

## **SMMUSD Emergency/Temporary Parcel Tax Feasibility Committee**

**October 28, 2009**

### **Minutes**

Attending:

Joel Brand, Neil Carrey, Brian Chase, Tim Cuneo, Shari Davis, Anthony Fuller, Bruce Gilbert, Craig Hamilton, Chris Harding, Rebecca Kennerly, Tom Larmore, Laurie Lieberman, Mike Matthews, Debbie Mulvaney, Nimish Patel, Paul Silvern, Elizabeth Stearns, Bruce Sultan, Ted Winterer  
Neil Carrey began the meeting at 7:05.

The minutes from the October 14, 2009 meeting were approved.

### **Polling Subcommittee Report:**

Paul Goodwin from Goodwin-Simon presented the findings of the focus groups meetings. Some of the learnings from the sessions included:

- Community response to this measure is more guarded than the response to Measure R.
- There is a stunning lack of knowledge about the District and its funding. Although people understand the financial problems of the California state budget, there is no understanding that it has a direct impact on SMMUSD.
- People interpreted the fact that the District had passed parcel taxes multiple times before to mean that there must be a “mismanagement” problem rather than a product of funding woes brought on by the way the State of California funds school districts.
- Neither the group that was asked about \$225 nor the group that was asked about \$425 reacted to the amount of money but when it was suggested that the parcel tax increase might only make up for a portion of the District’s need, this did not engender a positive response.
- As the members of the focus groups became more informed, their opinions moved in favor of a parcel tax measure.
- Understanding the depth of the cuts very concretely (e.g., reducing by 1 out of every 7 teachers) was more impactful than hearing about a \$10 million cut in the district budget.

The committee discussed the need to begin educating voters right away about the actual cause of the District’s funding crisis rather than waiting for an actual parcel tax measure campaign, i.e., the relationship between the State’s funding crisis and that of the School District. The committee acknowledged the lack of Board support for a communications director position recently proposed by the Superintendent but nonetheless unanimously endorsed the need for the Board to engage a qualified firm to conduct a specific communication strategy of limited duration designed to address the lack of general knowledge about School District funding and its relationship to the State’s budget crisis. Neil Carrey moved and Paul Silvern seconded the following motion:

*As a part of the Committee's November 5 report to the Board of Education, we want to stress the importance of a District communication strategy, based on our alarming learnings of our community's understanding of the state's budget crisis and its devastating impact on the SMMUSD budget.*

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Ambassadors Subcommittee Report**

Tom Larmore reported that he, Chris Harding, and Brian Chase will be speaking with the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce to obtain feedback. Ted Winterer reported that he spoke with a couple of the neighborhood groups and found that they were aware of the District's financial issues, that they were positive about SMMUSD, but they had some concerns about the parcel tax on the heels of other SMMUSD and SMC measures. In general, there would be support. Neil Carrey said he would follow up with the other ambassador groups.

### **Timing Subcommittee Report**

Rebecca Kennerly gave the report, raising key questions about the timing of a parcel tax election.

1. Would SMMUSD be responsible for the full cost of a special election? Probably, as any special election would be our responsibility.
2. Is it advisable to hold the election on the scheduled June 4 general election or a special election? June 4 is the very last moment the new tax to make it onto the July 2010 property tax bills, a measure would have to be passed no later than the June election date. A mail-in election would seem to be advantageous as well.
3. Why consider a special election?
  - a. An election that is 5 weeks earlier than the scheduled June 4 date would give seniors (and perhaps SSI citizens) a longer window in which to apply for an exemption.
  - b. If the District takes action with employee layoffs, an earlier election could lead to an earlier rehire of those employees, giving us a greater opportunity to retain these teachers.
4. Would there be substantial concern about the costs of a special election? This is a concern that must be weighed seriously.
5. How much would the election actually cost? We are still waiting to get an update from LA County on the cost. The previous estimate we had been given was \$250,000.

### **Future Meetings:**

There are several meetings coming up:

- November 19 – *Executive Committee Only*
  - All chairs should come as prepared as possible to this important meeting.
- November 23 at 7:00 PM
  - The results of the poll will be presented and we will begin discussing our recommendation to the Board of Education.

- December 2 at 7:00 PM
- December 10 – Board of Education Meeting
  - The committee makes its recommendation to the Board.

Mike Matthews will have District staff call members and remind them of the importance of attending all meetings.