Parcel tax on ballot comes on heels of two bond measures

By Amy Sylvestri

San Leandro Times

The school district is asking San Leandrans to vote yes on Measure L, the $2.4 million proposed parcel tax that would be used to fund education.

If approved, the annual tax would be $39 per single family home, $19 per unit for apartment complexes with over five units, and two cents per square foot for commercial properties. Seniors will be able to file for an exemption.

A two-thirds majority is needed for the measure to pass.

What Measure L would pay for is not specific – the ballot says it will "protect" academic programs and retain quality teachers, and maintain computers, P.E. and art. The district has said that the money would not go to administrators' salaries. But the money could go to teachers' salaries.

Measure L comes on the heels of two large bonds that have been passed in San Leandro – the $109 million Measure B bond passed in 2006 and the $50 million Measure M bond passed in 2010. But bonds aren't like parcel taxes and must be used to complete specific projects – such as the ninth grade campus and the new Burrell Field.

On the other hand, the Measure L parcel tax money would go into the district's general fund.

Opponents of Measure L cite those previous bonds and say that the schools have asked voters for too much money already. They also say Measure L is just a temporary solution to the long-term problem of educational funding. The argument against also takes issue with the impact the tax would have on businesses who might not want to stay in San Leandro because of the tax.

The ballot argument against Measure L was written by the California Apartment Association Political Action Committee, which did not return calls for further comment.

Supporters of Measure L include the Alameda County Democratic Party, the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce, and the City Council – with Mayor Stephen Cassidy calling its approval vitally important.

"Things are so desperate in public education right now," said Deborah Cox, co-chair of Yes on Measure L. "There will be devastating cuts if this doesn't pass."

Cox said that she understands that people who feel the schools have just gotten the public's money through the previous bond measures or people without kids in the district might not see how Measure L would benefit them, but says that the quality of schools is directly connected to the quality of life in the city as a whole. Good schools mean higher property values and an influx of young families to live and work in the city, according to Cox.

"A community is only as good as its public schools," said Cox. "It's just a fact."