



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY

**TO** Rick Callender and Marta Lugo  
Valley Water

**FROM** Dave Metz and Miranda Everitt  
FM3 Research

**RE:** Valley Water Voter Follow-Up Survey Results

**DATE** March 3, 2020

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a follow-up survey of local voters to understand their views of Valley Water and a potential measure to renew the Safe Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program.<sup>1</sup> The study found that, after further refinement of the ballot language, the measure appears viable in November 2020. It receives two-thirds support initially, and expanded backing after voters hear more background information and messaging.

Specific survey findings included the following:

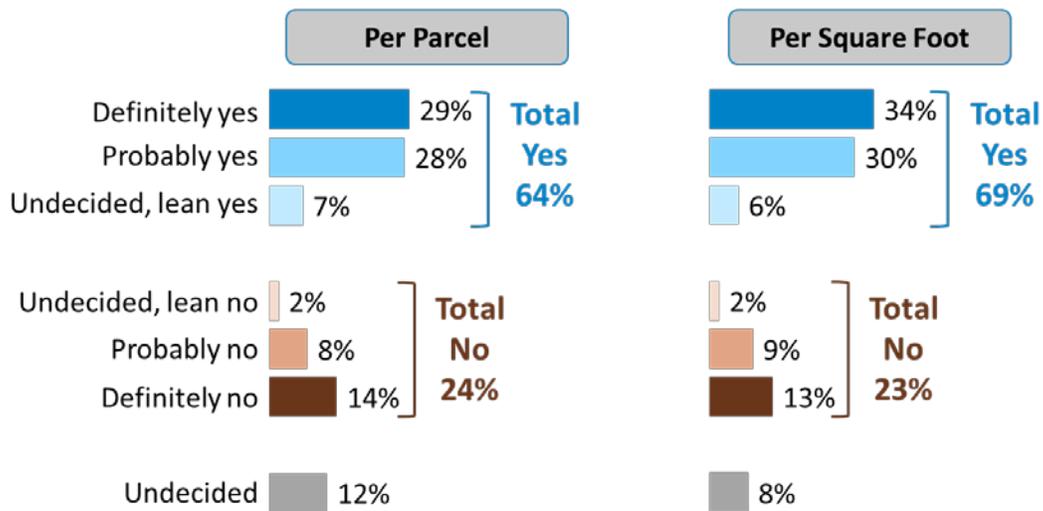
- **More than two-thirds support extending the existing parcel tax.** Figure 1 on the following page shows voter reactions to two versions of a draft 75-word ballot label; a "per parcel" formulation and "per square foot" formulation, both tested using a split sample. Taken together, such a measure has support from two-thirds (67%), with one-quarter opposed (24%). The "per square foot" parcel tax version has slightly more support (69% "yes" versus 64% for the "per parcel" formulation), but the difference is within the margin of error.

Recent prior polling testing different measure language on the same concept has consistently shown support hovering around the two-thirds threshold. Prior polls showed 68 percent support in July 2019, 65 percent support in March 2019, and a low of 58 percent in November 2019 after initial adjustments in ballot language required by state law.

**Figure 2: Voter Support for a Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program Parcel Tax**

*PER-PARCEL: Shall the measure to renew the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program which protects drinking water supply, dams from earthquakes and climate change, reduce pollution, toxins and contaminants in waterways, and provide flood protection by renewing Santa Clara Valley Water District’s existing parcel tax without increasing rates that averages \$60.44 per parcel annually as described in Resolution 2020 until ended by voters, raising approximately \$45,500,000 annually, with qualifying senior exemption, annual audits, independent citizen oversight be adopted?*

*PER SQUARE FOOT: Shall the measure to renew the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program which protects drinking water supply, dams from earthquakes and climate change, reduce pollution, toxins and contaminants in waterways, and provide flood protection by renewing Santa Clara Valley Water District’s existing parcel tax without increasing rates averaging \$.006 per square foot annually as described in Resolution 2020 until ended by voters, raising approximately \$45,500,000 annually, with qualifying senior exemption, annual audits, independent citizen oversight be adopted?*



- Given a plain-language explanation, support for the measure increases to three-quarters of those polled.** Voters were next given a plain-language explanation describing what the proposed measure would do and were asked again how they would vote. Support for the measure increases by seven points (to 74%) as shown in Figure 3 on the next page. This result is comparable to that obtained in several prior polls; in March 2019, support increased by six points to 71 percent "yes" after a similar explanation; the increase in the November 2019 poll was also six points.

**Figure 3: Voter Support After Plain-English Explanation**

*"The measure would renew and continue an existing parcel tax that voters approved in 2012. The rate would be (HALF SAMPLE: \$60.44 per parcel) (HALF SAMPLE: \$.006 per square foot) per year until repealed by voters. This renewal would not increase current rates. It funds upgrades to outdated, seismically unsafe pipelines, dams, and infrastructure to improve water supplies and prepare for the risk of flooding, droughts, earthquakes, natural disasters, and climate change. It would also restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat and provide access to open space. The measure would also reduce toxins, hazards, and contaminants in our rivers, lakes, and streams and remove vegetation near creeks to prevent wildfire risk."*

Vote	Initial Vote	After Explanation	Change
Total Yes	67%	74%	+7%
Total No	24%	22%	-2%
Undecided	9%	4%	-5%

- Voters' highest priorities for funding include protecting drinking water; providing safe, reliable water supplies; and preventing pollution.** Given a 7-point scale on which to rate the importance of potential uses for measure funding, several received a mean score of 6 or higher, indicating that they are "very important" to broad majorities. These include *protecting drinking water; providing a safe, reliable supply of water for the future; reducing toxins, hazards and contaminants in our waterways; providing safe, clean water for future droughts and emergencies; protecting our water supply and dams from earthquakes and natural disasters; and providing safe, clean water in our creeks and bays.* These findings are also consistent with prior polling.
- Exposure to arguments in favor of a measure pushes support to two-thirds.** Voters next heard an exchange of pro and con messaging. Support messaging in isolation pushes support to three-quarters, well above the two-thirds required, as shown in Figure 4 below. Opposition messaging does have a notable impact as well, eroding that advantage to a 62 percent "yes" vote.

**Figure 4: Progression of Support for the Measure After Support Messaging**

Vote	Initial Vote	After Explanation	After Support Messaging	Change
Total Yes	67%	74%	75%	+8%
Total No	24%	22%	20%	-4%
Undecided	9%	4%	5%	-4%

In sum, the survey result show that voters offer solid support for a measure to extend the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection ballot measure. As in prior polling, a clear explanation of the concept, along with exposure to arguments in favor of a measure of the measure, brings support to more than the two-thirds required.

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<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** From Feb. 5-13, 2020, FM3 completed 839 online and live telephone interviews (on both landlines and cell phones) with likely November 2020 voters in the Valley Water district. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-3.5% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.