



NEWS



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COUNTY MISLEADS EFFORTS TO PUT REPEAL OF FP-5 FIRE TAX ON THE BALLOT

Staff Writer, Z107.7 FM News

Posted: February 12, 2020

For months now, the non-profit Red Brennan Group has been financing a signature-gathering campaign to place a measure repealing the county's FP-5 special fire tax on the November 2020 ballot. Today, a petition with what is estimated to be seven times the number of signatures needed, goes to the registrar of voters. Reporter Mike Lipsitz explains why there are so many extra signatures...

Landowners in the county's newly expanded Fire Protection District 5, or FP-5, saw a \$157 per parcel "fee" added to their most recent property tax bills. The fee was imposed following a process widely viewed as a violation of Prop 218, which requires voter approval of special taxes. Last August, the nonprofit Red Brennan Group gave legal notice of intention to put a ballot measure before voters seeking repeal of the FP-5 special tax. The citizen activist group went to the registrar of voters for guidance on how many signatures were needed to put the measure on the ballot. The answer was 10 percent of registered voters in the fire protection district, or at least 26,183 signatures.

A five-month signature-gathering effort ensued, netting more than 34,000 signatures. At the same time, the organization contacted the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, which determined the county had given bad information to the Red Brennan Group, and only about 7,800 signatures were needed. They pointed out that an initiative may be proposed by presenting a petition signed by five percent of the voters for governor at the last election. The applicable law is Proposition 218 of the California Constitution.

The county has acknowledged the error, but it came too late to prevent the Red Brennan Group's expenditure of more than twice the funds and resources necessary to put the tax rescission measure on the November ballot.

<http://z1077fm.com/county-misleads-efforts-to-put-repeal-of-fp-5-fire-tax-on-the-ballot/>

San Antonio Heights, Upland property owners to get \$6.8 million fire tax refund

Sandra Emerson, Daily Bulletin

Posted: February 11, 2020, 5:40 pm

San Antonio Heights and Upland property owners are getting a refund.

On Tuesday, Feb. 11, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors approved giving \$6.8 million, plus \$400,000 in interest, back to property owners who paid a special tax for county fire services in fiscal years 2017-18 and 2018-19.

The refund, which includes interest and other fees, was granted after San Antonio Heights residents won a lawsuit against the Local Agency Formation Commission and the county. The suit alleged property owners did not get a formal vote on the matter. The tax, about \$150 a year, was imposed on property owners in both communities after there weren't enough written protests to stop it.

In 2016, Upland officials voted to disband its fire department and join the county fire district to save money. However, LAFCO included San Antonio Heights, an unincorporated community north of Upland, in the deal, though the agency did not have the authority to do so, a San Bernardino County Superior Court judge ruled.

“Just because you’re a small community, don’t think the county has the authority to push you around when they’re doing things that are basically against the law,” Bob Cable, president of the San Antonio Heights Association, said by phone Tuesday afternoon. “We’ve always been a very small community, but we’re very tight knit and vocal community and we stand up for our rights.”

The refund will go to 21,845 property owners in San Antonio Heights and Upland, said Doug Boyd, Assistant Auditor-Controller/Treasurer/Tax Collector. In the next month, the county will send the majority of property owners a form to claim the refund, Boyd said. Owners who have sold their properties or had some other complication with their bill should expect to hear from the county in March, he said.

The refund will be taken out of the fire district’s fund meant for major emergencies. As of January, that fund had about \$9.3 million. Because of additional fees, the refund will take up to \$8.6 million from the fund and leave less than \$1 million, the county may need to loan the district money to cover the costs of responding to a future major emergency.

The amount of the refund is about the same it costs the district to operate four stations for one year, Fire Chief Dan Munsey said. Rather than close stations, fire officials decided to take the money out of the special fund, which could take 10 years to rebuild, he said.

“This is a significant blow to the district, but it’s the legally right thing to do,” Munsey said.

The property owners aren’t getting a refund for the tax paid in 2019-20 because in October 2018, supervisors voted to expand the tax to all unincorporated communities, again including San Antonio Heights and Upland, to address a \$29 million budget shortfall.

While supervisors met Tuesday, opponents of the tax expansion handed county election officials a petition with about 29,500 signatures supporting a potential November ballot measure seeking to repeal the tax.

“Our primary goal was giving back to the voters their right to vote,” said Tom Murphy, spokesman for small government advocacy group The Red Brennan Group, which is backing the repeal measure. “The key thing is that issue of ‘Are we going to follow the state constitution as it applies to taxation or not?’”

The Red Brennan Group sued the county over the October expansion, but lost.

Cable said it’s disappointing San Antonio Heights property owners are still being charged the tax, despite winning their court case.

“Hopefully that will end up on a ballot and we’ll let the voters decide, which is what we’ve asked for all along,” he said.

In June, supervisors asked county officials to come up with options to replace the tax, including possible tax measures that could be put before voters by January 2021, as well as an expiration date for the tax.

Supervisors later agreed to only focus on the unincorporated areas, including San Antonio Heights, who were asked to pay the tax in 2019 and beyond.

Supervisor Janice Rutherford said they have directed Munsey, who became fire chief in November, to review the department budget and bring the board fresh ideas on how to modernize.

“That information is going to let us debate how we fund the fire district and then talk with taxpayers about what level of service they are willing to pay for,” Rutherford said in an emailed statement.

Munsey said one challenge has been funding fire and emergency services in parts of the county with little to no tax base, such as in the desert areas and transportation corridors.

The valley region has a much larger tax base, but those dollars need to pay for services there, he said.

“The struggle has been, how do you create revenue for a district where there’s no property taxes in order to pay for that large expanse of the county?” Munsey said.

<https://www.dailybulletin.com/2020/02/11/san-antonio-heights-upland-property-owners-to-get-6-8-million-fire-tax-refund/>

TWENTYNINE PALMS CITY COUNCIL ENDORSES SCHOOL BOND MEASURE

“C”

Staff Writer, Z107.7 FM News

Posted: February 12, 2020



County Fire Chief Dan Munsey gave a presentation on San Bernardino County Fire and Twentynine Palms Fire Service. Heather Clisby photo

The Twentynine Palms City Council heard a presentation last night from Citizens for Safe and Modern Schools in the Morongo Unified School District regarding Measure C. Reporter Heather Clisby was there ...

The bulk of last night’s Twentynine Palms City Council meeting was spent discussing Measure C, the school bond measure on the March 3 ballot. Led by Morongo Unified School District’s Facilities Director David Daniels, the Citizens for Safe and Modern Schools in the Morongo Unified School District presented a detailed argument for upgrading and modernizing school facilities. After some discussion, the Council voted unanimously to endorse Measure C.

San Bernardino County Fire Chief Dan Munsey gave a heartfelt presentation that recalled memories of his 25 years in the fire service, referring to County Fire Battalion Chief Scott Tuttle, who was present, as his mentor. Munsey highlighted the partnerships between County Fire and the Twentynine Palms Fire Service.

Kevin Burnett from Willdan, a utilities consulting firm, presented on the rate-setting process that will be used to determine sewer rates for customers and business owners within the borders of Project Phoenix. Those affected will meet with city leaders on February 20 and a public hearing is set for April 7.

City Manager Frank Luckino stated that the new traffic light slated for the intersection of Hwy 62 and Utah Trail has hit a slight snag. CalTrans—which is driving the project, not the city—determined that with all the military convoys traveling from the base, the light pole will require a mechanized sleeve that can swing the pole out to allow taller vehicles to pass. Look for lights on in mid-March.

<http://z1077fm.com/twentynine-palms-city-council-endorses-school-bond-measure-c/>

CABB to discuss Measure I

Staff Writer, Big Bear Grizzly

Posted: February 12, 2020

Community Advocates of Big Bear holds its monthly meeting Thursday, Feb. 13, at 6:30 p.m. The meeting, which takes place at the Historic Chapel at Community Church Big Bear, is free and open to the public.

Learn the latest updates on issues in the community including Measure I. Receive input from Big Bear Fire, **County Fire**, CalFire, the San Bernardino County Tax Assessor's office and other viewpoints. Think ahead about questions and submit them in writing to CABB. Cards will be provided.

Attend in person or tune in to the live Facebook video feed on the CABB page. Questions submitted on Facebook will be answered along with the ones submitted from the audience. The meeting is also broadcast live on KVBB 94.5 FM radio station.

The Historic Chapel at Community Church Big Bear is at 40946 Big Bear Blvd., Big Bear Lake.

http://www.bigbeargrizzly.net/news/cabb-to-discuss-measure-i/article_f04da55c-4d31-11ea-acad-6fa09ca3fda7.html