

## **Survey finds San Pablo voters moderately supportive of hospital parcel tax**

[By Sandy Kleffman](#)

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SAN PABLO -- Leaders of Doctors Medical Center are exploring whether to seek voter approval of a parcel tax to help keep doors open at the financially struggling hospital.

Doctors lost \$2.8 million in May, a sign of the challenges it continues to face despite a recent \$10 million advance from Contra Costa County.

The hospital board Wednesday heard the results of a telephone survey of 607 West Contra Costa residents taken June 9-15.

Half were asked if they would support a \$47 annual parcel tax, and the other half if they would vote for a \$97 tax.

Initially, 64 percent said they were leaning toward or would definitely support the \$47 tax.

The \$97 tax drew less support, with 54 percent indicating they were leaning toward a yes vote.

The measure would require a two-thirds vote for passage.

In what hospital leaders viewed as an encouraging sign, after people heard pro and con arguments, support rose. Seventy-three percent said they were leaning toward supporting a \$47 tax, which would raise \$5 million to \$6 million annually.

Sixty-one percent expressed support for the \$97 tax.

Hospital leaders made no decisions, but said they were encouraged by the findings.

"The good news is the poll shows there is substantial public support to have a reasonable parcel tax to keep this hospital open," said county Supervisor John Gioia, who heads the hospital board.

One option would be to seek approval of a \$47 tax in November through a mail-in ballot, said board

member Eric Zell. A decision will be made at a later board meeting.

The survey did not inform participants that a new parcel tax would be in addition to the \$52 annual tax that voters approved for Doctors in 2004. That measure passed with 84 percent support.

Nurse Tami Roncskevitz warned the board that although nurses worked hard to get the 2004 measure passed, an "anti-union climate and hostile work environment" at the hospital now could discourage many from participating this time.

"There's no question it will be necessary to have the support of all of the stakeholders," board member Zell said after the meeting. "We will be working on that from this point forward to make sure we get that support."

Hospital leaders are also in discussion with the state, Kaiser Permanente and John Muir Health to see if those organizations would be willing to help out, as they did when Doctors declared bankruptcy in 2006.

The hospital, which was running a \$30 million annual deficit when it entered into bankruptcy, now has about a \$15 million annual funding gap.

Contact Sandy Kleffman at 925-943-8249 or [skleffman@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:skleffman@bayareanewsgroup.com).