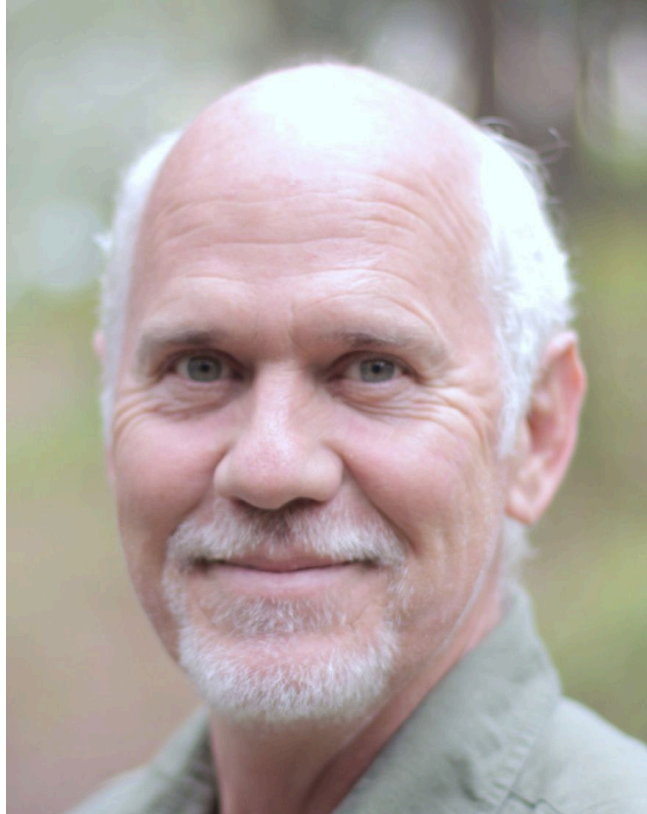

Guest Column: An abuse of democracy

September 23, 2022



A handful of local citizens are attempting to overturn Measure S (City) and Measure R (County) which were both approved by a majority of voters in 2020. These measures adopted a one percent sales tax increase to help fund local government programs and services. The genius of this plan is that the many tourists and visitors passing through will help us to pay for our essential community services.

Even though these measures were supported by a majority of voters it only takes five percent of the voters to put this action back on the ballot. This is a very low threshold. In Crescent City this means that only 49 voters can ask for a revote, even though 65 percent voted to approve Measure S.

To be clear there are no allegations that the votes were miscounted. These people simply do not like the results of this election.

Even though this effort is legal, I think that this is an abuse of democracy. In theory these same people could bring this issue back before the voters every two years. This is a tremendous waste of time and money. It will cost an estimated \$20,000 to place these antigovernment measures on the ballot.

Here is where it gets a little confusing. The new measures will have different letters. On the 2022 County ballot you will see Measure U, which proposes to repeal the 2020 County Measure R. On the 2022 City ballot Measure T proposes to repeal the 2020 Crescent City Measure S. Even though the question might seem convoluted, the answer is simple. Just vote NO on Measures T and U.

In order to appreciate what we would be giving up; it is informative to look at how the City and County have spent these funds since the sales tax measures were passed.

Measure R will generate an estimated \$1.8 million annually. According to the Del Norte County impact report, these funds are being used to “specifically address a long standing need to support, maintain, and improve vital services, public facilities, and infrastructure in our community.”

In the first year, Measure R funds have been spent to improve funding for staffing, facilities and services at County Departments including the Sheriff, Probation, Veteran Services, District Attorney, Agriculture, Emergency Services, Community Development Planning and Code Enforcement. If funding is cut this will result in reduced staffing which means reduced services.

The County has a Measure R Citizens Oversight Committee which has reviewed the expenditures in the first year and “did not identify any misspending or misuse of Measure R funds.”

Measure S is projected to generate \$2 million in annual funding for the City. This represents about 20% of the City’s budget. This funding is being spent as anticipated to improve staffing and services from the Police and Fire Departments. To date, \$1.5 million has been spent on street and sidewalk improvements. Another \$1.5 million has been spent on operations and maintenance of the very popular Fred Endert Pool.

Crescent City has a Measure S Citizens Oversight Committee that has played an active role in hearing suggestions from the public and making recommendations of spending priorities to the City Council. These public meetings have provided an extra level of fiscal accountability and transparency to the expenditure of Measure S funding.

Having this extra funding also provides opportunities for innovation that might not otherwise be possible. After struggling to recruit new police officers from outside of the community, Crescent City started a program to train “homegrown cops.”

The City is recruiting local men and women who are interested in joining the police force and is using Measure S funding to pay the cost of sending them to the police academy. When they finish training and return to Crescent City, the new recruits will be reimbursed 20% of the training costs for each year that they serve. After five years the total cost of training will be forgiven. This provides an incentive to stay here and continue as a member of the Crescent City Police Department.

Both the City and the County can use the funds from this one percent tax to leverage other funds that become available. Many grant funds require a local match. Having funding available to provide this match can lead to hundreds of thousands even millions of dollars in funding for infrastructure projects.

Some people say that government needs to live within their means, but services and programs cannot be run on bootstraps and beans. If we want to have a community that is safe, attractive, and functional we all must commit to invest in this success. If we starve our government agencies of funding, we will end up with diminished services.

The Del Norte County Democratic Central Committee voted unanimously to oppose the repeal of Measure S and Measure R. We encourage others to follow our lead and choose to preserve funding for vital City and County services.

Please vote NO on Measure T and Measure U.

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