

# Why Did Lamorinda Voters Reject Nearly Every Tax Increase on the Ballot?

By Nick Marnell

Unless you were the Moraga School District, you did not fare well asking Lamorindans for money in the 2016 general election. Lamorinda voters displayed no appetite for tax increases, voting against two transportation measures that sought either a property tax increase or a higher sales tax and defeating a Lafayette general sales tax.

What happened? Why did a measure seeking to improve a critical transportation system pass overall but fail in Lamorinda? How did a sales tax increase sought by the organization that delivered the Fourth Bore on time and under budget not pass? And what caused a requested sales tax hike from a municipality widely recognized for its prudent fiscal management to lose so stunningly?

A postmortem of each measure follows, in order of the amount of dollars sought, with vote totals provided by the Contra Costa County Elections Division.

## Measure RR

The Bay Area Rapid Transit system placed a \$3.5 billion bond measure on the ballot in San Francisco, Alameda and Contra Costa counties, with the money earmarked to improve the system infrastructure. Needing a two-thirds vote for passage, the measure was handily approved with over 70 percent. But if the measure were left up to voters in Contra Costa County, it would have lost, as there it garnered only 60.4 percent of the vote.

"There is clearly room to build stronger support for BART in Contra Costa County," said District 3 director Rebecca Saltzman.

Lamorinda voted almost exactly in step with the county on the BART measure: 59.3 percent yes in Lamorinda, with Lafayette at 58.5, Moraga 58.2 and Orinda 61.2.

Measure RR will be funded through a property tax increase, and that method highlighted lifestyle differences among the three counties. Alameda and San Francisco counties report homeownership rates at well under 50 percent, with Contra Costa County more than 65 percent. According to data supplied by Frank Woodward of Coldwell Banker, Orinda, Lamorinda home ownership rates

span from 75 percent in Lafayette to 82 percent in Moraga to nearly 90 percent in Orinda. As property tax increases do not directly affect renters, it may have contributed to the higher number of yes votes in Alameda and San Francisco counties.

Jason Bezis, a Lafayette lawyer and one of the supporters of No on RR, said the proponents of the measure could have used a more targeted property assessment, based on proximity to BART stations. The slight edge in yes votes from Orinda supports that theory.

Comments from high-profile public officials may also have helped doom the measure in Lamorinda, as State Senator Steve Glazer of Orinda and Assemblywoman Catharine Baker railed strongly against RR.

Some fret that the infrastructure projects targeted for Lamorinda, like upgrades to the Orinda station, will be stonewalled by the agency because of the local voting results. "BART would never 'punish' one part of the system based on political outcomes," said BART spokesman Taylor Huckaby. "Capital improvement projects are initiated and prioritized by a variety of criteria, namely safety and reliability needs, and are affected by staff availability and resource allocation."

## Measure X

The Contra Costa Transportation Authority, the public entity that spearheaded the Caldecott Tunnel expansion, asked voters for \$2.9 billion through Measure X, which sought a half-cent sales tax increase over 30 years for county transportation funding, including roads, transit and increased bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Voters said no.

Lamorinda sported a slightly less inclined electorate here, with 61.1 percent yes against 63.5 percent countywide, but Measure X required a two-thirds vote for passage. Orinda again led the pack with 66.1 percent yes, Moraga 61.1 and Lafayette 57.2.

"I was flabbergasted," said Don Tatzin, transportation authority commissioner and Lafayette city council member, when asked to explain the defeat. "It might have been ballot fatigue, it might have been BART. I'm not sure."

EMC Research conducted opinion surveys for the transportation authority, and company president Alex Evans agreed that ballot fatigue may have played a role in the outcome. "Our advice was that 2016 potentially was a good opportunity because of higher voter turnout. It would have been a true test of the county's will. The risk was the crowded ballot, where the measure could not get the proper attention," Evans said. He also agreed that the presence of BART as a recipient of a portion of the Measure X funds may have contributed to the measure's downfall.

The Contra Costa Taxpayers Association, an organization that opposes wasteful government spending, supported Measure X. "There is no perfect government, but the transportation authority is as good as it gets," said Jack Weir, taxpayers association president, who posited that voters balked at paying for something that they already pay for — transportation — through highway tolls.

Tatzin offered another possibility for the defeat, saying that maybe the organizers could have pushed harder the success of the Caldecott Tunnel Fourth Bore project, but he added that it could be simply that Contra Costa County is more conservative than Alameda or San Francisco and less prone to support a tax.

## Measure C

This may have been the most startling defeat of the three. Not only did Lafayette voters reject the city-proposed 1-cent sales tax with 58 percent against, they cast fewer yes votes for the sales tax than they did for either Measure RR or Measure X.

"It was surprising to me that it

didn't pass," Mayor Mark Mitchell said. "We responded to requests from three community sessions, we listened to the output. It was all similar. We thought we were there." Mitchell said that the length of the tax polled evenly, at nine, 19 or 29 years, as did various percentages, with the city settling on 1 percent over 29 years.

Brian Godbe of Godbe Research evaluated public opinion of Measure C for the city, and he blamed the lack of campaigning for the defeat of the tax. "There was only one piece, plus the ballot language," Godbe said. "Tax campaigns need a preponderance of effort on the yes side. It needs to be 4-to-1 when there is a visible no campaign." Godbe said that the main issue, though, was the question of how the city would use the tax proceeds.

"What does the city need with \$100 million? Why would voters give that sum of money to

people they don't trust anyway?" said Guy Atwood of the No on C campaign, which thrust the knife in deeper by holding its victory celebration in the same complex that Lafayette conducts its city council meetings. "It was just too much money."

Mitchell indicated that the city could have run a better organized campaign with more direct voter contact, but he said that the message from the public was that the city budget already accomplishes its goals. "It was a quality of life issue, and that's how we presented it," Tatzin said. "People are happy with the way things are."

"Lafayette is a well run city, the citizens have faith in their council and likely aren't seeing things deteriorating to the point that they feel like they need to infuse more money," added County Supervisor and Board Chair Candace Andersen.



**Total Clean**  
would like to thank the following employee  
**Ernestina Ureña**

**11 Years of Dedicated Service!**

## Moraga

# Starbucks Plans to Relocate

... continued from page A5

The new plans call for the addition of the drive-through. In a 2014 article Bloomberg.com reported, "Drive-throughs account for more than 40 percent of company-operated stores and have a higher-than-average sales growth compared with non-drive-through locations." However, the coffee giant has experienced difficulty with its operations and according to Quick Service Restaurant Magazine, "Starbucks ranked last in drive-thru speed of service and in the bottom half with order accuracy" last year. The company has since started to add video communication with baristas to improve the experience.

The planning commission did not concern itself with the private company's operations but had questions regarding the queuing of cars in the early hours of the day, especially just before Campolindo High school starts and students want to be caffeinated before class. Town planner Coleman Frick explained that a peer review was conducted with Starbucks engineers and that there is a risk to see the queue overflow the parking area where it will form. The staff recommendation was to evaluate traffic after three months and after one year to make sure the coffee queue would not affect other parts of the shopping center.

Starbucks made an enticing presentation of its project, indicating that the purpose was to create a real community experience with this larger new space and outdoor patio where music could be allowed. Wendy Scheck, president of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce, asked the town to support this use that is in line with what the community wants to see at the Rheem Center.

The business operator indicated that alcohol was not part of the application at this time, but that beer and wine could be offered in the future. This addition would require an Alcohol and Beverage Control license. The commissioners made sure that Starbucks would limit alcohol consumption to the premises, that it would not be a drive-through item and that staff was trained not to sell it without proper age verification.

While the other commissioners did not agree with Korpus' concerns about the restrooms, they did support another of her proposals: the addition of a new pedestrian crosswalk in front of the new cafe.

The project will have to be reviewed by the Design Review Board to fine-tune the visual impact of the remodel along the scenic corridor before work can start. There is no indication yet of what the existing Starbucks location will become.

*Happy Holidays*

What a fabulous time of year to be thankful for what we have and how blessed we are to live in the Lamorinda area. To see old friends, gather with family and hopefully get a little down time to enjoy the season. Billy and I wish you the very best and hope you create new memories that last forever.

If you are thinking of selling in 2017, the Spring market has been the strongest season over the last several years and should be again.

Call for a **FREE** confidential Market Analysis and Opinion of Value of your home at 925.766.3030

51 Moraga Way, Suite 1, Orinda, CA 94563 | [Follow me @ Facebook.com/SherriePerlstein](#)

**SHERRIE B. PERLSTEIN**  
Realtor®  
925.766.3030  
Sherrie@OrindaHome.com  
www.OrindaHome.com  
License #: 00925213

WHEN EXPERIENCE COUNTS AND RESULTS MATTER  
**SHERRIE B. PERLSTEIN**

*Happy Holidays!*

May your home be filled with merriment this holiday season and beyond!  
We thank you for your past support and look forward to serving your  
Lamorinda and Rossmoor real estate needs in 2017!

925.708.1396 | Tony Conte

925.324.6246 | Mary Beth MacLennan  
tony@mbtcpartners.com  
marybeth@mbtcpartners.com  
License # 00959101 | 01480008  
51 Moraga Way, Orinda

**PACIFIC UNION**  
**CHRISTIE'S**  
REAL ESTATE

✓ LAMORINDA    ✓ ROSSMOOR    ✓ GREATER EAST BAY