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School bonds approved in a landslide

by Robb Fulcher
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Hermosa voters overwhelmingly approved a $13.6 million school bond to revamp the city's two aging public schools, build at least 13 new classrooms, acquire more land and build a gymnasium on the Valley School campus.

"I'm feeling really great. I'm really pleased," said Jennifer Rosenfeld, co-chair of the Yes on J campaign. "I think the people of Hermosa Beach knew this was the right thing to do, to invest in our schools. I think we got that message out."

Measure J pulled down 65 percent of the vote, well over the 55 percent required for passage. Thirty-five percent of the voters weighed in against J.

The bond measure, the first in the history of the city's 50-year-old schools, had the support of Congresswoman Jane Harman, State Senator Debra Bowen, Assemblyman George Nakano, Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, four Hermosa council members and a host of commissioners and civic leaders.

The successful campaign was bolstered by a $27,500 war chest provided mostly by Dougherty + Dougherty architects of Costa Mesa, which has been employed by the school district to help prepare its renovation and expansion program, and UBS Paine Webber of Los Angeles, which is expected to assist in the sale of the bonds.

Opponents of Measure J had unsuccessfully argued that the school district could have cut overhead or sold off land to raise money, rather than going to the taxpayers.

The bond issue is expected to cost individual Hermosans in the neighborhood of $21 per $100,000 of assessed value, bond backers have said.

Of the $13.6 million total, $3.8 million is to be set aside to acquire property now housing the Adelphia Communications cable TV company next door to Valley School. Officials have said they are willing to use imminent domain to secure the property.

During extensive campaigning, the Yes on J forces stressed a need to upgrade basic items such as electricity and plumbing systems in the city's Eisenhower-era schools.
The bond is needed "to completely bring both schools up to the current standards of

construction and technology, and to build the necessary classrooms to handle anticipated growth in the district," school board President Cathy McCurdy said.

"Our schools need fundamental improvements. They were built half a century ago and upgraded nearly 20 years ago. The funding from Measure J will go towards basic upgrades on our heating, plumbing and electrical systems, which are badly out of date," school Superintendent Duffy Clark said.

All of the 10 school districts closest to Hermosa have used bonds to finance school improvements, proponents say.

Opponents of Measure J said the school district should raise money for improvements through "no tax" methods such as teaming up with the Beach Cities Health District to build a school gym, an idea that the health district suggested and the school district had rejected.

Opponents also suggested that the school district sell or lease the 6.2-acre site of the old North School, which the district now leases for $200,000 a year to the South Bay Adult School and Sea Sprites daycare center.