

By Amy Sylvestri

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Alameda County voters will decide on Measure A1 this election day – a parcel tax that would benefit the Oakland Zoo.

Measure A1 would levy a \$12 per parcel annual tax on residences and \$72 for commercial properties, with exemptions for low-income seniors . The tax would last for 25 years and bring in about \$4.5 million annually for the zoo. A two-thirds majority must vote in favor of the tax for it to pass.

The Measure A1 funds will go to infrastructure improvements like upgrading animal habitats and sewer lines at the zoo, as well as maintaining educational programs and field trips for kids – the basic elements of running the place.

At the same time, the zoo is also planning a separate \$72 million expansion into Knowland Park, which was first approved by the Oakland City Council in 1998. The 50-acre expansion will include administrative offices, new animal exhibits, and 30 acres of California wildlife in a natural habitat.

The Measure A1 money cannot be used for the expansion project, but opponents of A1 say that the zoo's expansion money should be used to fund necessities.

But Oakland Zoo president Joel Parrott says that bringing the expansion into the discussion at all is misleading.

The funds they have collected for that project are specially earmarked and can't be used on repairs or education programs. Similarly, if A1 passes, that money can't be used on the expansion, Parrott said

"There is misinformation out there," said Parrott. "There is a very clear expenditure plan that details improvements to the animal corridors. The plan must be followed and a citizens' oversight committee will be created to make sure it is. There will also be audits."

But those opposed to Measure A1 say the expansion needs to be taken into consideration as an example of how the zoo spends its money. A group called Save Knowland Park argues that the zoo shouldn't be asking for taxpayer money to run the zoo while planning the expansion.

"The whole idea of planning a \$72 million expansion while asking for funds begs a lot of questions," said Alexa Gilweit of Save Knowland Park. "My first one is, if you don't have the money for the animals you have now, how are you going to pay for more? I like the zoo, and I like the idea of educating kids, but there are better ways."