

The Figures Tell the Real Story on Park Assessment Balloting

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By ROSEANN MIKOS

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In his Ventura County Perspective article "Balloting Redefines Democracy," (June 27), Bruce Roland of Ojai is wrong about what happened in Moorpark's recent mail ballot "election." He clearly doesn't understand the Moorpark issue.

At first blush, Mr. Roland sounds like a taxpayer advocate concerned about fairness in voting. He would have you believe that far fewer people in Moorpark got to vote on reestablishing the park maintenance assessment in the spring mail ballot than were eligible to vote in November 1997 when the city unsuccessfully attempted to pass a similar measure in a standard election.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Proposition 218, the Right to Vote on Taxes Act, was qualified for the ballot by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn.--California's best-known taxpayer advocate. Passed in 1996, it was designed as a more fair way for communities to vote on local assessments, like this one.

Proposition 218 took away a key Moorpark funding source for park maintenance but it also specified two ways to reestablish such canceled assessments. Moorpark tried the first when it held the 1997 election. After that failed, it tried the other: a mail ballot proceeding, allowing all who would have to pay the assessment to vote.

So no, Moorpark did not fail to get an assessment before Proposition 218 and then "take advantage" of 218 to later get one passed. Rather, it was Proposition 218 that canceled the assessment district we already had. It just took two tries to properly educate the public about what happened and how we could rectify the situation to get back about \$400,000 to \$450,000 in lost annual revenue.

What were the voting figures in 1997 vs. 1999? Roland erroneously claims the vote wasn't overwhelming in support of the assessment in June '99, implying that it was overwhelmingly in opposition to the assessment in 1997. He has seriously misconstrued the data.

Here are the facts. In November 1997, 3,781 ballots were cast (2,052 in favor, 1,722 opposed) to keep the otherwise canceled assessment. This means that of 15,321 eligible registered Moorpark voters, only 24.7% voted--54% for the assessment and 46% against. The measure did not receive the two-thirds super-majority required so it failed.

During the 1998 Moorpark City Council campaign, I talked to hundreds of Moorpark residents who overwhelmingly told me that they did not understand they were voting in 1997 to keep an assessment they already had been paying. They wished they could change their votes.

This spring the city decided to try again. I decided to get involved with the Save Our Parks Committee. I wanted people to know what they were voting on and to get a better turnout than in 1997. More than 30 volunteers spent hundreds of hours calling Moorpark residents; most were grateful to get a chance to discuss the issue.

My goal as phone bank coordinator was to reach enough people with the facts so that we would get a two-thirds super-majority in favor, although Proposition 218 requires only a simple majority for mail ballot proceedings. If we succeeded, and we did--it would send a stronger statement of Moorpark's support for parks.

According to city figures, 9,041 mail ballots were sent to Moorpark property owners, per Proposition 218 guidelines. Valid votes were received from the owners of 3,530 of the properties subject to the assessment. Anyone who might have to pay had an opportunity to vote--unlike the 1997 election, in which business owners who would have to pay an assessment had no chance to vote. That means 40.1% of those eligible did vote--much higher than the 27.4% who voted in 1997.

Of those voting in '99, if we consider the number of parcels represented, 2,425 voted yes and 1,105 voted no, a super-majority of 68.7%, substantially higher than the 54% approval rating in 1997.

Mr. Roland says 7,000 Moorpark voters were excluded from voting this time, claiming that "not since women's suffrage have so many people been excluded from participating in the democratic process." This is utter poppycock! He bases this on 16,000 registered voters and 9,000 mail ballots--as if only one registered vote was represented by each mail ballot. Wrong again. If half to three-fourths the 8,332 homes/condos/mobile homes have two registered voters, that would account for 12,498 to 14,581 of Moorpark's registered voters.

The truth is that more people voted in this mail ballot "election" than in the 1997 standard election. And no matter how you slice it in this admittedly new kind of vote the favorable tallies were more than two-thirds:

- If we count it by the raw number of property parcels whose owners voted, 68.7% of them voted "YES."
- If we count it by the formula in Proposition 218 for "weighted" ballots, with those owning more property getting a greater vote, it came to 70.9% voting "YES."
- If we count it by the most common type of household in Moorpark, the single-family dwelling, 72.1% of those homeowners voting said "YES."

If anyone still has questions about the park mail ballot or what it means, feel free to contact me. And thank you, Moorpark, for your overwhelming support for maintaining our park system!

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