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## Voters reject half-cent sales tax increase for transportation

By Sora O'Doherty

Measure J on the March 3 ballot failed to garner the two-thirds vote required to pass a revenue measure, although it did exceed half the vote. Therefore, for the third time, Contra Costa voters refused to extend the half-cent sales tax dedicated to transportation. Nevertheless, the current half-cent sales tax for transportation, adopted by the voters in 2004, will continue until 2034. The ballot measure had been supported by every municipal council in Contra Costa County, as well as by the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors.

Orinda Vice Mayor Amy Worth is also an ex officio commissioner of the Contra Costa County Transportation Authority. "At this point," she said on March 10, "we are waiting for all the returns." She acknowledged that the vote may have been influenced by economic concerns with the market and in particular the effect the coronavirus will have on the market. However she said that the CCTA will just see how to keep moving forward with all programs. "We have another 16 years of the programs to do," she explained, "but there is no capital funding." Further complicating matters, in order to qualify for state or federal matching funds, she said, you have to have local money. Without it, there may not be funding to do the larger projects. Another complicating factor is that right now, the CCTA is covered by special legislation that allows them to exceed the 2% local cap on sales tax. That legislative exemption ends on Election Day in November. Although CCTA could go back to the voters in November, Worth deems that unlikely. Before a new measure could be brought to the public after November, new legislation would be required to allow CCTA to exceed the sales tax cap.

The CCTA board was scheduled to meet on March 18.

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