

Hermosa Beach

Counting down to Measure S

by Lisa Jacobs and Alana Garrigues

Hermosa Beach voters return to the polls June 7 to vote on a \$59 million school bond measure, just 19 months after a previous measure fell short by just 32 votes.

The bond would address overcrowding by rebuilding and reopening North School and add upgrades to safety, facilities and technology at Hermosa Valley and Hermosa View. The measure would be \$29.50 per \$100,000 of assessed value annually.

Detractors of the November 2014 Measure Q bond, valued at \$54 million, argued that

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the school district didn't have a clear plan and hadn't vetted all options for a third school, including a lease at the Community Center, a North School property trade or a new lot purchase. They also voiced concerns about a Valley Park encroachment.

Now, after months of campaigning and with the backing of both the City of Hermosa Beach and the Chamber of Commerce, Measure S supporters are hopeful the bond will pass. School bonds require a 55 percent majority.

Mike Collins, an active member in the community group Hermosa Educational Renewal Operation (HERO), said passing the bond is simply what the kids and future generations deserve.

"I think that everybody agrees that the schools are overcrowded and outdated and underfunded and need to be fixed," said Collins. "The district has been sitting in a critical situation for a long time of overcrowding and they've given us a smart bond that is a safe investment in the future of Hermosa Beach."

He points to neighboring school districts in Manhattan Beach and Redondo Beach where per student state funding exceeds Hermosa, simply due to the district's K-8 grade levels. Residents have approved recent bond measures in the neighboring beach cities. Hermosa residents currently pay \$15.75 per \$100,000 in assessed home value; that number is \$92.42 in Redondo and \$70.05 in Manhattan.

The Yes on S campaign, registered with the Fair Political Practices Commission, is a well organized and well-funded effort, with dozens of people knocking on doors. It has nearly \$30,000 in donations from residents and local businesses, including a \$10,500 donation from the architecture firm gkkworks, the company hired in 2014 to conduct a long-range facilities plan for the district.

"It's standard practice in any industry that (gkkworks) might donate to the campaign. It's a relationship," Collins said. "The campaign has nothing to do with the district... It's an opportunity to invest in the future of Hermosa Beach, in my opinion, and it doesn't guarantee anything on the back end for them getting work."

By contrast, opponents of Measure S, who argue that the school district is still not evaluating all the options, are running on a shoestring budget and have not registered as a Political Action Committee. PACs are only required to file after spending more

than \$2,000 on a campaign.

"We're not raising money," said Mike Prassas. "We're just a ragtag group of grassroots volunteers who are just doing their own thing."

Prassas, a 25-year Hermosa Beach resident and advocate for joint-use of the Hermosa Beach Community Center (1001 Pier Avenue School), isn't happy with HBCSD's decision-making methods.

She said the district "picks out the plan and then shows the facts that fit the plan, instead of gathering all the facts and then coming up with a plan." The district, she said, "doubled down on North School after the defeat of Measure S, pushing only one solution."

Building at the North School site \$28-33 million isn't cost effective, Prassas said. She noted cost estimates are prices from 2015, and could escalate the time construction starts. In addition, she believes the district will not be able to afford maintaining a new school.

Prassas, who parented two children through HBCSD schools, supporting them through volunteer efforts and monetary donations, said she is not against a bond in general.

If Measure S fails, she said she would support going back to the public November to "look at some of these other things other than building a brand new million school at North School."

"It's not because we don't want to build the kids," she said. "It's simply because we all feel strongly that this hasn't been a transparent process."

Should the bond measure fail again, Collins said planning another bond would be possible. But continuous campaigning a drain on volunteers on both sides. While he agrees construction costs will continue to rise, students are studying in overcrowded classrooms.

He believes that the district has made appropriate adjustments to the measure from 2014.

"The district listened when Measure S didn't pass, and they made some alterations to the plan that incorporated what people were saying they didn't like about Measure Q," Collins said.

"They've given us a better bond. For more information about Measure S, including ballot measure language and official arguments for and against the measure, visit hbcso.org. To learn more about the Yes on S campaign and Hermosa HHV visit hermosahero.com. To learn more about the No on S campaign, visit restorehermosaschools.com."

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