

TO: Tamalpais Union High School District Directors
FROM: Mimi Willard
DATE: October 15, 2019
SUBJECT: PARCEL TAX RENEWAL; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As a taxpayer-resident of the Tamalpais Union High School district, I am concerned about recent developments that merit more careful consideration by the board.

Flat parcel tax renewal: The district appears to be hurtling forward toward a flat parcel tax increase of \$190 on the March 2020 ballot. This is reckless. The polling on the \$190 increase showed it had a 50/50 chance of failing. The district faces a fiscal cliff in 2022. It is mind-boggling that the board has not in any public meeting that I've seen asked its consultants (paid for at taxpayer expense) whether pursuing the \$190 increase is prudent. The option of a \$90 increase polled better, and of no increase better still. The polling, which was completed several months ago, did not reflect subsequent developments that make passing your parcel tax even more difficult. These include: Marin Municipal Water District's large new capital maintenance fee; Marin Wildfire preparedness tax on the March 2020 ballot (>\$200 for average single family home based on \$0.10 per square foot); SMART tax renewal also on the March 2020 ballot; and most important, a general sense of tax exhaustion. The Coalition of Sensible Taxpayers will not support a further \$190 increase in TUHSD's parcel tax. The assertion that TUHSD needs \$190 doesn't mean it will pass.

Per square foot parcel tax: The district should be taking a more serious look at a per square foot parcel tax. Flat parcel taxes that levy the same amount for a mansion, apartment complex or small condo are unfair. Recent developments have changed / clarified the legal situation regarding schools' ability to levy a tax based on square footage of improvements. Such an approach will have broader voter support.

Community engagement: In the past, TUHSD was a model of public engagement. In the last year, things have taken a turn for the worse. Open comment has been moved to the end of the meeting, which is highly unusual. No one comes to offer public comment on topics not on your agenda given the lateness of the hour and the great uncertainty as to at what time all other board business will be complete. Meanwhile, letters submitted to your board are no longer included in the meeting packet. Topics of interest to the public are buried on the agenda behind lengthy discussions of topics of little public interest. The net effect is that public input is effectively stifled, as is the dissemination of that input to other members of the public. These changes send an unfortunate message to the taxpayer-voters on whom you are depending to increase your parcel tax for the second time in 16 months, taking it from \$300 to \$640.