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Lafayette officials speak out on state and regional initiatives

By Nick Marnell

A spate of ballot measures and proposed state legislation came to the Lafayette council members for endorsement at the May 14 city council meeting, but the bills received mixed reviews from the city officials. A resolution on Senate Bill 3, a \$4 billion bond to fund affordable housing programs and the veterans' homeownership program, was continued by the council, as was action on the Tax Fairness, Transparency and Accountability Act, an initiative that requires a two-thirds vote for all locally imposed tax increases. The League of California Cities, a political advocacy group in Sacramento, requested that the council oppose the initiative. "We are among the most highly taxed population in the country. How can we oppose a measure that is trying to improve tax fairness and accountability?" asked Vice Mayor Cam Burks, and the council declined to act without more information.

"There are other ways for state money to be used," said Council Member Ivor Samson in reaction to Proposition 68, which would authorize \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for state and local parks, environmental protection and flood restoration projects. Officials agreed that little of the money would flow back to the city, but, "If we don't pass the item, we will not be able to get any of the grant money," Council Member Mike Anderson said. The council authorized the mayor to sign a resolution supporting the measure, which Samson opposed.

Proposition 69 would require that revenue from the 2017 state gasoline tax, including diesel excise taxes and vehicle registration fees, be dedicated for transportation-related purposes. "Now, we have the absurd situation of a proposed Constitutional amendment to require the tax revenues to be spent only on that which was originally intended? I think this is ludicrous," Samson said. All but Samson supported the proposition.

A state assembly bill that would allow BART to permit housing development on property it owns, with cities having two years to update their zoning laws to accommodate the development, received zero support from the council. "No one is enthusiastic about the bill as written," Mayor Don Tatzin said, and the council unanimously slammed the door on an endorsement of AB 2923.

Regional Measure 3 elicited the most robust dialog. Passage would raise bridge tolls in the Bay Area - excluding tolls for the Golden Gate Bridge - by \$3 over six years to fund the Bay Area Traffic Relief Plan, which includes \$4.5 billion of transportation projects with the goal of not only relieving traffic but enhancing public transit. Tatzin said that funding would pay for more BART trains and Interstate 680 enhancements, and he and Anderson supported the measure.

According to the expenditure plan, a high percentage of bridge tolls are paid by Alameda and Contra Costa County residents, but those counties would receive less than their proportional share of the revenue. "The distribution of revenue is inequitable to the East Bay, and coming on top of last year's gas tax increase, it's the wrong thing to do," Samson said, and Burks agreed.

The council took no position on the measure as Council Member Mark Mitchell said, "Let the voters make their choice."

Voters will have the opportunity to make that choice on June 5.

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