



NEWS



News Headlines 11/8/2017

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UPDATE: Measure J narrowly misses two-thirds majority

Paola Baker, Daily Press

Posted: November 7, 2017, 8:35 PM

BARSTOW — Voters here appeared to have decided against a sales tax hike meant to bolster the city's fire district services.

Measure J, a half-cent sales tax, was short of its two-thirds majority by a narrow margin at the end of the unofficial election night results, with 609 residents voting "No" on Tuesday.

The last of Tuesday's preliminary results released at 10 p.m. showed a slight edge of voters backing Measure J, with 633 "Yes" votes tallied thus far.

"It's a nailbiter, for sure," Barstow Fire Protection District Fire Chief Jamie Williams said after the first results were released at 8 p.m. "We knew it would be tight with mail-in ballots, but so far the vibe is really good."

However, in a close race, the measure apparently failed to reach the threshold needed to pass: Out of 1,711 total votes and all precincts reporting, almost 65 percent of voters approved the measure, in contrast to the 35 percent opposing it.

The measure would have imposed a half-cent sales tax throughout the city that's expected to generate an estimated \$3.8 million a year, with residents paying an average of \$47 a year, according to city officials. The funds were meant to be earmarked for the Barstow Fire Protection District, which has been financially struggling for some time.

The measure was put to the ballot after the City Council approved a resolution to do so in mid-April. The move came after several workshops were held in the hopes of finding solutions to the Barstow Fire Protection District's bleeding finances.

The measure was touted as a way for residents to maintain local accountability. City and fire officials both stated the measure would allow the BFPD to stay local, while allowing residents to have their voice heard.

"We can't necessarily rely on the county to make the best decisions for us," Council member Rich Harpole said. "Measure J is the best solution for our community and it's what we need to do to keep Barstow safe and strong."

With Measure J seemingly defeated as of Tuesday night, city officials will now be looking at a limited set of alternatives to maintain fire services. The most likely option would be the City Council annexing the BFPD into the San Bernardino County Fire Department.

The region would then fall under the umbrella of County Fire's FP-5 parcel tax, estimated to be about \$150 for every parcel in the city. That tax would increase 3 percent each year thereafter.

The San Bernardino County Professional Firefighters Union, or Local 935, was openly opposed to the sales hike, based on what union president Jim Grigoli characterized as "derogatory comments" from Barstow firefighters against County Fire.

"We are opposing it because the comments on the parcel tax makes us look very bad," Grigoli said.

City and fire officials have previously opposed a parcel tax, stressing how difficult it could be to residents with a low or fixed income.

“We wanted to look at it as objectively as possible,” city spokesman Anthony Riley said. “The city felt like this was the most equitable option.”

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20171107/update-measure-j-narrowly-misses-two-thirds-majority>

Measure K can't muster two-thirds majority vote

Paola Baker, Daily Press

Posted: November 7, 2017, 8:28 PM



Victorville residents line up to vote on Measure K on Tuesday at University Prep. Measure K appeared to fall short of the required two-thirds majority vote required to pass the half-cent sales tax after unofficial election night results. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

VICTORVILLE — Measure K looks to be short of the two-thirds majority vote needed to pass a sales tax hike meant to bolster fire and public safety services here.

Unofficial election night results showed 2,042 voters said “No” on Measure K, a half-cent sales tax measure expected to raise \$8.5 million yearly in revenue to supplement the city’s general fund dollars. The funds would be used specifically for public safety services.

Over 62 percent of the 5,393 votes counted, so far, leaned towards the measure, but they weren’t enough to close the gap and reach the two-thirds majority needed.

“We are pleased that Victorville residents will be spared the additional burden of an increased sales tax, particularly given the recent jump in gas prices due to misplaced priorities by our leaders in Sacramento,” Inland Empire Taxpayers Association (IETA) president Chris Mann said.

The organization — along with the San Bernardino County Firefighters union, or Local 935 — spearheaded the measure’s opposition campaign. City officials promised funds generated by the measure would be used to bolster fire services, but union president Jim Grigoli said there were no guarantees of this.

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

But Mayor Pro Tem Jim Cox strongly denied this, stating the ordinance drafted by the city to put the measure on the ballot specifically stated the funds would be directly used to hire more firefighters and replace aging equipment.

“I was pretty shocked when the County Fire union opposed us, because they provided us with the list of things they needed. We complied, and to have them oppose it was just very shocking to me,” Cox said. “I still don’t understand it. It hurts.”

City officials have said current tax revenues can’t keep pace with rising contract costs — largely attributed to Victorville’s agreement with the sheriff’s department — and that fire equipment is in need of upgrades or replacement.

“We really tried our best, and I think we did a good job at telling the public what Measure K was and how it would restrict what the funds would be used for,” Cox said.

With the measure apparently failing to gain the votes needed to pass, annexation into County Fire’s service zone seems almost inevitable. Such a move would be accompanied by a \$153 yearly parcel tax on nearly 38,000 parcels in the city.

The parcel tax is subjected to a yearly 3 percent cost-of-living increase, which has equated to \$36 in extra tax since 2008 when it was only \$117.

Parcel tax revenue would be collected by County Fire, which would also assume assets and liabilities from the city including fire apparatus and facilities, as well as be responsible for capital improvements and service expansions.

The next round of results are expected to be released Wednesday afternoon.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20171107/measure-k-cant-muster-two-thirds-majority-vote>