

Voters OK tax to keep San Pablo hospital open

[Carolyn Jones, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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Voters in west Contra Costa County overwhelmingly passed a parcel tax Tuesday to resuscitate Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo, which has the region's only full-service emergency room.

Measure J won by 74 percent, according to semiofficial results. It needed a two-thirds majority to pass.

"We're very pleased that voters recognize the importance of keeping this hospital open," said Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia. "This gives us some breathing room to work out a long-term sustainable financial model."



In the lung clinic, Carol Paule's temperature is checked at Doctors Medical Center. Voters overwhelmingly passed a parcel tax that will allow the hospital to remain open.

The \$47-per-year tax will bring in about \$5 million annually, enough to stave off creditors and keep Doctors Medical Center open for the foreseeable future.

If the tax failed, the hospital would have almost certainly closed, officials said. That would have left no full-service emergency rooms between Berkeley and Vallejo. Those suffering from heart attacks, strokes, car accidents and other emergencies would have faced critical delays to get to the nearest hospitals.

"I'm absolutely thrilled," said San Pablo Mayor Paul Morris. "We now have the opportunity to turn this whole thing around. There's an incredible amount of optimism out there."

Doctors, originally called Brookside, opened in 1954, and generations of west county residents were born or died there. Nearly everyone has been down the pastel-colored corridors: bringing in a sick child at 3 a.m., visiting a suffering loved one, seeing friends healed and comforted.

As a district hospital, Doctors is akin to Marin General and Eden Medical Center in Castro Valley. It's overseen by a publicly elected board, with a mission to serve the 250,000 or so residents who reside in the district.

But as private insurance costs and medical expenses began to soar in the 1990s, Doctors was especially hard hit. Many of Doctors' patients had limited insurance or none at all, leaving the hospital with chronic debts.

In 1997, faced with few options, the hospital merged with a for-profit health care chain called Tenet. That arrangement lasted until 2004, when Tenet pulled out. No other hospital company, such as Sutter, has expressed interest in saving Doctors since then.

By 2006, the hospital was on life support. Voters OK'd a \$54-per-year parcel tax, but it wasn't enough to keep Doctors from filing for bankruptcy. To avert a public health crisis, the county intervened, helping oversee the hospital and - along with Kaiser, the state and federal government - providing grants.

But the health care funding quagmire, locally as well as nationally, has not improved. Doctors' problems have only worsened with time, chief executive Dawn Gideon said.

MEASURE J PASSES 2-2-2-2

The parcel tax will help, but the hospital also plans to permanently rein in costs by sharing more services with other hospitals, refinancing debt and making further cuts to administration.

The cuts will total \$18 million, enough to close the gap in the hospital's \$139 million overall budget, Gideon said.

E-mail Carolyn Jones at carolynjones@sfchronicle.com.

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Contra Costa Elections Division

November 15, 2011 Special Mail Ballot Election Registered Voters: 105,433 Precincts Completely Reported: 41 of 41
Website last updated 11/15/2011 Ballots Cast: 32,517
8:07:53 PM PST Voter Turnout: 30.84 %

Semi-Official Results

November 15, 2011 Special Mail Ballot Election

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J - West Contra Costa Healthcare District - Parcel Tax - 2/3		
41 of 41 Precincts Reporting		
	Percent	Votes
Yes (NON)	73.68%	23,923
No (NON)	26.32%	8,546
		32,469

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