

STAFF REPORT
City of Lancaster

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Date: July 6, 2016

To: Mayor Parris and City Council Members

From: Mark V. Bozigian, City Manager
Jason Caudle, Deputy City Manager
Britt Avrit, CMC, City Clerk

Subject: **Ordinance authorizing a Special All Mail Ballot Election**

Recommendation:

Introduce **Ordinance No. 1014** (the “Ordinance”), authorizing a Special All Mail Ballot Election to be conducted on October 11, 2016, and establishing procedures, rules and regulations therefor.

Background:

The Constitution of the State of California authorizes charter cities to make and enforce all ordinances and regulations in respect to municipal affairs and may provide for, among other things, the conduct of city elections. Additionally, Section 102 of the City of Lancaster’s Charter states that the City may “adopt ordinances establishing procedures, rules or regulations concerning City of Lancaster elections and public officials including but not limited to, the qualifications and compensation of elected officials the method, time and requirements to hold elections, to fill vacant offices and for voting by mail.”

This Ordinance provides that the City may conduct a Special All Mail Ballot Election on October 11, 2016, if and to the extent the City Council adopts a resolution calling for such election. This Ordinance further provides that if such an election is called, it shall be conducted pursuant to the rules, procedures and regulations established by state law, including, without limitation, the mail ballot provisions of the Elections Code (Cal. Elect. Code § 4000 *et seq.*). If adopted, this Ordinance will take effect immediately pursuant to Section 36937 of the Government Code.

The proposed Special All Mail Ballot Election is for the purpose of seeking voter consent to authorize the City Council to establish a parcel tax to raise funds for law enforcement protection and homeless services. A parcel tax is a tax on parcels of real property collected as part of a parcel's property tax bill. Unlike the property tax, the parcel tax is not based on the value of property and is therefore considered a 'special tax' which is allowable under Prop 13. It is typically a flat tax per parcel but may vary with the size or characteristics of the parcel. The parcel tax is a main source of revenue for schools, colleges, hospitals, and special districts and must be approved by two-thirds of voters and is established by ordinance.

Homeless Crisis in Lancaster:

Homelessness is a rapidly growing problem as households continue to suffer from the deepest shrunken economy since the Great Depression. Lancaster was hit particularly hard losing 30% in assessed value, with many families losing their houses to bank foreclosures. Since this last recession Lancaster has been experiencing a uniquely high homeless population with the highest rate in Los Angeles County (.8% versus Los Angeles County's average of .4%). A recent head count by Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) shows our region's homeless population has doubled from 1,412 in 2011 to 3,038 in 2016, increasing faster than Los Angeles County overall.

Homeless demographics have also been shifting; women now make up a greater share of the total, increasing from 24% in 2013 to 32%. Homeless women live in a constant danger of being abused. With numbers increasing this means more assaults and a greater need for social services. Further, rates for homeless veterans are twice the national average. For a community that reveres military service this is completely unacceptable.

Despite the scale of the Antelope Valley's homeless population, this area has been under-funded for years receiving the lowest funding compared to other Service Areas, with \$276 per homeless person. By contrast, Los Angeles, with Skid Row, Hollywood and East Los Angeles in its jurisdiction, receives \$4,329 per homeless person. Los Angeles County and HUD are simply not interested in supporting the solutions that best work for this community. As such, our community is only capable of sheltering a mere 12% of our most vulnerable individuals.

This calamity touches every aspect of our region, even thriving commercial centers. Merchants and restaurateurs in Lancaster want the shopping and dining areas to be secure, safe, attractive and family-friendly. Understandably, they see gatherings of transients, panhandlers and vagrants clustered around public places, shopping centers and grocery stores as a threat to that environment.

There are many compassionate individuals from dozens of churches and volunteer organizations in our community who put their best into serving the homeless population. They are working tirelessly to provide shelter and small comforts to those among the hardest hit in society. Unfortunately, growth in the homelessness population is swelling beyond the capacity of our local non-profits and more has to be done to meet everyone's needs. So far every attempt to solve this problem has been a temporary fix.

The measure that would go before voters will ask for \$3 a month in the form of a parcel tax for a single family residence. Staff estimates that this measure will raise approximately \$4 million annually (see attached memo). Funds will be used to provide a suitable shelter for 400-600 local people, domestic abuse assistance, veterans' programs, mental health services, employment training, substance abuse treatment, and significantly expanded sheriff operations to help keep people off the street. It is the intention of staff to offer housing services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. The ultimate goal will be to use these funds in such a way to provide suitable shelter to those in need and provide law enforcement tools and resources to clean up our streets from those vagrants and panhandlers who disrupt our daily lives.

With the cost of housing reaching historic high's regionally more and more low-income families will be pushed into homelessness. If this measure is not passed, it is predicted that the number of homeless families will continue to increase.

Attachments:

Ordinance No. 1014

NBS Parcel Tax Modeling Memo