

Special election for Point San Pedro median improvement may go forward in San Rafael

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Marin Independent Journal

Posted: 04/30/2011 05:50:00 PM PDT

San Rafael and unincorporated Marin County residents living in some 2,500 homes near Point San Pedro Road could begin voting this week on whether to form a special assessment district to fund median beautification.

The San Rafael City Council will decide Monday whether to authorize the mail-in election and approve a memorandum of understanding with Marin County outlining construction and maintenance obligations for medians on a 4.5-mile stretch of Point San Pedro Road. Ballots would then go out to neighbors.

If a majority of residents who return ballots by June 20 are in favor of the \$75 annual assessment, the City Council would take a final vote on the district a couple days later. The tax would last for 30 years, with \$46 going to service debt for the initial capital improvements and \$29 paying for maintenance.

The Point San Pedro Medians Committee, a neighborhood group that has been working on the project since 2008, raised more than \$68,000 from 215 residents to pay for studies and community education.

"People are just disgusted with how bad the road looks, but yet it's a great place to live," said Andrew Perry, committee chairman.

San Rafael and Marin County first built the medians in 1969 but turned off the water during a severe drought in the late 1970s, Perry said. When the agencies turned the water back on several years later, many of the pipes and sprinklers were broken.

A water truck traveled up and down the road and manually irrigated the medians thereafter, but officials eventually stopped that service too, Perry said. The medians now are filled with weeds.

An earlier effort to form an assessment district failed in the late 1990s after a majority of residents voted against it. This time around, Perry's group has been building community support by encouraging donations from as many individual residents as possible, going door to door and distributing 2,000 postcards and 500 yard signs.

Under terms of a memorandum of understanding Marin County supervisors approved last week, the county would contribute up to \$25,000 for initial work on the medians and \$6,000 annually for maintenance. San Rafael would pay about \$42,000 for the initial work and \$15,000 a year for upkeep.

Residents, about two-thirds of whom live in San Rafael and the rest in unincorporated Marin County, would foot most of the nearly \$1.8 million construction bill via the assessment.

Should the district pass, both city and county officials would try to complete median improvements before a \$2 million road repaving project planned for Point San Pedro Road in 2012.

"If this assessment passes and the City Council approves it ... we're going to start hiring a consultant to design the landscaping for the medians," Public Works Director Nader Mansourian said. "Our goal is to design something where the plants are more natives with less water use, less maintenance, that kind of thing. Our goal is to get this done by October-November."

Flowers could then go in during the spring, he said.