Measure L Winning

By Sora O'Doherty

Early vote counts showed Measure L, the half-cent sales tax proposed for the funding of Orinda road repairs, passing by 68.6 percent of the votes cast. As a revenue raising measure, it must be passed by a two-thirds majority, and it would not take too many votes to tip the scales to under 66 percent. So Orinda is waiting with bated breath for the official count, which is due June 24, but won't be official until the June 28, following a complete audit.

A count released on Friday, June 10, included all the ballots cast at polling places and all those received by elections through Thursday, June 9. At that time out of a total of 7,066 votes the measure was passing, receiving 4,844 yes votes (68.6 percent) and 2,222 no votes (31.4 percent.) According to Scott O. Konopasek, Contra Costa Assistant Registrar, a new law that has just gone into effect allows three days for vote-by-mail ballots to reach the Department of Elections. To be valid, ballots must have been postmarked by midnight on Election Day, but they could be received by DOE through Friday, June 10. All of the ballots that were mailed or dropped into the ballot boxes around the county must be counted before any provisional ballots can be counted.

A large number of no-party-preference voters requested party preference ballots so that they could cast a vote for a presidential candidate. In this situation, there may be two ballots in the hands of the voter, and elections has to check very carefully to make sure than only one ballot was used to cast a single vote for each voter.

Provisional ballots are a failsafe. Such ballots are held to make sure no one voted twice. Some people think that provisional ballots are only counted if the vote without them is not clear, but that is not the case. All ballots are counted, including ballots that cannot be machine-read owing to some damage. These ballots are remade by hand by teams of two election workers so that the ballots can then be machine-counted. The process of counting the votes is very methodical. Only a very small percentage of ballots are spoiled and cannot be counted. Contra Costa has hired on more help for this election than they have had for years.

In the meantime, Orinda is proceeding with its previously funded road repair program. A contract for road paving will soon be finalized and construction is anticipated to begin in the first part of July.

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