

OFFICE OF THE
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

November 19, 2019

Matthew H. Hymel
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Daniel Eilerman
ASSISTANT COUNTY
ADMINISTRATOR

Angela Nicholson
ASSISTANT COUNTY
ADMINISTRATOR

Marin County Civic Center
3501 Civic Center Drive
Suite 325
San Rafael, CA 94903
415 473 6358 T
415 473 4104 F
CRS Dial 711
www.marincounty.org/cao

Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903

SUBJECT: MERIT Hearing Regarding Proposed Ordinance to Create a Special Parcel Tax for 10 Years to Fund the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA), and Resolution Authorizing an Election on March 3, 2020 for Voters to Consider the Tax

RECOMMENDATION: 1) Conduct Hearing on proposed Ordinance for the County of Marin to Levy a Special Parcel Tax for the MWPA for 10 Years, and 2) Adopt Resolution Authorizing an Election March 3, 2020 for Voters to Consider the Tax

BACKGROUND: Given the changing climate and increased risk of wildfires, we have been partnering with FIREsafe Marin and Marin's fire-responsible agencies to develop a countywide wildfire prevention program and authority to coordinate and oversee the ongoing programs to make our community safer and better prepared.

Based on the "Community Wildfire Protection Plan," the "Lessons Learned from North Bay Fire Siege" report, and this year's "Marin Civil Grand Jury Report on Wildfire Preparedness," we recognize the importance of a countywide, multi-agency approach to better protect our residents. The mission of the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority is to fund and oversee the following efforts:

- Wildfire detection and evacuation system improvements;
- Vegetation management and fire hazard reduction;
- Defensible space and home hardening evaluations;
- Public education and neighborhood wildfire preparedness; and
- Local specific wildfire prevention efforts.

Consistent with the requests of 17 fire-responsible governing boards, we brought to your Board on November 5, 2019 a First Reading of an ordinance to create a special parcel tax for 10 years to fund the MWPA. All 17 agencies have requested that your Board approve a parcel tax ordinance and place it on the March 2020 ballot.

Based on feedback from the 17 agencies, the attached parcel tax ordinance includes the following major provisions: 1) a 10-year funding term; 2) a low-income exemption for property owners age sixty-five (65) years; 3) an exemption for churches, non-profits and local governments that meets the standards for exemption from ad valorem tax; and 4) a Citizens' Oversight Committee to evaluate the work program's consistency with the tax measure.

New Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA)

A countywide coalition that includes seventeen (17) of Marin's 19 fire-responsible agencies has created the new MWPA, a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JEPA) representing over 98 percent of Marin's land area and over 96 percent of its population. The MWPA's 17 member agencies include the following:

1. Southern Marin Fire Protection District
2. Novato Fire Protection District

3. Stinson Beach Fire Protection District
4. Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District
5. Kentfield Fire Protection District
6. Bolinas Fire Protection District
7. Marinwood Community Services District
8. Muir Beach Community Services District
9. Inverness Public Utility District
10. Town of Fairfax
11. Town of San Anselmo
12. Town of Ross
13. Town of Corte Madera
14. City of Larkspur
15. City of San Rafael
16. City of Mill Valley
17. County of Marin (including Community Service Areas 13, 19 and 31)

All funds would stay local and would be protected from any taking by the State. Funds must be used for wildfire prevention and cannot be diverted. Independent oversight and annual audits would be required. Finally, the new revenue source would help Marin qualify for state and federal grants that otherwise will go to other communities around the state.

March 2020 Revenue Measure

The proposed ballot language of the measure is as follows:

Marin Wildfire Prevention Measure. *To support coordinated wildfire prevention including early detection, warning and alerts; reducing vegetation; ensuring defensible space around homes, neighborhoods and critical infrastructure; and improving disaster evacuation routes/procedures; shall the Marin Wildfire Prevention Measure, levying up to 10¢ per building square foot tax (\$75 per multifamily unit or as described in the full measure) for ten years, providing \$19,300,000 annually, with annual inflation adjustments, independent citizen oversight/audits, and low-income senior exemptions, be adopted?*

With your Board's approval today, and adoption of a resolution authorizing an election, staff will coordinate with the Registrar of Voters to include the proposed tax on the March 3, 2020 ballot for voters to consider the parcel tax. If approved by voters, the revenue measure will provide improvements to alert and warning systems, evacuation planning, and protect critical infrastructure to remain functioning in a disaster. With longer and hotter fire seasons, Marin needs to be proactive to reduce vulnerably to wildfires.

Based on a parcel tax study, we are proposing a rate of up to 10 cents per building square feet for improved commercial and residential parcels; \$75 per unit for multi-family residential (3+ units); and \$25/\$100/\$150 per parcel for unimproved parcels based on acreage. We estimate that this tax structure will result in approximately \$19.3 million annually after accounting for exemptions for low-income seniors. We are also recommending an annual inflator equal to the San Francisco Bay Area Consumer Price Index (CPI) with an annual cap of 3 percent. Overall, the estimated \$19.3 million annual funding plan would include:

- 60 percent to core functions such as vegetation management, wildfire detection, evacuation system improvements, grants, and public education;

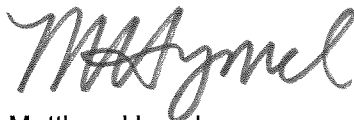
- 20 percent for annual defensible space and home hardening evaluations; and
- 20 percent for local-specific wildfire prevention efforts.

Fiscal Impacts

With approval of the voters at the March 3, 2020 primary election, a new parcel tax is estimated to generate approximately \$19.3 million annually, adjusted for inflation, to fund the new JEPA's critical wildfire prevention program for a period of 10 years. Should voters approve the measure, estimated one-time incremental County costs of \$124,000 for conducting the election will be reimbursed from the tax proceeds.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew Hymel
County Administrator



Jason Weber
Fire Chief

Attachments: Parcel Tax Ordinance
Resolution Calling for Election