

Most Campaign Money Pushing Tax Increase Coming From Outside City

Mayor's Former Employer, Edison, Gives \$45,000 In Support Of Tax Increase On Local Residents And Businesses

■ By **GEORGE ECONOMIDES**
Publisher

It takes a two-thirds majority of voters to pass Mayor Bob Foster's tax increase on local residents and businesses, but, ironically, two-thirds of the money he's raised to support his efforts has come from . . . outside Long Beach.

Through the October 1 filing period, Foster's Rebuild Long Beach, Yes On Measure I campaign raised \$248,500, of which \$168,250, or 68 percent, came from companies and individuals located outside the city, according to records maintained by the Long Beach city clerk's office.

The mayor's former employer, Edison International, where he served as president of Southern California Edison, has donated \$45,000 to help its former employee get the tax increase passed. Voters will decide Measure I on November 4.

Other supporters outside the city contributing at least \$5,000 are: Clean Energy of Seal Beach, \$30,000; DeMenno Kerdoon, a recycling firm in Compton, \$25,000; Giradi And Keese, a Los Angeles law firm, \$25,000; Engstrom Lipscomb & Lack, personal injury and litigation lawyers in Los Angeles, \$5,000; Alpert & Alpert Iron & Metal of Los Angeles, \$10,000; Performance Team Freight Systems of Santa Fe Springs, \$5,000; R. Hall Investments Properties of Tustin, \$10,000; Three Rivers Trucking of Exeter, \$5,000; and Total Transportation Services of Rancho Dominguez, \$5,000.

Local contributors include the Long Beach Police Officers Association, \$25,000; Tidelands Oil Production Co., \$19,000; attorney Skip Keesal, \$7,500; Healthcare CEO John Molina, \$5,000; Raymond Alpert, \$5,000; and Laserfiche, \$5,000. Third District Councilman Gary DeLong pitched in \$2,500.

The tax increase – a parcel tax on property owners to repair the city's infrastructure and build new community and public safety facilities – is the same for all Long Beach homeowners irrespective of the value of their home. A multimillion-dollar home in Naples will pay the same tax as a \$300,000 home in North Long Beach. Apartment owners will be charged per unit and pay the same rate as homeowners. The tax will increase annually for 35 years, with the increase tied to the Consumer Price Index. Business property owners will pay by the square foot and will collectively pay approximately 37 percent of the \$1.3 billion cost.

City Attorney Changes Opinion On Release Of Exemption Information

City Attorney Robert Shannon, who told the Business Journal on September 17 that the exemption forms filed by individuals to avoid paying the parcel tax would be public record, has changed his opinion. The Journal's story appeared in its September 30 edition.

Shannon now says that only the person's name is public record. He previously told this writer that an individual's address, phone number and birthdate would also be public record.

Homeowners 65 years of age and older who live in their home are exempt from paying the proposed parcel tax, but must file an annual exemption form to qualify. The Business Journal raised the concern that the exemption forms would be available to scam artists, many of whom prey on senior citizens.

Shannon issued a memo to Councilmember Gerrie Schipske – dated September 30 – after she requested, on September 26, an opinion “to any legal requirement that information contained in Parcel Tax Exemption forms be released to the public.”

The memo stated: “The Attorney General has taken the position that such forms are subject to public inspection pursuant to the mandate of the Public Records Act. There is no appellate opinion directly on point. While an Attorney General opinion is subject to some deference, it does not carry the force of a law or appellate opinion.

“In this regard, the opinion fails to discuss the right to privacy contained in Article I, Section One of the California Constitution. This right is fundamental and must be weighed against the public's right to know as expressed in the Public Records Act.

“With these competing considerations in mind, it is my opinion that while the name of the filer would be subject to release, any further information, such as the filer's address or any required ‘supplemental documentation’ would be confidential and not subject to disclosure. While the public has a right to know who is claiming an exemption, I can discern no fundamental public need for disclosure of any further information which would override the Constitutional right to privacy enjoyed by every Long Beach citizen.”

Shannon told the Business Journal that the city would go to court to fight any effort to obtain any information other than a person's name. ■