
County Fire union backs opposition to Victorville's public safety tax

By Paola Baker
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It serves as a reminder, as a vote looms, that the politicized battleground now tied to the city's fire services is unlikely to resolve when the election does.

Editor's Note: This is the latest in a series of stories leading up to the Nov. 7 special election that will examine Victorville's Measure K ballot initiative. Other stories will look more closely at city finances, business impact and more.

VICTORVILLE — San Bernardino County Fire's union has put undisclosed sums of money into the campaign opposing the city's proposed half-cent sales tax for public safety, the Daily Press has learned.

The contribution by Professional Firefighters Union, Local 935 — confirmed recently by the organization's president and by the taxpayer group leading the anti-effort — forges a potentially awkward dynamic moving forward since the union represents one of two reported agency benefactors of the November ballot measure.

It also serves as a reminder, as a vote looms, that the politicized battleground now tied to the city's fire services is unlikely to resolve when the election does. In response to the union's challenge, a bewildered Mayor Pro Tem Jim Cox summed: "Nobody expected this."

The proposed tax, _____, is projected to generate an estimated \$8.5 million yearly, city officials say, and as a special tax must be earmarked only for bolstering services provided by County Fire and the Sheriff's Department, which both contract with the city.

Officials have already outlined plans for the supplemental cash, which they insist is desperately needed as public safety costs outpace revenues. Those plans include adding 15 new firefighter/paramedics and opening a fire station.

Cox said he had presumed the planned additions would have been viewed by the union as victories. But instead the union contributed funds to the Inland Empire Taxpayers Association, which has posted "Vote no on Measure K" signs across the city.

The exact amount spent should be revealed in public records during the next campaign finance reporting period before the Nov. 7 special election.

Jim Grigoli, president of Local 935, said the union's firefighters can't support Measure K without a pledge of how much revenue will be allotted to County Fire versus law enforcement and over concerns about what he described as the city's non-committal relationship with the department.

"All I'll tell you is that a public safety tax is, majority (of revenue) doesn't go to the fire department," Grigoli said by phone. "The second part is the city hasn't made any guarantees to us."

While city officials are fighting to keep local control of fire services, the union seeks assurance of County Fire's long-term presence in Victorville. The two objectives are inherently conflicting, however, because the most committed agreement possible — annexation — would mean the city abdicate such control.

The City Council's decision in February to vet different fire service agencies for a price-point comparison appears to have stirred the pot. When city leaders decided to terminate the County Fire contract, which officially expires June 30, they were steadfast it was done only as an exploratory measure and not as an indictment on County Fire's performance.

Despite early considerations of CalFire and the Apple Valley Fire Protection District, three options survived: a city-run department, a renewed contract with County Fire or annexation into County Fire. Officials view the city-run option as a slightly cheaper plan, but have said the savings achieved would not enable the expansion of services they seek.

Yet Grigoli said already having pulled the trigger on annexation would have “given Victorville the funding to accomplish everything they wanted,” but the charted course instead has effectively put County Fire in a sort of limbo, he argued, and sparked speculation over job security if the city were determined to reactivate its own fire department.

“This could have easily been solved if they signed a long-term contract with us, but they didn’t,” he said. “And now we’re at the point that we can’t support something that will leave our guys without jobs.”

Grigoli continued that annexation — which would enact a \$153 yearly special tax on nearly 38,000 parcels in the city — made more sense than a sales tax “when the parcel tax is designed to serve property.”

But city officials increasingly sense that annexation, wherein County Fire assumes financial responsibility for equipment and stations, is being forced onto them. It’s been widely publicized, _____, that _____.

“I think a reasonable person would arrive at a conclusion that they simply want to oppose it,” Cox said of the union, “and hope that it will fail, to force the city to join into the county.”

To further his point, he noted the union’s opposition of the proposed sales tax in Barstow — meant to save the city’s fire department — as another sign of the union’s push for control.

The mayor pro tem, who distinguished between County Fire administrators and union officials, said the Council was initially presented by administrators with a wish-list and used it as a guide to determine that a sales tax would be the preferable option.

“We wanted the public to have a say-so on this,” he added, noting that the annexation petition process afforded to the public is rarely successful in shutting down parcel taxes.

He also said the ballot measure language did offer the guarantees that the union said were lacking, articulating specifically how County Fire would benefit.

“We think it’s pretty clear,” he said.

He acknowledged the harm done to the measure’s chances by losing the union’s support, coupled with the city’s inability by law to advocate or lobby for its passage. Cox on Tuesday asked City Manager Doug Robertson to again brief the Council later on its options for fire services.

“I’m mortified by it,” Cox said. “I can’t believe that professionals ... would conduct themselves in that way.”

Dan Mejia, assistant fire chief who heads Victorville operations, was calculated in a response to Measure K, declining to express either support or opposition and vowing the department would continue to provide premier services.

“(County Fire) has had a productive partnership with the City of Victorville for the past nine years,” he said in an email statement, “and are hopeful we can come to an agreement for future services.”

The disunity evident between the fire union and the city was not explicitly noticeable in the other benefactor to Measure K’s supplemental revenue; officials have pledged adding 10 new Sheriff’s Department deputies.

Lolita Harper, spokeswoman for the county’s Safety Employees Benefit Association, said because SEBA is not privy to the details of the city’s contract with the Sheriff’s Department, the union representing law enforcement could not make an educated assertion on whether a tax was justified.

“The city will need to find a way to offset its costs,” she said in an email statement. “If they choose to accomplish that goal by a special tax and the residents are supportive, that is their prerogative.”

Union President Laren Leichliter is scheduled to meet with Cox to discuss the ballot measure's "pros and cons," she added, saying that SEBA was "trying to keep an open mind."

Meanwhile, Sheriff John McMahon described the department's simplest goal as providing top-level service to Victorville residents.

"With that said, we would welcome additional funding" he said in an email statement, "which will put more deputies on the street, improve response times to calls for service and help deal with the quality of life issues we face today."

Commenting on the increasing deputy workload, he concluded by acknowledging the "tough job" city leaders have to balance budgets while also securing public safety funding.

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Community

Yucaipa Adobe Open For Guided Tours

By **Staff**- September 21, 2017 TAGS: MUSEUM YUCAIPA

[Yucaipa, CA](#) – The historic Yucaipa Adobe, which has been closed for restoration, will open for guided tours starting in October on the third Sunday afternoon of each month from 1 to 4 p.m. This year, tours will be offered on Oct. 15, Nov. 19, and Dec.17. Reservations are not required.

The Yucaipa Adobe site was part of the San Bernardino Rancho, established by Antonio Maria Lugo in 1842. Lugo's cousin, Diego Sepulveda, brought a herd of cattle from other ranchos and settled in the Yucaipa Valley. Although oral tradition attributed the Yucaipa Adobe to Sepulveda, restoration in 1989 and 1990 revealed clues that suggest that Sepulveda's adobe was located a few hundred yards away and that the existing building was constructed in 1858–1859 by James Waters, a hunter, trapper, and mountaineer who later became a noted county citizen who was elected a San Bernardino County supervisor and erected the San Bernardino Opera House.

Waters' ranch was purchased by John Dunlap in 1869 and the Dunlap family maintained ties to the ranch until the 1950s. In 1954, the Yucaipa Women's Club raised funds to save the adobe home from demolition, and it later became part of the San Bernardino County Museum system. The site,

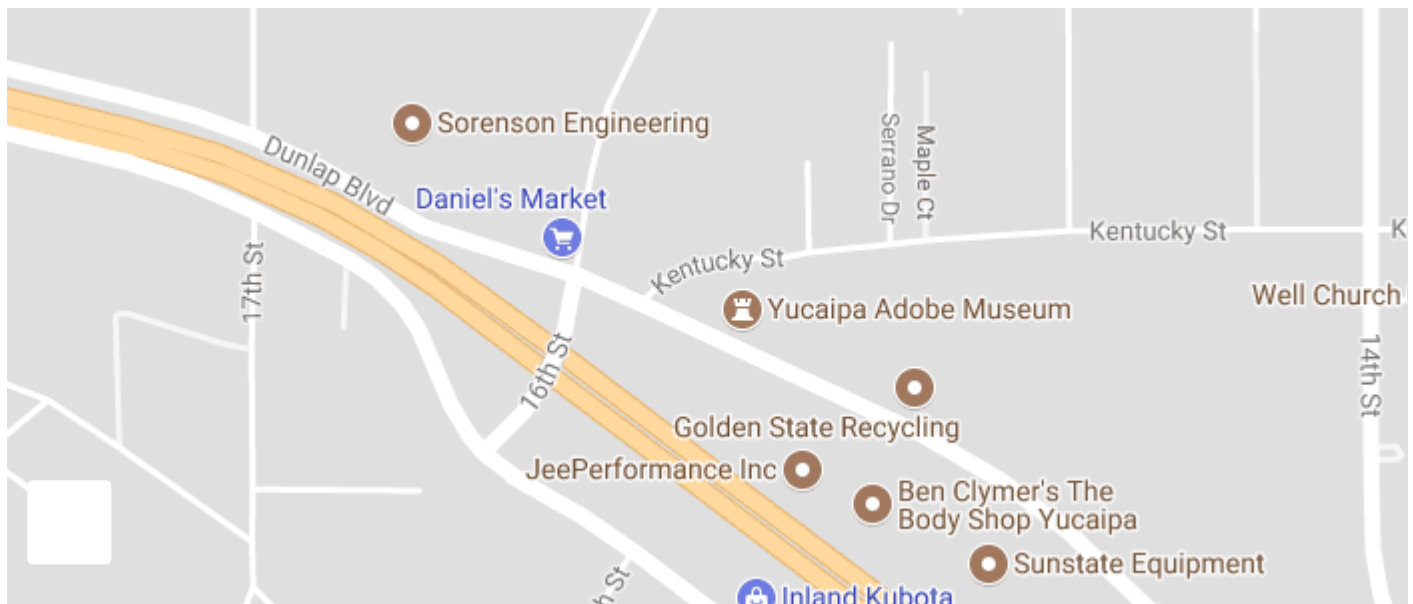
recognized as California State Historical Landmark #528, is furnished as it would have appeared in the 19th century.

"We are pleased to be able to open this site to the public," said Jennifer Dickerson, the museum's curator of history. "This is being made possible with the help of members of the Yucaipa Valley Historical Society, who will be leading the tours. Their connections with the history of the Yucaipa Valley along with special training they've undertaken about this historic site makes our partnership with the society of special value to visitors."

Each tour will last about 20 minutes, with flexible start times between 1 and 3:30 to accommodate visitor arrivals. Visitors are welcome to explore the historic site and its grounds on their own following their tour. On Dec. 17 the site will be decorated with luminarias to recognize the holiday season.

The San Bernardino County Museum's exhibits of regional cultural and natural history and the Museum's other exciting events and programs reflect the effort by the Board of Supervisors to achieve the [Countywide Vision](#) by celebrating arts, culture, and education in the county, creating quality of life for residents and visitors.

The Yucaipa Adobe is located at 32183 Kentucky Street in Yucaipa. General admission is \$5 (adult), \$4 (military or senior), and \$2.50 (student or child. Children under five and Museum Association members are admitted free. Parking is free. The tours are included with admission. For more information, visit www.sbcounty.gov/museum. The Yucaipa Adobe is accessible for persons with disabilities.



MUSEUM NEWS

Opinion The myths used to needlessly delay the Cadiz water project, debunked



A sign at Cadiz Ranch in the Mojave Desert in 2012. Cadiz Inc. proposes to pump groundwater from the Mojave Desert. (Los Angeles Times)

By **Tracy Rafter Hernandez**, **Carlos Rodriguez**

SEPTEMBER 22, 2017, 5:00 AM

California is world-renowned for its protection of natural resources, and its environmental laws are America's strongest — far more stringent than their federal equivalents. In fact, the rigor of California's environmental process has caused many high-profile projects to seek legislative exemptions from state review. So when a critical infrastructure project makes it through California's environmental permitting processes and is upheld by all levels of the state's courts, it's a big achievement.

For nearly a decade, the Cadiz Valley Water Conservation, Recovery and Storage Project, which will create a new water supply for 400,000 people and thousands of jobs, has followed the entire California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review and approval process from start to finish — public comment periods, public hearings, board approvals and litigation, all of which concluded last year, when the 4th District Court of Appeal sustained every approval of the project and concluded that it could be operated safely and sustainably.

So it's disappointing that Sen. **Dianne Feinstein** (D-Calif.) and her allies, including state Assemblywoman **Laura Friedman** (D-Glendale), continue to perpetuate a series of myths about the Cadiz project as part of a campaign to derail it, including in a recent [op-ed article](#) for the Los Angeles Times. Here are just a few examples of the most common myths:

“

It is arithmetically, physically and legally impossible for the Cadiz project to do what Feinstein and Friedman claim it could do.

- Feinstein and Friedman claim the project would be “an environmental disaster” that could “destroy the Mojave Desert.” However, independent experts, public agency decisions and 12 state court opinions have concluded that the Cadiz project is no such threat to the Mojave Desert or the surrounding ecosystem, including the springs, flora, fauna and aquifer. In their op-ed, Feinstein and Friedman cited an old U.S. Geological Survey estimate of the area's water recharge rate, prepared in 2000 for a different project. They fail to acknowledge that this out-of-date estimate was evaluated during the project's CEQA review process and set aside in light of actual, measured data not previously available to the USGS. What's more, the project's use of groundwater was ultimately limited by San Bernardino County to a specific amount — 0.3% of total storage, annually — and to a hard floor in the water table, making the recharge rate moot. It is arithmetically, physically and legally impossible for the Cadiz project to do what Feinstein and Friedman claim it could do, given the county's strict conditions and court-approved management provisions.
- Feinstein and Friedman also allege that Cadiz avoided review by locating its pipeline in a railroad right-of-way. But they ignore the fact that the federal government concluded in 2009 that no federal permits were required. Multiple federal agencies participated in the project's CEQA review, and their comments were fully incorporated and addressed. Furthermore, sharing a right-of-way with a railroad is customary practice. Most railroads have other infrastructure in them — fiber optic lines, electric lines, sewer lines or gas lines. This “co-location” practice minimizes the potential for negative environmental effects because it protects virgin lands from new infrastructure, and it helps utilities better service communities in need. This doesn't mean a project is not subject to environmental scrutiny. It just means a project doesn't need a secondary permit to use the same corridor that the host railroad was already permitted to use.
- Feinstein and Friedman claim that the new administration is dismantling the federal regulatory framework that could have prevented Cadiz from using the railroad right-of-way. This is very misleading, and it also ignores the role that Feinstein herself played in any “dismantling.” After the federal government determined in 2009 that no federal permits were required, Feinstein wielded her tremendous federal appropriations power to create a new regulatory framework that would force the Bureau of Land Management to certify that the Cadiz project was within the scope of the railroad right-of-way, a new requirement unique to Cadiz. At the same time, Feinstein's appropriations policy prohibited the BLM from processing any applications for permits that could

be required under that new framework. While publicly insisting that Cadiz must undergo a federal review, Feinstein blocked all potential for there to ever be one. This Catch-22 set the stage for a widely criticized precedent that threatened the sensible use of existing railroads for necessary infrastructure — a precedent now being addressed by the federal government at the request of members of Congress from both sides of the aisle.

Feinstein's and Friedman's agenda — to stop this court-validated, job-creating water project — is no secret. But it's not based in fact or law. The Cadiz project is a privately financed California project, regulated in accordance with our state and local laws and supported broadly by major labor unions; local, state and federal representatives; and business, agriculture and public-interest organizations. It offers a new, sustainable water supply, thousands of jobs and more than \$875 million in economic activity — all without any negative environmental effects.

We are grateful that the Legislature didn't advance Feinstein's and Friedman's agenda in the recently ended legislative session. And we urge California's leaders to continue to stand up for jobs, for citizens who need water, and for our state's strong environmental review laws by rejecting sustained efforts to change the rules of the game for Cadiz or any other CEQA-approved project.

Tracy Rafter Hernandez is chief executive of the Los Angeles County Business Federation. Carlos Rodriguez is chief executive of the Baldy View chapter of the Building Industry Assn. of Southern California.

This piece is part of Blowback, our online forum for rebuttals to The Times. If you would like to write a full-length response to a recent Times article, editorial or Op-Ed and would like to participate in Blowback, here are our [FAQs and submission policy](#).

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LOCAL NEWS

Superintendent Ted Alejandre: San Bernardino County students have 'boundless potential'



Ted Alejandre, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, delivers his State of Education Address "Boundless Potential" at the California Theatre for the Performing Arts in San Bernardino, Thursday, Sept. 21, 2017. (Eric Reed/For The Sun/SCNG)

By **BEAU YARBROUGH** | byarbrough@scng.com | Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

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San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Ted Alejandre gave the annual State of Education address on Thursday, praising the "boundless potential" of students in the county.

"Our districts, schools and staff are focused on transforming the student experience; expanding the impact we can make in the lives of our students by ensuring equity; creating opportunities to meet the needs of all students; engaging our communities and our partners to work collectively with us to build strong schools and resilient communities; and empowering innovation with inspiring educational practices to prepare our students well for the workforce of tomorrow," Alejandre told the audience at the California Theatre of Performing Arts in San Bernardino.

Last year, the county rolled out a Footsteps2Brilliance early literacy program, which sought to get 1,500 preschool students to read a total of 3 million words by September.

According to his prepared statements, Alejandre also praised the [Ontario-Montclair School District's Promise Scholars program](#), which guarantees district students who complete certain eligibility requirements admission to a group of participating colleges including Chaffey College, Cal State San Bernardino, Cal Poly Pomona, Cal State Bakersfield and the University of La Verne.

“There are 10,000 Promise Scholars across the Ontario-Montclair School District and at Chaffey, Montclair and Ontario high schools and that is projected to grow to 30,000,” Alejandre said.

Sixty-four percent of all seniors at Chaffey, Montclair and Ontario high schools completed the federal Free Application for Federal Student Aid, he said, up 40 percent from 2012.

As always, the State of Education presentation also featured student performers:

- The Chaffey High School Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps presented the flag colors;
- CJ Rogers, a student at David Stine Chaffey West County Community School, led the Pledge of Allegiance;
- The Chino Hills High School Drumline and Saxophone Quartet performed the National Anthem;
- Arroyo Valley High Schools' Dance Company from San Bernardino City Unified;
- Eisenhower High School's Ikettes and Ike Singers from Rialto Unified.

“We want every student in San Bernardino County to realize and actualize their unique, boundless potential,” Alejandre concluded, “To be transformed by life-long learning, to unite their promise with endless possibilities, to experience innovation and turn discoveries into solutions for the common good, to be engaged and productive citizens with a voice for positive change. We want all students to be inspired by great teachers and supported and valued unconditionally by their families and communities.

“California’s future success depends on tapping into the potential of all students, no matter their background, ethnicity or gender, so they graduate ready for post-secondary options, professional opportunities and life,” Alejandre said. “There are no limits to what we can accomplish together.”

He will present the State of Education address again on Oct. 13 at High Desert Church in Victorville.

Tags: [Echo Code](#), [education](#), [Top Stories IVDB](#), [Top Stories Sun](#)

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By Ford Motor Company



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Sheriff's Rodeo will be held at Glen Helen Regional Park Sept. 22-24

Posted: Thursday, September 21, 2017 10:31 am

The 18th Annual P.R.C.A. Sheriff's Rodeo will be held at the Glen Helen Regional Park in Devore during the weekend of Sept. 22-24.

Gates will open at 4 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday, and the rodeo starts at 8 p.m. Challenged Children's Rodeo will take place at 5 p.m. on Saturday before the main event.

Gates will open at 2 p.m. on Sunday and the Rodeo Starts at 6 p.m.

Several of the world's top professional cowboys will be performing bareback and saddle bronc riding, bull riding, steer wrestling, tie-down roping, barrel racing and team roping.

Also performing will be Professional Rodeo Clown Ronald Burton and the Norco Drill Team. This year's entertainment will include Cowboy Kenny Bartram's Steel Rodeo Tour.

Friday night's event will be dedicated to bringing awareness to domestic violence. The rodeo will be making a donation to the "Man Up Crusade" along with a donation to a local domestic violence shelter.

For Saturday, the Sheriff's Department will be asking, "Are You Tough Enough to Wear Pink?" Attendees are invited to wear pink this night to the rodeo and show their support for breast cancer awareness. The rodeo will be making a donation to Loma Linda University Hospital for breast cancer research.

A dance will follow the Friday and Saturday night rodeos and will feature Brad Johnson and Killin' Time Band.

Sunday's performance will be dedicated to public safety personnel. A joint honor guard team comprised of members from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and San Bernardino County Fire will be posting the colors, followed by a moment of silence before the start of the event.

Tickets are \$15 on Friday, \$20 on Saturday, and \$10 on Sunday. Children 6 and under are admitted free each night. Parking is \$5.

Proceeds from the event will continue to support youth in the local communities, with the ultimate goal of developing them into responsible citizens. Cash donations will be given to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Challenged Children's Rodeo, Children's Fund, the 4H Club of San Bernardino, the Yucaipa Equestrian Center, the California State Horsemen's Association, Loma Linda University Hospital for breast cancer research, the Man Up Crusade (bringing awareness to domestic violence), and several service clubs.

The rodeo grounds are located a short distance from the Interstate 15/215 interchange. Take the Devore turnoff or Glen Helen Parkway.

For more information, visit www.sheriffsrodeo.org.

LOCAL NEWS

Liberty Lane housing project for veterans to move forward



A Community of Friends, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit affordable housing developer, proposes to build an 80-unit complex for veterans and their families, people with special needs and low-income families at the southwest corner of Texas Street and Lugonia Avenue in Redlands. (Staff file photo by Rick Sforza, Redlands Daily Facts/SCNG)

By [SANDRA EMERSON](#) | semerson@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts

PUBLISHED: September 21, 2017 at 6:13 pm | UPDATED: September 21, 2017 at 11:01 pm



Developers of a controversial affordable housing project for veterans have received the green light they've been waiting for.

On Tuesday, Sept. 20, the Redlands City Council narrowly approved the 80-unit [Liberty Lane](#) affordable apartment complex on the southwest corner of Lugonia Avenue and Texas Street. The project is intended to assist veterans with mental illness diagnoses and their families, individuals with special needs and low-income families.

“If this type of facility is Redlands’ contribution to helping solve a much bigger problem, then it would be wrong of me not to support it,” Mayor Paul Foster said Tuesday. He was joined by Councilmen Paul Barich and Jon Harrison in supporting the project while council members Pat Gilbreath and Eddie Tejada voted against it.

The council voted after hearing from the project’s developers, veterans and county officials in support of the project. They also heard from numerous residents concerned about the project’s potential impact on their neighborhood.

The [project has received support](#) from numerous political and government officials, including San Bernardino County Supervisor James Ramos and District Attorney Mike Ramos who addressed the council Tuesday.

The project, however, has faced [opposition from neighboring residents](#). They have cited the project’s density, its proximity to Texonia Park and Teledyne Battery Products and the potential impact on safety, traffic and property values as reasons why the council should reject the project.

Rosa Gomez of Redlands said she supports housing for homeless veterans but opposes the project because of its location on north side, which she said historically has faced segregation and racism. She also questioned the services that will be provided, which she said will not be adequate.

“For this project to be a healthy development in any neighborhood, not just the north side, anywhere, they really need to rethink this,” Gomez said.

Jason Barber, a veteran, said he sought help from U.S. Vets and the Loma Linda VA after being homeless and diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

“I wanted to give you an opportunity and maybe the residents and neighbors to the project an opportunity to see I am the epitome of the veterans with psychiatric disorders that are getting help from this program,” Barber told the council. “It’s really the U.S. Vets and the Loma Linda VA that changed my life.”

The apartment complex, under development by Los Angeles-based A Community of Friends, U.S. Vets Inland Empire and Western Community Housing, would provide low-income housing and supportive services to its residents, many of whom would have mental health diagnoses.

U.S. Vets will be the main service provider, with additional services from Loma Linda VA and the San Bernardino County Department of Behavioral Health.

Two full-time property managers will live on site, while case managers and county staff will be available during the day.

Security cameras installed inside and outside of the project will connect to the Redlands Police Department's surveillance system. Private security will be hired to patrol the site overnight.

Since gaining [Planning Commission support](#) in January, the project has undergone continued environmental review.

In February, the [council postponed](#) its consideration of the project to allow staff time to review comments received about the project's environmental documents.

The city hired an outside consultant, at the developer's expense, to review the documents.

A revised study was re-circulated for additional public review from July 17 to Aug. 7.

Residents opposed to the project and supporters, meanwhile, continued to send letters and petitions to the city.

Tejeda said he has constituents on both sides of the issue, but decided to support those in opposition to the project.

"My vote tonight is going to go with the people, the vast majority of people who are opposing the project not because they're opposed to veterans or veterans housing," Tejeda said. "The zone change is something we believe is not appropriate to the area."

About the project

The \$30 million-project is funded by county and state programs, low-income housing tax credit equity and a federal affordable housing lending program.

Liberty Lane will include five two-story buildings with Spanish Mission-style architecture.

A 4,700-square-foot community building will offer a large community room, kitchen and laundry facilities.

There will be outdoor amenities, such as a picnic and barbecue area, children's playground, fitness area, walking trails and a community garden.

Between 53 to 59 units will be available for veterans experiencing homelessness and who may have mental illness, 15 units will be for individuals with mental illness, four to 10 units will be for low-income families and two units will be for the property managers.

The complex will be energy-efficient, targeting a U.S. Green Building Council LEED Gold Certification.

Tags: [development](#), [Echo Code](#), [housing](#), [Top Stories RDF](#), [Veterans](#)



Sandra Emerson

Sandra Emerson covers the cities of Redlands, Highland and Yucaipa for the Redlands Daily Facts and The Sun.

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Think back a decade: what did your cell phone look like? Now imagine carrying out your normal routine today with that old phone.

That scenario sums up the problem facing California's aging voting system.

Around the state, the machines that handle ballots have grown old as technology has advanced. There are also increasing concerns about security threats and how to get more voters to participate in elections. And the pending rollout of a new law could do away with most neighborhood polling locations and nudge more voters to vote by mail.

In short, many California voters are facing a major shakeup in how they will be casting ballots.

"There is a lot of change going on at once and I do think it's tricky," said Kim Alexander, president and founder of the nonprofit California Voter Foundation.

Alexander said there is a wave of activity going on at the state level: 10 sets of voting regulations are in development by the Secretary of State office and the voting systems certification process — which will allow for new types of voting equipment — is starting up after several years of stagnation. All of this will eventually lead to changes aimed at helping people vote in an easier, modernized and more secure way.

Driving much of the change is the [Voter's Choice Act](#), the 2016 law that gives counties the option to run elections under a new model that would give voters more days to cast ballots and consolidate polling places into regional voting centers. The centers would offer more services, including same-day registration.

Counties in Southern California and across the state are in various stages of responding to the Voter's Choice Act and the new way of voting as they prepare for the 2018 and 2020 elections.

County	Changes planned for 2018	Changes planned for 2020	Cost Issues
CountyLos Angeles County	Changes planned for 2018New vote by mail ballots expected for 2018 elections. Anticipating new internal vote by mail equipment for 2018 for ballots.	Changes planned for 2020Planning to switch to VCA*. Also planning to roll out new ballot marking devices.	Cost IssuesCost estimates not yet available. The exact number of vote centers and ballot marking devices needed are not yet known.
CountyOrange County	Changes planned for 2018Vote by mail ballots will feature increased security and comprehensive ballot tracking for voters. New equipment to print vote by mail ballots for 2018.	Changes planned for 2020OC had been set to roll out VCA in 2018. OC Board of Supervisors halted VCA roll out.	Cost IssuesNeeds to replace voting booths. Registrar says county is close on a budget for those replacements.
CountySan Bernardino County	Changes planned for 2018No changes planned for 2018.	Changes planned for 2020Unknown whether County will switch to VCA. San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors to ultimately decide. Registrar says more public discussion is needed.	Cost IssuesExact costs for 2020 changes unknown. Registrar anticipates less equipment would be needed if county switches to VCA, likely the cheaper option. The county's current equipment was purchased in 2004 and will need to be replaced.
CountyVentura County	Changes planned for 2018No changes planned for 2018.	Changes planned for 2020Registrar is waiting to decide if county will be switching to VCA. He says new voting equipment is needed either way.	Cost IssuesRegistrar says VCA is expected to have a high up front cost, but potentially may have cost savings down the line.
CountyRiverside County	Changes planned for 2018No changes planned for 2018.	Changes planned for 2020Registrar is undecided as to whether she'll recommend VCA to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, but she's optimistic and says VCA would be a good option for her county. She says they need new voting equipment within the next five years. Most of the county's current equipment was purchased in 2005.	Cost IssuesRegistrar says new voting equipment costs will be significant, she anticipates that if the county opts in to VCA the cost would be less expensive.

By 2018, Los Angeles County plans to upgrade its vote by mail ballots, doing away with the current Scantron-like system that voters have used for years. Instead, a new larger and consolidated ballot sheet will include measures and candidates together on one page.

Orange County is also making changes to its vote by mail ballots for the coming year and replacing aging equipment.

During a visit to the Orange County Registrar's warehouse in Santa Ana earlier this month, a small crew was hauling away ballot mailing machines to make way for new ones.

The aging machines were placed in service starting in 2004, shortly before President George W. Bush was re-elected. Roughly 13 million ballots have passed through the machines.

"You know, there's a little wear-and-tear," Neal Kelley, Orange County's registrar of voters, said with a laugh. "It's been through a lot."

Rolling out a ballot mailing machine



Kelley said his office plans to replace the machines with new equipment by December, in time to be tested and running for midterm primary elections that take place in June.

More importantly for Orange County voters, the upgrade will allow them to track their mail ballots at each step of the mail out and vote count. Officials plan to use a process similar to one used by delivery companies like FedEx that enables customers to track packages online.

Another benefit: increased voter security. Kelley said the new technology will help keep elections secure in an age of digital threats and concerns about possible voter fraud.

"If there were issues with intrusion or something related to hacking ... you would be able to detect it. That's why the equipment is so critical," he said.

But while some election changes are underway, the Voter's Choice Act won't roll out in Orange County. In June, the county Board of Supervisors [voted against](#) adopting the voting center model for elections, although the idea was backed by Kelley.

On top of these changes, several Southern California counties may adopt the optional new system of voting at regional centers by 2020. Counties that opt in would shutter most of their neighborhood polling locations and consolidate in-person voting at the regional centers that would open over several days.

Many Democrats in California, like Secretary of State Alex Padilla, have been strong proponents of the new system. But the reception among county registrars and the public has been mixed.

"There is a lot of anti-Voter Choice Act sentiment here in Ventura County, at this point," said Mark Lunn, the county's clerk, recorder and registrar of voters who will decide whether to switch his county to the new system.

He is holding off for now and watching a few counties in Northern California that are moving ahead with the model of more mail ballots, regional voting centers, fewer polling places and extended days to cast ballots.

"I'm just not sure at this point it's good for Ventura County voters. And I'll do what our voters want us to do, coupled with what I think is the most efficient way to conduct elections here in the county," Lunn said.

In San Bernardino County, Registrar Michael Scarpello said there hasn't yet been a lot of public discussion on the new law. He said he'll be doing his homework to help the public, and ultimately the board of supervisors in his county, decide whether to make the switch.

"I think there's some advantages and there's some disadvantages," he said. "Some people like their local polling place, but then some people really like the idea of receiving a mail ballot and of having the flexibility to go to any polling place instead of an assigned polling place, and to do it over a period of many days."

In L.A. County, election officials support the voting overhaul. They say the changes will help modernize elections and make voting easier for residents.

Details of the rollout in Los Angeles are still being worked out, including the exact number and location of voting centers and the days each center will be open. L.A. election officials also plan to roll out new ballot marking devices by 2020, according to Michael Sanchez with the L.A. County Registrar's office.

But it may take some persuading to get L.A. voters like Echo Park resident Ashley Carey on board. She isn't sure if she's completely happy with the proposed changes.

"A voting center that isn't right next to my house within my neighborhood will definitely not be as convenient for me," she said. That's because Carey doesn't have a car. For the past seven years, she's walked to her polling place.

Mail ballots also aren't Carey's first option when voting.

"I don't have any stamps. I don't know where outgoing mail is in my apartment building," she said.

The changes incorporated in the Voter's Choice Act are similar to ones implemented by states like Colorado, which has some of the highest voter turnout rates in the country.

Colorado's rollout of the voting changes, however, occurred more slowly. It began with just special elections and primary elections, compared to what California is attempting — setting it up in some counties by critical midterm elections next year and during the presidential election in 2020.

Scarpello, the registrar in San Bernardino County, was in Colorado during the early years of the voting center rollout there.

He understands why officials in places like Orange County are hesitant to be among the first to implement a new voting system. "They may feel that there's a little more risk."

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LOCAL NEWS

All charges dismissed against Colonies defendant Jim Erwin



Attorney Rajan Maline, left, speaks with his client Jim Erwin after a jury was deadlocked in all counts against Erwin in the Colonies case on Wednesday, September 13, 2017 at San Bernardino Justice Center in San Bernardino, Ca. (Micah Escamilla, The Sun/SCNG)

By **RYAN HAGEN** | rhagen@scng.com and **JOE NELSON** | jnelson@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun

PUBLISHED: September 22, 2017 at 9:19 am | UPDATED: September 22, 2017 at 9:37 am



SAN BERNARDINO >> Jim Erwin, the final defendant in the San Bernardino County Colonies corruption case, will not be re-tried on any charges, prosecutors announced Friday.

That means none of the four defendants were found guilty on any charges in the years-long case.

“Since the conclusion of jury deliberation, the people have currently evaluated our current position,” said lead prosecutor Lewis Cope. “We’ve identified some witness problems we felt we cannot resolve. As a result, we’re hoping to dismiss this case in the interest of justice.”

Judge Michael A. Smith then dismissed all of the remaining counts against Erwin, leading to applause in the courtroom.

On Sept. 13, Erwin's jurors declared they were "hopelessly deadlocked" on all seven charges after deliberating nearly two weeks. Prosecutors allege Erwin took part in the bribery of two county officials to get a San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors approval of a \$102 million court settlement in favor of Rancho Cucamonga-based developer Colonies Partners LP in 2006.

Erwin, a former assistant county assessor and sheriff's labor union president, also was charged with intentionally failing to file his state tax return for 2008, and two counts of perjury — one of those for not reporting a gifted \$12,765 Rolex watch from Colonies Partners co-managing partner Jeff Burum and other items from an East Coast trip to celebrate the settlement.

Cope said Friday that Erwin would now like that watch returned to him.

The deadlock left options that include retrying all, or part, of the case or dismissing it.

On Aug. 28, a different jury panel acquitted defendants Jeff Burum, a Rancho Cucamonga developer and co-managing partner of Colonies Partners, former county Supervisor Paul Biane, and Mark Kirk, a former chief of staff for former county Supervisor Gary Ovitt — on all charges, including aiding and asking for bribes.

Prosecutors claimed bribery drove a \$102 million settlement in 2006 by the county Board of Supervisors that favored Colonies Partners in a years-long dispute over flood control work on Colonies' 434-acre property in Upland. Along with other charges, jurors rejected all the bribery counts.

Erwin's attorney, Rajan Maline, said the majority of Erwin's jurors wanted to acquit him on the four bribery charges, were evenly split on the tax evasion charge, and that the majority wanted to convict Erwin on the perjury charges.

A rift occurred among Erwin's jurors early on in deliberations, creating tensions and divisiveness that ultimately led to Maline requesting that two of the jurors be dismissed, including foreman Joe Harris, but was rejected by Judge Michael A. Smith.

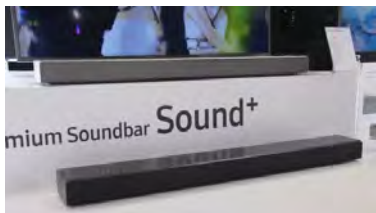
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Ryan Hagen

Ryan Hagen covers the city of San Bernardino for The Sun and the Southern California News Group.

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Joe Nelson

Joe Nelson is an award-winning investigative reporter who has worked for The Sun since November 1999. He started as a crime reporter and went on to cover a variety of beats including courts and the cities of Colton, Highland and Grand Terrace. He has covered San Bernardino County since 2009. Nelson is a graduate of California State University Fullerton. In 2014, he completed a fellowship at Loyola Law School's Journalist Law School program.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Riverside County Builds Team Dedicated to Helping Mentally Ill Inmates

POSTED BY : CA FWD SEPTEMBER 21, 2017

By Nadine Ono.

Last year, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and the Riverside University Health System's Behavioral Health Department partnered to create a better system of care for individuals with mental health needs incarcerated in their jails. In doing so, they developed the Core Team, new team of deputies specifically trained to work alongside the behavioral health specialists embedded in their mental health units.

This distinct partnership is dedicated to working with this population in custody and increasing their success both inside the jails and when they are released. It was initiated by a lawsuit and a court-ordered cap on the jail population. It also coincided with the release of a jail utilization study conducted by CA Fwd's Justice System Change Initiative.

All the deputies in the Core Team have volunteered to go through the training, including their supervisor, Riverside County Correctional Sergeant Jasmine Rodriguez. "You start from where they don't have the education needed to deal with the situation, they don't understand the mental illnesses or how to de-escalate." But after they are trained, she noted, "It's impressive to see them not have to use force or not have to see inmates fight because they can go in and fix the problems even before there is a problem."

Riverside County Correctional Deputy Steven Benisek is a member of the Core Team at the Robert Presley Detention Center. He recalled one inmate with severe mental illness who was cycling through the safety cell two to three times a week. "I was doing pill call and he told myself, the clinician and medical personnel, 'I'm starting to get suicidal thoughts, I'm going to hurt myself.'"

The clinician spoke to the inmate and realized that seeing the sun through the window every morning triggered him. Benisek added, "We came up with a plan, so when he starts feeling like that, we block out the sun and he hasn't been in the safety cell since. He's now programming. He comes out every day, he's med compliant and he says 'Good morning' to me every day. It's a 100 percent turnaround."

Core Team members are assigned to the mental health units at both Presley Detention Center in Riverside and the Larry D. Smith Correctional Facility in Banning. They have the same shifts with the same partners so the inmates and the deputies are familiar with each other.

Riverside County Correctional Deputy Krystal Doyle explained, "It's a consistency and knowing that we're there to help them." She added, "Almost on a daily basis you have to de-escalate situations. Once you learn how to talk with the inmates and having a rapport with them, you're able to learn when they're starting to go downhill or what some of their triggers are so you can try to either see if you can get them help or, if you know that inmate, try to talk them down, so it doesn't escalate to anything further."

Additionally, the Core Team and the clinicians meet at every shift change to discuss the inmates who are deteriorating or having problems so that their care is consistent with the incoming shift.

"You work there every single day, you start to learn all the inmates, so at shift change, you give your pass down and also document everything throughout the day," said Benisek. "They meet with the PM clinicians and the medical staff and go over what happened because each one gets their own pass down. And we all share it with our meeting, so everyone's on the same page every day."

The deputies on the Core Team see that they are not only helping the inmates with mental health needs in their care, but they are also improving their communications and problem-solving skills, which will help later in their careers. And when the current deputies are promoted and new deputies are trained, the jails may see a change.

"That's one of the biggest benefits of the Core Team in the housing units," said Riverside County Lieutenant Harold Reed. "It will change the culture throughout the jail to be a little bit more understanding, talk a bit more to the inmates, not escalate certain situations."

"It's been a positive program," said Doyle. "I've seen a lot of inmates grow. Ones who have been in there may not have been educated on their mental health illness and this program has definitely been able to educate them, get them on their feet, give them confidence to take control and be successful."

Rodriguez agreed. "We're here to provide safety and security, not just to our inmates, but to the public outside and understanding that we're a part something big. We're rehabilitating and reducing recidivism, so they're going out to be productive members of society."

[Originally posted at CA Fwd.](#)

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LOCAL NEWS

Redlands Mall owner soon to control nearby public parking



Brixton Capital LLC, owner of the Redlands Mall building, now controls the parking spaces nearby. The real estate company has plans to convert the mall to a mixed-use project with residential and retail. (John Valenzuela/Staff Photographer)

By **SANDRA EMERSON** | semerson@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts

PUBLISHED: September 21, 2017 at 2:43 pm | UPDATED: September 21, 2017 at 10:54 pm



The public parking spaces surrounding the Redlands Mall should belong to the building’s owner by the end of the week.

Brixton Capital LLC, which purchased the mall in 2014, is expected to close escrow at 8 a.m. Friday, Sept. 22, on the surface and underground parking lots, which the developer says is a significant step toward developing its proposed **residential-retail project**.

“We are moving forward very quickly,” said Joe Graves, lead developer on the project.

In **March**, the City Council agreed to sell the parking lots surrounding the mall to Brixton for \$1.95 million.

Brixton plans to build 35 townhomes on the parking lot at Citrus Avenue and Eureka Street, which the city previously required to remain open for public parking for five years.

To accommodate the developer’s plans, the City Council on Tuesday, Sept. 19, voted to amend its sale agreement to allow the public’s continued use of the parking lot for either the next five years, or when 100 additional public parking spaces are provided at the mall site, whichever comes first.

The lot will remain public until the mall building is demolished, Graves said.

Once demolished, additional parking will be created on the site and construction can begin on the lot across from Citrus Avenue, he said.

“The important thing is that the amendment ... is going to allow us essentially to develop the project quickly, which is great,” Graves said.

The developer unveiled its plans to overhaul the building earlier this year during the annual State of the City luncheon and a follow-up public forum.

At that forum, residents made it clear they are eager to see activity on the site.

“We realize people really wanted us to move on this quickly,” Graves said. “We do, but it was encouraging to see how much support there was for us to make that happen, so we’re trying to find a way to speed up the timeline.”

The company proposes to complete the project in two phases.

In addition to the construction of townhomes at Citrus Avenue and Eureka Street, the developer proposes numerous other improvements during the first phase including demolition of the mall, except for the CVS building. A multi-story residential building, with two small retail buildings, would be built on the western half of the mall site.

Surface parking lots would be reconfigured and enlarged on the eastern half of the mall site, adding about 109 parking spaces.

For years, the Redlands Mall parking spaces have been used by downtown visitors and businesses.

To make up for the future loss of spaces, the city has pledged to use the sale proceeds toward improving parking elsewhere in downtown.

While construction is still a year or two away, Graves said, the CVS parking will remain available to its patrons and the parking at the site will not change for some time.

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EMERSON_SANDRA – Sandra Emerson

Sandra Emerson covers the cities of Redlands, Highland and Yucaipa for the Redlands Daily Facts and The Sun.

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LOCAL NEWS

Metro to study the future of Claremont Metrolink station



Claremont City Councilman Sam Pedroza shows the tracks at the Historic Claremont Depot where the Gold Line station is proposed to be on Thursday on June 29, 2017. (Photo by Keith Durlfing/San Gabriel Valley Tribune/SCNG)

By **LISET MARQUEZ** | Imarquez@scng.com | Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

PUBLISHED: September 21, 2017 at 7:01 pm | UPDATED: September 21, 2017 at 7:07 pm



CLAREMONT >> As the Gold Line extension becomes more of a reality so has the growing friction between two rail authorities that run complementary lines on the west end of San Bernardino County.

[Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#) board director Supervisor Hilda Solis has taken notice. She proposed that a local transportation committee prioritize a study which looks into the benefits and impacts of eliminating the Metrolink station in Claremont.

The decision on whether to eliminate the Claremont Metrolink station before the opening of the Gold Line extension could solve the dilemma between Metrolink and Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority, Solis explained at the meeting.

The news, however, caught Claremont officials by surprise.

“It’s worthy of a discussion,” Claremont Councilman Sam Pedroza acknowledged. “But to come up so fast, it puts the city in a difficult position.”

Pedroza said the city would like to be included in the process. With about 400 daily riders in Claremont, he said, the study will help analyze whether public transit riders intend to stay with Metrolink or switch to the Gold Line.

Solis made the substitute motion during the Metro’s Planning and Programming committee Wednesday afternoon.

Originally, the committee was considering a proposal which was to evaluate the Metrolink San Bernardino Line and the future Gold Line extension “and to really develop some strategies that will enable the two services to be able to complement each other,” Jeanet Owens, Metro’s senior executive officer for Program Management/Regional Rail told the authority.

But Metro board director John Fasana asked that those aspects of the study be tabled while the committee focused on the Claremont issue.

That [Claremont station](#) is “somewhat unique because it’s just a mile east of the Montclair Metrolink station,” he pointed out.

Plans for the Claremont Gold Line station call for the Metrolink station to be relocated east of College Avenue, building a shared 1,260-space parking structure and then building the Foothill Gold Line station on the site of the current Metrolink station.

Officials said the Claremont station will be a center platform station, with light rail tracks on either side. There will be four tracks, with the two light rail tracks on the north side.

Solis, along with the support of the committee, has asked staff to look at these key issues:

- Current and projected ridership growth under existing conditions
- Total parking space and current parking utilization rate
- Impacts and potential mitigation to Metrolink riders that currently board at the Claremont station
- Impacts to Metrolink operations, travel times and fare revenues
- Cost savings associated with the construction of the Gold Line Phase 2B
- Determine the formal process by which to eliminate a Metrolink station, if the local city agrees

Solis has asked that staff report back to the board within 60 days with its findings and any recommendations.

The proposal for the Claremont Metrolink station is going to the Metro's board of directors meeting Sept. 28, said Colin Tudor, Claremont assistant city manager.

"We want to see a system that makes sense for everybody," he said. "We just want to make sure that we're involved and that we have a seat at the table."

Tags: [Inland Empire](#), [Metrolink](#), [San Gabriel Valley](#), [Top Stories IVDB](#), [Top Stories SGVT](#), [transportation](#)

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Liset Marquez

Liset Marquez has covered the foothill communities of Rancho Cucamonga, Upland and Claremont since 2014. She has been with the Daily Bulletin since 2006.

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L.A. reaches settlement with First Amendment Coalition over retaining public records



Boxes of files belonging to former L.A. City Councilman Tom LaBonge, marked for destruction, were made available to the public at Los Angeles City Hall in 2016. (Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)



By **Emily Alpert Reyes**

SEPTEMBER 20, 2017, 2:00 PM

A legal battle over records tied to former Los Angeles City Councilman Tom LaBonge has ended with the city reaching an agreement on retaining city documents.

The [Los Angeles City Council](#) voted 12 to 0 on Wednesday to approve the settlement with the First Amendment Coalition, a group that advocates for open government. The organization [sued the city](#) last year after it requested a range of emails and letters involving LaBonge and came up empty-handed.

The lawsuit accused L.A. of flouting the [California Public Records Act](#) and improperly destroying records. California generally allows city governments to destroy some records if lawmakers and the city attorney approve, but not if the documents are unduplicated and less than 2 years old.

Under the agreement announced Wednesday, the city will pay the group \$20,000 to cover its legal fees, agreed that California Government Code section 34090 does not allow the destruction of records less than 2 years old, and must notify the organization during the next five years if it stops requiring records to be retained for at least two years.

“This is a victory for the people of Los Angeles,” said David Snyder, executive director of the First Amendment Coalition. “This settlement will ensure that the city is living up to its obligations, under California law, to hold on to records. ... If a government agency can simply destroy records immediately after they’re created, the public right to access records is meaningless.”

“What happened when LaBonge departed should not happen again,” Snyder said.

Rob Wilcox, a spokesman for City Atty. Mike Feuer, said in a written statement Wednesday that “this settlement reinforces the city’s commitment to transparency.” LaBonge, who was not named as a respondent in the suit, said Wednesday that he was “glad it’s been resolved.”

The former councilman added that he had routinely provided historic material to be saved in city archives.

The allegations in the lawsuit revolved around the fate of documents when LaBonge left office. City records indicate that as he cleared out, LaBonge staffers sought to destroy more than 100 boxes of material.

Dozens of boxes marked for destruction were later recovered and thrown open to the public by his successor, Councilman David Ryu, who allowed reporters and residents to page through reams of salvaged documents that included planning files, travel receipts and letters from the public. It is unclear whether other boxes were thrown out, according to city records officials.

LaBonge denied that any public records had been destroyed, said no one had instructed him to save anything, and argued that any important documents would be available from other city departments.

In the wake of news coverage of the controversy, the First Amendment Coalition requested emails, letters and memos sent or received by LaBonge regarding the Department of Water and Power, the California Film Commission or the Il Villaggio Toscano housing development during 2014. It sought the records from Council President [Herb Wesson](#), whose staff responded that their office had no such records.

The city rejected the allegations raised by the First Amendment Coalition in a court filing earlier this year, saying it had “acted in good faith.”

It also argued that the First Amendment Coalition was legally precluded from raising issues about its request because it had failed to promptly follow up to find out if the city — not Wesson’s office specifically — had the documents.

Last year, city officials approved new schedules for retaining and disposing of records for City Council offices, including guidelines for council members leaving office. Ryu, who pushed for the rules, said the move “advances

our intent of rebuilding trust in our local government.”

Snyder said that the settlement also requires some specific language “that makes it expressly clear that the city is required to retain all of its records for at least two years.”

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UPDATES:

2 p.m.: This article was updated with additional details of the agreement.

This article was originally published at 12:50 p.m.

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This article is related to: [Tom LaBonge, Los Angeles City Council, Herb Wesson, California Public Records Act](#)

Girl struck by car as she walked to 'unsafe' school bus stop awarded \$36.1 million by San Bernardino jury



Isabella Sanchez, photographed before the crash. (Courtesy Gina Fernandes)



By **Alene Tchekmedyan**

SEPTEMBER 21, 2017, 8:55 PM

Every morning on her way to first grade at Bonnie Oehl Elementary School in Highland, Isabella Sanchez crossed a residential street mid-block to catch her bus.

One morning about two months into the 2012 school year, she dashed across and was struck by a car. She flew 70 feet into the air, her attorney said, before landing on the pavement and going into cardiac arrest several times.

Isabella, 6 at the time, survived. But she was in a coma for three months, and had a traumatic brain injury and fractures to her neck, arm, leg and pelvis. She was in a wheelchair and needed 24-hour care.

“You’re her arms, you’re her body, you’re her eyes, you’re her feelings, everything,” her mother, Carina Sanchez, 38, told The Times on Thursday. “For us to rest, like a regular person, that hasn’t happened since the day of the accident.”

Now, five years later, a jury has awarded the girl \$36.1 million, ruling that Durham School Services, a private school bus company, and one of its drivers were negligent when they failed to notify the San Bernardino City Unified School District about a pattern of unsafe crossings at that bus stop.

The attorney representing the company could not be reached Thursday.

The company “is supposed to be the eyes and ears of the school district to monitor all things that are unsafe that occur out at the bus stops,” said Geoffrey Wells, an attorney who represented the Sanchez family. “Everyone admitted that bus driver had an absolute duty to report that and get the safety people out there right away.”

The verdict comes after a five-week trial in which four mothers, Wells said, testified that they jaywalked daily in front of the bus driver to get to the bus stop. A traffic light stood about four houses down the block.

Wells said the school district’s transportation director testified that the district relies on drivers to report dangerous conditions at bus stops, including unsafe mid-block crossings.

Two bus drivers also testified, Wells said, that they didn’t see the dangerous crossings. Neither was fired, he added.

The jury deliberated for two days, Wells said, before reaching the 11-1 verdict.

The jury also found Isabella’s mother negligent, which Wells said he admitted, and 20% responsible for her daughter’s harm because she endorsed the dangerous route to school. She was not there the day of the crash, Wells said. Isabella walked to the bus stop with a neighbor.

After the verdict, Sanchez said she felt relieved that her daughter could get the medical care she needs.

“More than anything I don’t want any other little kid to go through what I’ve been going through,” Sanchez said. “We’re trusting the bus companies with our kids, for them to have a better future, and we don’t want nothing to happen to them.”

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13 Cities Pressure OC Sheriff on Contract Costs



SPENCER CUSTODIO, Voice of OC
The Orange County Sheriff's Department.

By **SPENCER CUSTODIO** ([HTTPS://VOICEFOC.ORG/AUTHOR/SCUSTODIO/](https://voiceofoc.org/author/scustodio/)) **September 21, 2017**

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All 13 cities that contract with the Orange County Sheriff's Department for their police services have voted to conduct a study to examine and possibly help curb some of the costs.

Mission Viejo Mayor Pro Tem Ed Sachs said last week the study could lead to the creation of a regional police force (<https://voiceofoc.org/2017/09/mission-viejos-rising-costs-for-sheriffs-contract-raise-concern/>), even though that possibility isn't in the draft scope of work for the study.

Dana Point, Laguna Woods, Laguna Niguel and Aliso Viejo were the final cities to sign a memo this week circulating among the 13 municipalities that contract with the Sheriff.

Since contracting with the Sheriff's Department for police services is costing nearly 35 percent of Dana Point's general budget, Mayor Pro Tem Paul Wyatt said it's time for the contract cities to put pressure on the department by signing the memo.

"We have to start looking ... seems like we will get the most cooperation of the Sheriff's department ... when essentially all of their customers are onboard the study. It seems like this is the right move," Wyatt said at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

"That's when you think the Sheriff will sit down (with the cities)," Wyatt said in a brief interview after the meeting, when the council unanimously voted to join the study.

Wyatt said it's too early to say if a regional police force is needed or not.

The 13 cities are: Mission Viejo, Aliso Viejo, Dana Point, Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, Lake Forest, Rancho Santa Margarita, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Stanton, Villa Park and Yorba Linda.

Mission Viejo is the lead city heading up the proposed study that will look at potential command consolidation, like sharing lieutenants and sergeants; consolidating human resources, accounting and purchasing units to reduce administrative costs; having a county-wide split on substation costs versus a regional split. The city is slated to vote Sept. 26 to send the cost study out to bid.

The cities also are concerned about helicopter charges and the cost if it is responding to other law

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“There’s a lot of other things that we don’t use on a daily basis,” like the gang unit and SWAT, said Laguna Niguel Councilman Jerry Slusiewicz. “Maybe there’s some savings associated with that.”

Laguna Niguel Mayor Fred Minagar echoed Slusiewicz’ concerns Tuesday night.

“They (the cities) are saying that we want to know the costs, even though we’re not getting charged directly for the K-9, the SWAT,” Minagar said. “I do believe we have fiduciary responsibility to our taxpayers ... like other cities. So this reality check, I think, is needed.”

Laguna Niguel spends about a third of its annual budget on the Sheriff’s department contract.

“Our concern is all about the rising cost of law enforcement,” Aliso Viejo City Manager David Doyle said during Wednesday’s City Council meeting.

Despite what Sachs said last week, Doyle said the study is not about the 13 cities breaking away from the Sheriff’s department. There would have to be another study for that, Doyle said after Wednesday’s meeting.

According to the memo signed by the 13 cities, Sheriff’s contract costs have risen nearly 33 percent over the past 10 years, with 26 percent of the increase occurring during the past five years.

“Basically this is the first step because we need information to be able to start talking and negotiating and finding out why these costs are rising,” Dana Point Mayor Debra Lewis said at Tuesday’s meeting. “Cities feel that it’s just not sustainable.”

Laguna Woods is hit even harder, with nearly half of its general budget spent on the Sheriff’s contract.

“Our law enforcement cost is the single largest expenditure in the operating budget,” City Manager Christopher Macon told the Laguna Woods council.

Macon said he and the 12 other city managers have been discussing and determining the scope of work that will be done in the study.

At the current rate, Macon told the council, next year’s Sheriff’s contract will be at least 50 percent of the city’s budget.

The city’s budget for 2017-2018 is just over \$5.3 million, with \$2.6 million allocated for the Sheriff’s contract.

“The single greatest threat to the solvency of the City remains the rising cost of law enforcement services, exacerbated by operational changes within the Orange County Sheriff’s Department and labor agreements approved by the Orange County Board of Supervisors,” reads Macon’s cover letter to the current budget.

Macon continued, “future costs are expected to continue to increase at an unsustainable rate ... the existing level of service will increase at least 15 percent over the next four years.”

Census data shows that nearly 90 percent of the roughly 16,000 people who live in Laguna Woods are over 60. Earlier in the meeting, South County Outreach — a homeless and hunger relief group — representative Mikelle Daily told the council the the fixed-income elderly in the area need basics, like food and clothing, but didn’t ask for funding because she said the city doesn’t have the budget for it. The organization has a food pantry for the community and also offers rental assistance.

Following Laguna Woods’ Wednesday afternoon vote, Aliso Viejo unanimously jumped on board the study Wednesday night.

Aliso Viejo’s current contract with the Sheriff is \$8.4 million, reflecting a \$600,000 increase over last year’s contract.

According to the city staff report, nearly half of Aliso Viejo's budget goes to the Sheriff's department. Like Laguna Woods, Aliso Viejo projects Sheriff's spending could account for over 55 percent of its budget without any increase in service.

"Looking at the cost numbers, versus our city income numbers, what's happening ... has become almost unsustainable in the long run," Aliso Viejo Councilman Mike Munzing said Wednesday night.

Spencer Custodio is a Voice of OC reporter who covers south Orange County and Fullerton. You can reach him at scustodio@voiceofoc.org.

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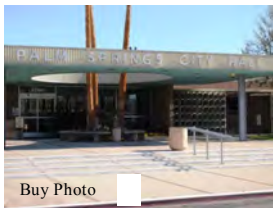
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Taxpayer-funded mailer in Palm Springs under scrutiny after promoting sales tax increase

Jesse Marx, The Desert Sun Published 4:27 p.m. PT Sept. 19, 2017 | Updated 7:51 a.m. PT Sept. 21, 2017



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(Photo: The Desert Sun file photo)

Palm Springs is under scrutiny for a taxpayer-funded mailer that lists the benefits of a proposed half-cent sales tax increase on the November ballot.

Council candidate Robert Stone filed a complaint with California's independent watchdog last week, alleging that the educational mailer crosses the line into political advocacy. The California Fair Political Practices Commission will decide within the next two weeks whether the matter warrants a closer look by state investigators.

Stone, former chair of the Warm Sands neighborhood organization, takes issue with the title of the mailer containing the word "official," and he challenged a line in the mailer stating, "Measure D replaces an expired state sales tax." The state tax that expired was a one-quarter percent tax; Palm Springs is asking voters to approve a half-cent increase.

Stone submitted the "vote no" argument that will hit mailboxes next month as part of the Riverside County Registrar of Voters official voter guide.

Stone also charged that the city provided no objective evidence to claim that up to two-thirds of the potential revenue generated by the passage of Measure D will be paid by tourists. City staff have said they used credit card transactions to derive the estimate, but did not cite their source on the mailer itself.

[READ MORE: Palm Springs wants the public's help in tightening up the budget \(/story/news/politics/2017/09/18/palm-springs-wants-publics-help-tightening-up-budget/678881001/\)](#)

Similar complaints were expressed six years ago when Palm Springs put together mailers and a website in relation to a one-cent sales tax increase known as Measure J boosting downtown redevelopment and street parking improvements across the city.



Palm Springs City Council
Candidate Robert Stone. (Photo:
Provided photo)

"It's the same story, only I think the voters will say this time around, once bitten, twice shy," Stone said.

Then and now, supporters of the sales tax proposals argue that the city is simply laying out the facts. The mailer cites an increase in response times for 911 calls and a decrease in state funds that came after the dissolution of redevelopment agencies.

Although Measure D was proposed as a way of paying down the long-term pensions and healthcare costs of the city's retired workforce — setting aside an additional \$6.5 million annually — pensions and healthcare costs are absent from the mailer.

City Council member Geoff Kors, who pushed the city into creating a pensions and healthcare fund earlier this year, said Measure D is the smart response to a number of state-level changes that are putting increased pressure on the budget, none of which locals can vote on.

"The one thing we do have control over is the very limited local sales tax we're able to charge," Kors said.

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The city is estimating that Measure D will cost the average resident an extra \$60 per year, or \$5 per month, and would be cheaper than a parcel levy, which is common in other cities.

"Before I have the opportunity to review Mr. Stone's complaint, I can't comment on it," city attorney Edward Kotkin said. "The city welcomes the application of the law to its action."

ADVERTISING

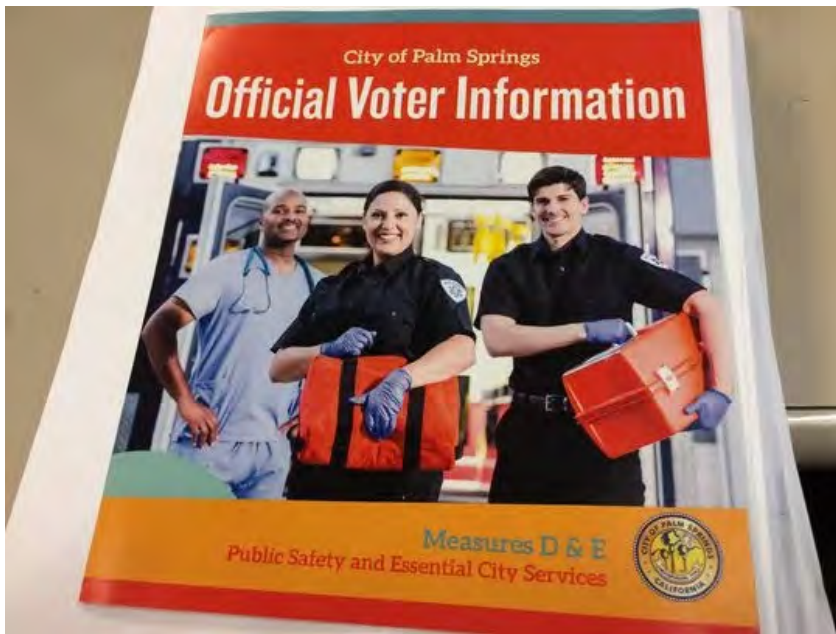
[READ MORE: If Palm Springs increases the sales tax rate, would residents have a higher tax burden than other cities \(/story/news/local/palm-springs/2017/08/21/if-palm-springs-sales-tax-increase-passes-residents-would-still-pay-less-taxes-than-other-valley-cit/573595001/\)](#)

In 2009, the California Supreme Court acknowledged in [Vargas v. City of Salinas \(http://caselaw.findlaw.com/ca-supreme-court/1208325.html\)](http://caselaw.findlaw.com/ca-supreme-court/1208325.html) the tension between allowing government agencies to write revenue-raising proposals and forbidding them from campaigning for those same initiatives, but declined to draw a clear line. Instead, the court ruled, state lawmakers "may wish to clarify" what is acceptable and unacceptable campaigning by municipalities.

The mailer does not instruct residents how to vote, and that could make all the difference. As it is, [state law \(http://www.fppc.ca.gov/content/dam/fppc/NS-Documents/LegalDiv/Regulations/Index/Chapter9/18901.1.pdf\)](http://www.fppc.ca.gov/content/dam/fppc/NS-Documents/LegalDiv/Regulations/Index/Chapter9/18901.1.pdf) prohibits governments from "expressly" advocating in favor of a ballot measure's passage or defeat.

Kris Vosburgh, executive director of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said local governments routinely push the boundaries of what they can do legally, but he doesn't believe Palm Springs crossed the line here, "as long as they fall short of appearing to be saying, 'On Nov. 7, go out and vote for this.'"

The city paid \$13,000 on the design, printing and postage costs, and \$22,000 on TBWB, a communications firm specializing in public finance ballot measures, for several months of consulting, according to city manager David Ready.



Palm Springs' Measure D & E voter information guide, which began hitting mailboxes in mid September 2017. (Photo: Jesse Marx/The Desert Sun)

Even if Measure D passes, the city is still considering cuts to the budget, because unfunded pensions and retiree healthcare liabilities total more than \$200 million over several decades. A budget subcommittee met Monday to consider programs worth cutting.

At the same time, both the city's police and fire chiefs are advocating for more officers and paramedics. They're requesting an additional \$1.7 million total — money they may not get if Measure D goes down.

On Monday night, police chief Bryan Reyes tweeted: "MEASURE D will help put more [cops] on the street."



Chief Bryan Reyes
@PSPDChiefReyes

Follow

Palm Springs residents, response times for 911 calls are critical for stopping crime. MEASURE D will help put more 👮 on the street.

8:12 PM - Sep 18, 2017

1 6

Editor's note: this story was updated with additional information from the city about the amount of money spent so far on the mailer and consultants.

Jesse Marx covers politics. Reach him at jesse.marx@desertsun.com or @marxjesse on Twitter.

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Contra Costa supervisors fund Richmond-based prisoner re-entry program on heels of beef with sheriff

By [Alex Nieves](#)

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(<http://richmondconfidential.org/author/alexander-nieves/>)

Posted September 20, 2017 8:11 pm

Two weeks after Contra Costa County Sheriff David Livingston questioned whether to fund Richmond-based prisoner re-entry organization Rubicon Programs, prompting accusations of political retaliation, supervisors voted unanimously to approve a \$400,000 contract with the longstanding group.

The vote capped off a week in which Supervisor John Gioia accused the sheriff of seeking revenge against Rubicon due to the organization's opposition to the West County jail expansion.

"As I said publicly last week, I think it was an attempt by the sheriff to retaliate against Richmond and Rubicon," Gioia said. "I think the issues he's raised were bogus."

Prior to the vote, County Administrator David Twa read a message from Livingston. It stated that he received a letter from Rubicon, which addressed a number of issues highlighted in his own September 6 memo to the board, and that it eased his concerns with the program. This paved the way for a discussion and voting process that only lasted five minutes.

The county's contract with Rubicon earmarks funds to allow it to continue operations out of the West County Reentry Success Center. The contract runs from October 1 through June 30, 2018.

What initially was assumed a formality, the motion to renew Rubicon's contract grew heated when the sheriff questioned the price tag of the organization's job-placement efforts, and whether workers were being funneled to Rubicon's landscaping business.

Rubicon responded with a letter, which was made available to the board, arguing that Livingston misrepresented the numbers behind its operations.

"The concerns raised by the Sheriff appear, unfortunately, to be misunderstandings of Rubicon's operations," the letter read. "Had the Sheriff come to us with these concerns, we could have addressed them at that time."

Rubicon estimates that it spends around \$7,000 on each job-placement effort, compared to Livingston's estimate of \$28,000. The group also claims that only one of 657 prior job placements was in its landscaping division.

Gioia expressed a more pointed view on Livingston's actions. He argued that the sheriff targeted Rubicon because of an op-ed piece it co-wrote with him, which opposed the jail expansion.

The sheriff's administration office did not return a call seeking comment.

Rubicon Programs has operated out of Richmond for 45 years and works on career planning and job placement for both formerly incarcerated individuals and the general public. On Tuesday, Richmond City Councilmember Melvin Willis spoke in support of the organization's efforts.

“Rubicon does a lot for those who are previously incarcerated, making sure people aren't getting into a track of recidivism and getting them back into society,” he said. “It's a major benefit to this community, and the fact that they were under attack ... it's just kind of an insult.”

One Comment

Commenter

September 21, 2017 at 12:39 am

The Sheriff questioned Rubicon's expenses and practices. They responded and the Sheriff accepted it. What's wrong with that? Just as we seen with Marilyn Langlois and Gayle McLaughlin recently when Mayor Tom Butt simply posted the very writings of Langlois herself for the public to see for themselves, the extreme left becomes hysterical anytime they are questioned in any way. We are supposed to accept everything they say unquestioned. Dare to question or have your own opinion on a matter and you will quickly discover that they do not like to be treated the same way they treat others. Frankly, it's a little insulting....

BUSINESS

\$350,000: How much house can you buy here, there and everywhere?

By **JONATHAN LANSNER** | jlansner@scng.com | Orange County Register

September 22, 2017 at 6:30 am

0 COMMENTS

How much housing can you buy for \$350,000?

In St. Louis, you can buy a 4,057-square-foot home with five bedrooms and four bathrooms.

In Boston, you'd only get one bedroom and one bathroom in 522 square feet.

Or you could buy one of the [New Home Co.'s 10 planned 707-square-foot townhomes in Rancho Mission Viejo coming to market in November.](#)

My recent column on this new local housing — a slice of the 80-home Azure neighborhood — stirred plenty of debate about the value of Orange County living.

Some folks are hopeful these new townhomes at such an eye-catching planned price are a sign of more affordable ownership options in the area. Remember, the last time the median selling price of an Orange County home was \$350,000 was July 2002, according to CoreLogic.

Yet, other folks can't see real bang for their buck in these townhomes, which are due in November. Critics typically cited "better" pricing outside of Orange County. For example, the median selling price of a single-family home nationwide is \$255,000, according to the National Association of Realtors.

So I decided to do some window shopping of sorts, looking at various price indexes and home listings to see how much housing someone could get for roughly \$350,000.

Housing tastes vary as do the nuances of each home and each market. And additional ownership costs, from fees to taxes, vary widely, too. But with those caveats in mind, let me guide you through the \$350,000 question ...

ORANGE COUNTY

This is a place with limited low-price options.

Just 274 existing residences were listed for sale below \$350,000 in mid-September, according to [ReportsOnHousing](#) — basically 1-in-20 of a house hunter's choices.

The bargain hunter's sweet spot — resale Orange County condos — had a median selling price of \$475,000 in August.

And the median for all residences sold was below \$350,000 in only three of 83 local ZIP codes: Santa Ana 92701 (\$286,000); Midway City 92655 (\$326,000) and Laguna Woods 92637 (\$335,000).

CALIFORNIA

If you want to stay in the state, cheaper living does exist — to the far north and inland.

Of the 51 counties tracked by California Association of Realtors, 25 had a median selling price for single-family homes below \$350,000.

Cheapest was Siskiyou County at \$212,000. The closest to Orange County was San Bernardino County at \$269,950.

And if you'd like to spend around the target amount, you could have a single-family home in Sacramento County (\$348,000) or San Joaquin County (\$355,000).

NATIONWIDE

Most Americans don't pay \$350,000 for housing.

Only 19 of the 178 regional markets tracked by the National Association of Realtors have median selling prices for single-family homes above \$350,000.

Of those pricey markets, five are in California — as are the two areas just under \$350,000: the Inland Empire and Sacramento.

Lower on the national price list and near our target price, but outside of the state: Reno (\$338,800) and Miami (\$335,000).

WHAT'S FOR SALE

So what does \$350,000 buy ... and not in the theoretical space of indexes but in the pragmatic world of actual homes for sale?

Locally, \$350,000 homes do exist. From a sampling of 10 recent sales at that exact price, we found most were condos and had two bedrooms (but a three-bedroom sold in Santa Ana) with living space ranging from 760 square feet in Cypress to 1,270 in Costa Mesa.

We also asked our friends at Redfin to do some quick nationwide house hunting for us, gathering a sample of \$350,000 listings from around the nation.

What did they find?

Large homes, at least 2,700 square feet with a minimum four bedrooms and three bathrooms, in St. Louis, Detroit, Nashville, Omaha, Charlotte, Tampa and Cleveland.

Slightly more modest housing — between 2,000 and 2,400 square feet — with at least three bedrooms and two bathrooms — in Greenville, S.C., Albuquerque, N.M., Manchester, N.H., Richmond, Va., Las Vegas, Atlanta and Houston.

If you only need 1,300 to 2,000 square feet — three bedrooms and two bathrooms — look to Phoenix, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Austin, Texas, and Baltimore.

And the smallest listings Redfin sampled were akin to the new Rancho Mission Viejo townhomes: one bedroom, one bathroom — ranging from Denver (two bedrooms, actually, in 1,106 square feet) and Miami (930 square feet) to Portland, Ore. (800 square feet); Washington, D.C. (731 square feet); Seattle (700 square feet); Honolulu (682 square feet), to tiny choices in San Francisco (530 square feet) and Boston (522 square feet).

No one house fits all. Everyone has very personal needs and tastes to live within distinct budgetary limits. Nonetheless, Orange County housing is expensive by almost any yardstick.

Barring another housing collapse, there's no easy fix to improve local housing affordability. Certainly, 10 relatively modest-priced townhomes won't dramatically move the needle ... but it's hard to argue against more choices being better.

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Jonathan Lansner has been the Orange County Register business columnist since 1997 and has covered the local business scene for the newspaper since 1986. He is a past president of the Society of American Business Editors and Writers and a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

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Californians Consider Moving Due to Rising Housing Costs, Poll Finds

POSTED BY : [CAL WATCHDOG](#) SEPTEMBER 21, 2017

By Drew Gregory Lynch.

A majority of voters in California have considered moving due to rising housing costs, according to [new findings](#) from the Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies, with 1 in 4 saying that if they moved it would be out of the state for good.

It's just the latest piece of evidence on the state's housing crisis, as residents confront a shrinking supply of homes and rising costs, leading many to wonder if they'd be better off elsewhere.

"When you then ask them where they would relocate, they're often throwing up their hands," poll director Mark DiCamillo said, according to the LA Weekly. "Millennials seem to be the most likely to say they'd consider leaving."

The uneasiness about the market appears most dramatically in the Bay Area, where 65 percent of those polled said they're facing an "extremely serious" housing affordability problem.

But even in Los Angeles and San Diego, 59 percent and 51 percent, respectively, have considered re-locating over housing affordability issues.

The IGS poll sampled 1,200 registered California voters from late August through early September.

In Los Angeles specifically, a [recent analysis](#) found that a person needs to earn over \$109,000 per year to afford a two-bedroom apartment in the city, with the assumption that renters are spending 30 percent or less of their income on housing.

Across the entire state, the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,750 and a two-bedroom averages \$2,110.

“These are very dramatic findings,” DiCamillo added, according to the Mercury News. “In every region of California, the rising cost of housing has crept into the consciousness of voters.”

The median price of a single-family home rose around 7 percent year-over-year to \$565,330 in California this past August – and in Santa Clara County, the heart of Silicon Valley, the median price jumped a shocking 17.9 percent year-over-year to \$1,150,000.

The state Legislature is taking notice, passing 15 bills this month relating to housing affordability, seeking to increase the pace at which housing construction takes place.

For example, Senate Bill 2 and Senate Bill 3 provide new funding for low-income housing, while SB35 attempts to streamline the approval process for construction in municipalities that fall behind Sacramento’s housing goals.

While California boasts some of the highest earners, it also has the nation’s highest poverty rate when housing costs are factored in, resulting in a heightened sense of urgency in a state that has some of the biggest regulatory hurdles for new home building.

Originally posted at Cal Watchdog.

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