

HOMESTEAD VALLEY SANITARY DISTRICT MEASURE C

C MEASURE C: Shall the order adopted on September 13, 2012 by the Local Agency Formation Commission of the County of Marin, ordering the consolidation of the Alto, Almonte, Homestead Valley and Richardson Bay Sanitary Districts into a single district known as the Southern Marin Sanitary District be confirmed subject to the terms and conditions specified in the order?	YES
	NO

IMPARTIAL ANALYSIS OF MEASURE C

Impartial Analysis of the Proposed Consolidation of the Alto, Almonte, Homestead Valley & Richardson Bay Sanitary Districts

This ballot measure, if approved by a majority of electors voting in this election, would consolidate the Alto, Almonte, Homestead Valley and Richardson Bay Sanitary Districts into a single sanitary district to be known as the Southern Marin Sanitary District. The consolidation has been initiated and approved by the Marin Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).

In making its approval, Marin LAFCO made findings that consolidation would reduce costs and improve local government accountability.

The areas affected by the consolidation include the unincorporated Alto, Almonte, Homestead Valley, Strawberry and north Tiburon areas plus a portion of the Town of Tiburon between Gilmartin Drive and Monterey Drive.

The four sanitary districts affected by this consolidation provide sewage collection service. The districts operate sewer mains and pump stations and jointly treat their sewage through the Sewerage Agency of Southern Marin (SASM).

Consolidation would affect governance and management functions of the districts. The consolidated sanitary district would be governed by a single, five-member board consisting of representatives of each existing district for a period of two years. Thereafter, board members would be elected at large.

Services after consolidation would be financed by existing fees. No new or increased taxes or assessments are included in this measure.

The assets and liabilities of the four existing districts will remain segregated in four rate zones following consolidation. Expenditures of reserves generated in any existing district rate zone on improvements in another rate zone are prohibited under legally enforceable terms and conditions of approval.

The above statement is an impartial analysis of Measure C. If you desire a copy of the measure, please call the Marin County Elections Department at (415) 473-6456 and a copy will be mailed at no cost to you.

s/PETER BANNING
Executive Officer

ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF MEASURE C

Rising sea levels, aging collection systems and deferred maintenance are among the infrastructure problems facing Southern Marin that must be addressed based on region-wide priorities. This consolidation provides the most effective governance arrangement to achieve that goal.

That is why Marin Local Agency Formation Commission, an independent agency, approved this consolidation in a 6-1 vote. They concluded, after extensive study, that (1) operating costs of sewer service would be reduced due to economies of scale and (2) government accountability would be improved.

- ECONOMIES CREATED BY CONSOLIDATION of sewer services provide for increased buying power, replacing management personnel with operating personnel, centralization of common functions, faster response time to spills and faster adoption of operational improvements.
- SMALLER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER. The four limited-purpose districts are among the county’s smallest. Almonte district’s population is only 1,064, and Alto’s a mere 928. The total for all four districts is 14,819. Together they incur the overhead of 20 board members, 4 managers, and 48 meetings per year. The stipends and staff time required to support such top-heavy governance are duplicative.
- EXISTING RATES WILL NOT BE AFFECTED BY CONSOLIDATION. Each district’s assets are protected under enforceable terms and conditions of LAFCO’s approval.
- “LOCAL CONTROL” IS ACTUALLY ENHANCED BY CONSOLIDATION. Citizen participation is only meaningful if the activities and decisions of an elected board are known to its constituents and attract their involvement. Public participation in meetings of these districts is negligible.
- THERE HAVE BEEN NO CONTESTED ELECTIONS IN MORE THAN TEN YEARS. Maintaining separate districts clearly does not contribute to political accountability.

The Tamalpais and Alto Richardson Bay Fire Districts were consolidated into the Southern Marin Fire District in 1999, creating significant cost savings without loss of local control. We are confident this sewer district consolidation will be equally successful.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS MARIN COUNTY
s/Marjory Eller, President
MARIN LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION
s/Jeffry Blanchfield, Chairman

REBUTTAL TO ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF MEASURE C

Life would indeed be simple if it were true that all of the problems recited above could be solved by consolidating these small sanitary agencies. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

It already has been acknowledged that these agencies are being run well, with active programs to upgrade their systems. Homestead Valley Sanitary District has had a wide-ranging replacement program in place for the last 15 years. One must ask why it is that there will be no change to rates or reserves if it is expected that consolidation will result in meaningful savings.

It is true that few of the elections for board positions have been contested. This is also true for 2/3s of the elections in the county. It is hard to find people willing to do community service. This is true regardless of the size of the organization.

If you believe that sanitary district board meetings are going to be a major public draw, chances are you have never been to one. Simply increasing the size of the district will not increase public participation. Today, at least, meetings are conducted in the neighborhood, making it easy for the public to attend should they wish to do so.

This proposal is not an action of good government; it is simply outsiders trying to tell us how to run things.

Vote NO.

s/EINAR ASBO

President, Homestead Valley Sanitary

ARGUMENT AGAINST MEASURE C

The proposed a merger of Almonte, Alto, Homestead and Richardson Bay Sanitary Districts should be rejected for many reasons, the main one being that it accomplishes nothing positive. There may be some forms of improving our Sanitary Districts but the proposal in front of us is not one that offers an improvement of what we have today.

The consolidation of Homestead Valley with the other Districts would create a new, "unified" district in name only. The rates and reserves of each of the old districts are different enough to demand separate rate zones and construction budgets for each present district. After a long, painstaking study, Marin LAFCO was only able to identify some small inconsequential savings. With the added administration work load it can be expected that the cost instead will be higher than before. Worse, the new structure is likely to set the stage for a dysfunctional board with accusations of favoritism and unfairness. Richardson Bay has a population that constitutes about 2/3 of the new district. It is reasonable to expect that the composition of the board, after the transition, will be strongly dominated by that district.

The argument that there will be fewer spills is invalid. There will be no change to the operation of the treatment plant, which is where the spills occurred.

The contract operator for the treatment plant is the City of Mill Valley, not the districts. If the district's representation is reduced from four to one, the city will have even larger control.

Since our district is being run very efficiently and old pipes are being updated regularly, the proposed consolidation should be voted down. If we are to go through a major change like this we deserve something that offers a better solution.

Retain local control, vote NO to consolidation.

s/EINAR ASBO

President, Homestead Sanitary District

REBUTTAL TO ARGUMENT AGAINST MEASURE C

“Local Control” is not a valid argument. With no contested election in over 10 years and almost nonexistent public input, local control is merely an opinion that supports retaining the offices of all members of the four boards. Maintaining the sewer pipes in each of four small, inefficient sanitary districts, each with its own governing board and general manager, is not necessary and needlessly expensive – especially for a district with only 2500 residents. The new district will be governed by board members elected at large. Residents of all four districts will be equally eligible to vote and to serve on the board.

Consolidation does not assume increased staffing costs. If the board of the consolidated district did choose to hire new employees, they would provide new service: physical work on the sewer systems instead of the cost now required for duplicative support for 15 board members and 3 part-time general managers who would be eliminated by consolidation.

Voluntary collaboration among the districts has been limited or ineffective. For example, regulatory filings in response to the spills of 2008 required separate compliance reports from each of the four sanitary districts annually for five years!

A consolidated district would be of equal size and voting power on the SASM governing board with the City of Mill Valley rather than Homestead remaining as one of six members on the fractious SASM board.

The consolidation would indeed accomplish something positive for Homestead residents – a reliable, cost-effective efficient sanitary system.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS MARIN COUNTY
s/Marjory Eller, President

MARIN LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION
s/Jeffry Blanchfield, Chairman