



OPINION
RESEARCH
& STRATEGY

TO Rick Callender and Marta Lugo
Valley Water

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FM3 Research

RE: Valley Water Voter Follow-Up Survey Results

DATE April 20, 2020

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.¹ The study found that, even in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and its economic impacts, the measure appears viable in November 2020. It receives two-thirds support initially, and expanded backing after voters hear more background information and messaging.

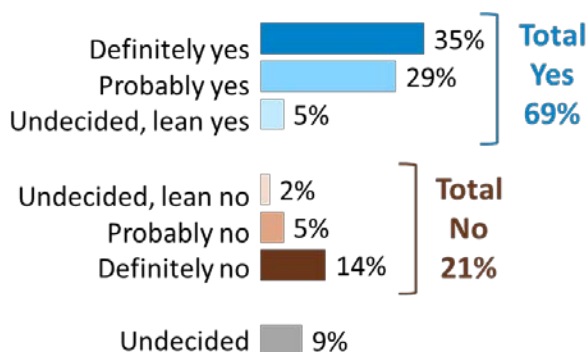
Specific survey findings included the following:

- **Nearly seven in ten support extending the existing parcel tax.** Figure 1 on the next page shows voter reactions to a draft 75-word ballot label. Such a measure has support from nearly seven in ten voters (69%), with one in five opposed (21%). 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. A version tested in February 2020 showed two-thirds support.

¹ **Methodology:** From April 11-16, 2020, FM3 completed 809 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%.

Figure 1: Voter Support for a Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program Parcel Tax

Shall the measure to renew the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program which ensures public health and safety by: protecting drinking water supply, dams from earthquakes and climate change; reducing pollution, toxins and contaminants in waterways; and providing 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 nearly 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 four points (to 73%) as shown in Figure 2. 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 and in February 2020 there was a seven-point increase.

Figure 2: 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 \$.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 support public health and community safety by increasing police patrols near waterways, reducing toxins, hazards, and contaminants in our rivers, lakes, and streams; reducing the threat of flood risks; and removing vegetation near creeks to reduce wildfire risks.

Vote	Initial Vote	After Explanation	Change
Total Yes	69%	73%	+4%
Total No	21%	19%	-2%
Undecided	9%	8%	-1%

- **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 3 below. Opposition messaging does have a notable impact as well, eroding that advantage to a 64 percent "yes" vote.

Figure 3: Progression of Support for the Measure After Support Messaging

Vote	Initial Vote	After Explanation	After Support Messaging	Change
Total Yes	69%	73%	74%	+5%
Total No	21%	19%	18%	-3%
Undecided	9%	8%	8%	-1%

- **Voters' highest priorities for funding include protecting drinking water supplies during public health emergencies 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; providing reliable water supplies during public health emergencies; 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 largely consistent with prior polling.
- **All of this is in the context of broadly shared concern about coronavirus and its impact on household finances.** More than seven in ten (72%) of voters said they were "extremely" or "very concerned" about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in Santa Clara County. And two in five (40%) believe that their household's financial circumstances will get worse in the next few months; a plurality (48%) believe they will stay the same. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, studies consistently showed voters split on whether the county was headed in the right direction. Now, however, solid majorities (60%) say things are headed in the right direction locally - up 20 points from just two months ago.

In sum, the survey results show that voters offer solid support for a measure to extend the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection ballot measure, even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the economy. 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.