

Parcel tax passes for Doctors Medical Center

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[Contra Costa Times](#)

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West Contra Costa residents delivered a clear message Tuesday: They want Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo to remain, and they're willing to pay for it.

Voters overwhelmingly approved Measure J, a \$47 a year parcel tax that will raise \$5.1 million annually for the financially struggling hospital.

The tax received 23,923 yes votes, or 73.7 percent, easily reaching the required two-thirds threshold for passage. It received 8,546 no votes, or 26.3 percent.

Still to be counted are ballots that arrived in the mail Tuesday or were brought to one of the drop-off locations. But with the tax winning in every city, it is unlikely that the remaining votes will change the outcome.

"West County voters understand the importance of Doctors hospital and want to save the hospital," said county Supervisor John Gioia, who heads Doctors' governing board. "Now we need to take the confidence they've expressed in us and implement a plan to make the hospital financially sustainable."

The tax will be in addition to a \$52 annual levy that voters overwhelmingly approved for the hospital in 2004.

Measure J supporters argued that Doctors would likely shut down if the tax failed. That would result in longer ambulance rides for West County residents and longer waits to be seen at other hospitals, they said.

Doctors operates the only full-service emergency department along the Interstate 80 corridor between Berkeley and Vallejo.

It also is considered a crucial part of the region's safety net for low-income residents.

Yet despite its importance, Doctors has struggled financially for years. It serves large numbers of uninsured patients and those who are on Medi-Cal, the government-run program for low-income people that pays only a fraction of what hospitals typically get from private insurers.

Doctors currently runs about an \$18 million annual deficit.

Hospital leaders viewed the parcel tax as a way to fill part of that hole, along with expense cuts, debt refinancing and possibly new partnerships with other area hospitals and the county.

No organized opposition surfaced to the measure, and no one wrote a ballot argument against it. The Contra Costa Taxpayers Association decided to remain neutral.

Individuals who opposed the tax said they doubted whether the hospital could solve its financial problems long-term. They also questioned whether it was right to ask cash-strapped voters to approve a second parcel tax so soon after approving the 2004 tax.

Parcel tax passes 2-2-2-2

The latest tax would automatically expire if the hospital closes, supporters noted.

They raised about \$270,000 for a campaign that included mailers and a phone bank to encourage people to return the vote-by-mail ballots.

The largest contribution was \$100,000 from Kaiser Permanente, said Gioia. Kaiser has a hospital in Richmond with a smaller emergency department that is expected to be jammed if Doctors closes.

Other contributions to the yes on Measure J campaign came from physicians, ambulance companies and Richmond Sanitary, Gioia said.

In addition to the \$47 levy for single-family homeowners, Measure J would impose a \$94 annual tax on small multiunit residential parcels.

For commercial and industrial parcels, the annual levy would vary based on size. It would be \$282 for small parcels, \$470 for medium-sized properties and \$940 for large parcels.

Doctors declared bankruptcy in 2006 but remained open after Kaiser gave the hospital \$12 million over three years, and John Muir Medical Center donated \$3 million.

This year, with Doctors again struggling to avoid a second bankruptcy or closure, Kaiser donated \$4.2 million more.

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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 8:07:53 PM PST Ballots Cast: 32,517
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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