

Occidental Community Services District Frequently Asked Questions - Measure C

The Occidental Community Services District has overseen the Occidental Fire Department since 1993. Occidental Fire covers an area over 33 square miles. Due to a host of operational challenges, the District is seeking voter approval of Measure C, a parcel tax that would be dedicated to funding fire and emergency services locally. Listed below are commonly asked questions regarding Measure C.

What is the Occidental Community Services District, and what territory does it cover?

OCSD covers roughly 2,500 residents and 33 square miles - from Coleman Valley to Joy Road, out to Salmon Creek Falls to downtown Occidental, East along Occidental Road and Graton Road to Green Hill Road, and North along Harrison Grade Road; Occidental Fire provides mutual aid when our neighboring fire departments need help and vice-versa, especially with Camp Meeker, Graton, Gold Ridge, Bodega Bay, and Bodega Fire Departments with whom we share borders.

What is Measure C?

Measure C is a ballot measure that will appear before voters in the Fall of 2019. Because Measure C is only to be used to enhance fire and emergency services, it requires a 2/3 majority of voters to pass. Measure C will establish a tax on all parcels within the Occidental Community Services District boundaries, to be used solely for fire and emergency services.

Why is Measure C on the Ballot in the Fall of 2019?

Occidental Fire has been considering options for closing our daytime service gap for several years. Measure C will primarily be utilized to fund daytime staffing at the firehouse to guarantee daytime response, and significantly reduce response times.

The increased demand via emergency calls is unsustainable. Hoping that there will be volunteer firefighters not at work and near the fire station 100% of the time is not a long-term plan. Thus, the Occidental Fire Board decided to move forward with a well thought out plan for voters to consider. Funding is needed as soon as possible to ensure coverage for fires, traffic collisions, medical emergencies, disaster events, etc.

What will Measure C cost homeowners?

Residential parcel rates are set at \$200 per year, or 55 cents per day, per parcel.

What will Measure C cost commercial businesses?

Commercial parcel rates are set at \$300 per parcel, plus a 14 cents per square foot, per year.

Will Measure C charge my agricultural or timberland property by the acre?

No. The District considered and rejected applying a per acre rate for agricultural and timberland parcels.

How does the proposed parcel tax compare to other fire departments?

It is consistent with other local departments. Most fire departments charge between \$200-\$560 for residential parcels and \$300-400 per parcel, plus a range of fees for square footage for commercial properties.

Are Occidental Firefighters currently paid as staff?

No. From the Fire Chief to the newest firefighters, Occidental Fire is 100% volunteer driven, and has been for over 100 years.

What is the staffing plan?

The District goal is to have paid staff at the firestation during daytime hours. Measure C will provide for the hiring of 2 career paid staff. The District will prioritize daytime staffing with these paid firefighters, as that is currently where our biggest challenge is. The paid staff will enhance our District volunteer base, who we will continue to respond to calls. Our loyal volunteers will continue to respond in the evenings and weekends, including when there are larger incidents like traffic accidents, house and wildfires, and disaster situations like flooding, earthquakes, and major storms.

Do I pay a parcel tax now to Occidental Fire?

Yes. When the District was created in 1993, a parcel tax based on units of risk was passed by voters. Generally Residential parcels pay \$80. The District receives some funding of the general property tax bill that comes back to the local area.

One percent of Occidental property tax is returned for local services; of this, only 3.4 percent (.00034) is directed to the Occidental Volunteer Fire Department. This is the lowest rate of property tax returned to a fire district in all of Sonoma County (countywide average return to fire districts is 7%).

How did the fire station remodel get paid for?

For the fire station addition and remodel in 2005, the District self funded the work and took out a mortgage style loan, and paid it off within ten years. Also, the district has been able to buy and pay off new fire apparatus, without taking on major debt.

Are taxpayer protections built in to Measure C?

Yes. All taxpayers who live within the District boundaries will be able to attend regular meetings of the District Board of Directors that meets regularly on the second Tuesday of the month, starting at 7pm. Additionally, the Occidental Community Services District Board will hold an annual rate setting meeting specifically on the parcel tax at the fire station in Occidental. There will be no need to go to Santa Rosa or some other district to follow the public meeting, complain, or make requests of the District Board of Directors in open public session.

What about the \$52 million ½ cent sale tax the County of Sonoma is considering?

The County of Sonoma may approach voters for a ½ cent sales tax countywide, that will need to be adopted by ⅔ of the voters. If it is approved, then Occidental will be well situated if Measure C is successful, and we continue to explore collaborations with our neighboring districts, to receive additional funds and staffing from the County. But there is no guarantee that that tax will be on the ballot, nor if it will pass. Occidental is moving forward to best serve our public with the highest level of service possible, in the most responsible way. We need to take care of our own house first, and the needs and demands of the District cannot wait for the County of Sonoma to determine our path forward.

What happened to the CalFire “Fire Prevention Fee” that I used to pay?

As of July 1, 2017, Cal Fire has suspended their old ~\$135/parcel fee to rural property owners. Neither Occidental Fire, nor the County of Sonoma, saw any of the money generated from this prior fee.

What happens if Measure C does not pass?

The service level of the Occidental Fire Department will be in jeopardy. The District will be forced to consider other funding solutions to ensure someone will respond to emergencies. One possible scenario is annexing with a neighboring district that already has a parcel tax, which would be applied to the Occidental parcels (through a LAFCO reorganization procedure). The Board of Directors of Occidental Fire decided that a locally-controlled parcel tax is a better option than consolidating with another fire district and imposing that tax without voter approval; thus leading to Measure C.

Can renters vote on Measure C, or is it just for property owners?

All registered voters within the boundaries of the Occidental Community Services District have the opportunity to vote on Measure C. To determine your status as a district resident, contact the Sonoma County Registrar of Voters at 707-565-6800.

How important is it to vote?

Very! As a special election year, there is only one item - Measure C. Please take the time to educate yourself, and cast your ballot on or before November 5th, 2019.

More Questions?

Contact Volunteer Fire Chief, Ron Lunardi at the fire station, at 707-874-3800. Please leave a message and he or another volunteer will get back to you as soon as possible.