

## No extra deputy without parcel tax, backers say

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Deputy Nubia Zamora of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office crackles with nervous energy as her patrol car swoops up and down the narrow hillside streets of El Sobrante.

Emergency calls echo through the radio. Her dashboard computer beeps impatiently, delivering a request for her to phone someone about the disoriented old man she spent two hours keeping out of traffic Thursday morning, looking for his family, consulting with ambulance paramedics about where to take him.

No rest for the deputy sheriff. Not in a town like El Sobrante.

"There have been some stray dogs running around out here," said a friendly man, leaning forward to talk to Zamora through her window on El Centro Road. "I'm not sure what to do."

A brief chat ensues about the block and current events. Zamora hands him a business card and finds the number for Contra Costa Animal Services.

One block down, far too many to go, say supporters of a tax to bring another deputy to El Sobrante.

Proponents of more policing in this geographically and culturally diverse swath of unincorporated western Contra Costa County hope a majority will approve a parcel tax proposed for the June 8 ballot that would raise funds to add a full-time sheriff's deputy to tend to El Sobrante's public safety needs.

"I definitely feel it would help," said Barbara Pendergrass, chairwoman of the El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Committee, which voted last week to support the tax. "A resident deputy can really concentrate on quality-of-life issues."

If approved by two-thirds of the area's voters, the tax would cost the owners of single-family homes about \$38 annually, and most businesses \$76 annually. It would pay for a car and one full-time deputy, who would work exclusively in El Sobrante and a hillside area near North Arlington Boulevard. The tax would end after five years.

About 5,000 parcels would be taxed, raising about \$200,000 annually.

The board of supervisors will hold a public hearing next month to help it decide whether to place the tax proposal on the June ballot.

"There has been a lot of demand for increased law enforcement presence in the community," Supervisor John Gioia said. "The deputies respond to many calls, and an additional deputy would allow a higher level of attention to quality-of-life issues."

Deep, recent cuts to the sheriff's budget helped to erode coverage in many Contra Costa communities, including all of western Contra Costa County.

"I've been associated with El Sobrante since 1967 when I was a patrol deputy. Back then this community had marginal but adequate law enforcement protection," Contra Costa Sheriff Warren Rupf wrote in a response to an inquiry. "That is not the case today with ongoing budget cuts."

A resident deputy would respond to some emergency calls, but would spend most of his or her time solving neighborhood problems such as theft epidemics, illegal dumping and loiterers. The deputy also would provide extra hands to handle the many, many quality-of-life calls that patrol deputies can only reach late, if at all.

"When I see them, I know them personally. I know what they want to talk about," said Zamora, as a neighbor near Manor Drive retreated from her car window, comforted after a chat part about her financial troubles, part about the truck left parked in front of her home for days. "I wish I had more time to give my complete attention."

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