

Can't agree on Measure Z

Robert Rogers, Staff Writer
San Bernardino County Sun

Article Launched: 02/15/2007 12:00:00 AM PST

SAN BERNARDINO - The city is divided.

From the highest halls of elected government to the crime-wary streets to the newer developments capping the north end, people of all stripes deeply disagree over how to continue the fight against crime.

The depths of the divide come from a ballot initiative known by a single letter: Z.

Measure Z, a quarter-cent sales-tax hike, and its companion Measure YY were approved by two-thirds of city voters last November and have become law. But so far they have done more to splinter city government than fight crime.

So contentious is the issue of how to spend Measure Z money that it is being debated in the halls of city government, by an ad hoc citizens committee, among high school students and throughout the streets and neighborhoods.

The controversy boils down to this: Whether all of Measure Z's initial proceeds, a projected \$1.6 million from April 1 to June 29, should go to police-driven crime suppression, or should a portion go to prevention and intervention - the other two "legs" in the so-called three-pronged strategy touted by most law-enforcement experts and Mayor Pat Morris, a former judge.

About \$1.5 million has already been unanimously approved by the City Council for the Police Department - not for salaries for new officers but for overtime, recruiting bonuses, helicopter leasing and 10 new vehicles.

A \$114,000 chunk remains, and has been hotly debated. A proposal to use it on a Police Activities League and after-school programs targeting youth was narrowly rejected Feb. 5.

The total annual take from the tax could be \$5.6 million for the next 15 years, but some City Council members have said that this first decision on how the money is spent could be a harbinger for future deliberations.

"Healthy cities are the ones that invest in their people," Councilman Rikke Van Johnson said last week. "The question now is: Will we commit to a healthy model and deal with this from a holistic standpoint or do we just go with suppression?"

With the debate intensifying at City Hall, new groundswells of public opinion are vying to make their presence felt.

Local high school students and religious leaders are scheduled to announce at a news conference tonight the results of a 7,600-student survey from which they have formulated a set of prescriptive actions city leaders should take to quell crime.

Among them, student leaders of the year-long project say, will be clear entreaties to the council to use more of Z monies on youth-targeted programs and facilities.

"We want to have a voice, we want to have input in these decisions that affect our lives," said Mireya Olguin, a 15-year-old Cajon High School sophomore. "We want a promise that some of this anti-crime money will go to after-school programs, job programs and other resources for kids."

Another teen who was part of the leadership group that conducted the survey, Rocio Ruiz, 15, said the money should be divided equally three ways among suppression, intervention and prevention measures.

On the streets in front of City Hall and at the Norman F. Feldheim Central Library on Wednesday, residents of all walks affirmed that the city was engaged and divided. Some said the city should spend the dollars on cops - period. Some said youth-targeted anti-crime programs should get some funds. Virtually all were aware of the issue.

"Spend it on putting more cops on the street, that's what I voted for," said Walt Smith, a 70-year-old retiree strolling by City Hall.

Council members who share that sentiment show no signs of budging, arguing that proposed youth programs were ill-conceived and that all Measure Z proceeds should go to police.

"They are just throwing stuff against the wall to see if it sticks," Councilman Neil Derry said of youth program proposals, which were altered drastically in two Measure Z workshops this year.

Arguments that money must be spent on more than policing to fight crime, Derry claimed, are more politics than science.

"The chief and the city manager answer to the mayor, and it came straight from the mayor's office that we were going to spend 'X' number of dollars on social programs," Derry said.

Councilwoman Wendy McCammack said her opposition was based primarily on her belief that the city would not be able to sustain youth-program funding and that local nonprofits, not the city, are more effective in delivering youth services.

She fired back at critics who have charged her and others with being unresponsive to the needs of underprivileged youth.

"This city currently funds more than \$3.5 million in social programs," McCammack said. "To say the council is not supporting youth and after-school programs is a complete and absolute misinterpretation of our efforts to help keep youth off the streets."

The city's top cop says he has the \$1.5 million he needs to hire officers, purchase equipment and keep his police helicopter in the air.

What's needed now, Police Chief Mike Billdt said, is money for the Police Activities League and other programs that target youth and complete the three-pronged anti-crime strategy.

A wing of the City Council, however, appears set on spending the final \$114,000 of initial tax revenues on body armor and communication technology upgrades for officers.

Billdt has made clear that he stands by the embattled portion of an anti-crime proposal he authored, saying they are crucial components of a holistic anti-crime strategy he called "key to long-term success" in quelling crime.

"I am confident that the Police Activities League can be an effective tool in intervening in the lives of at-risk children," Billdt said.

More than 100 departments in California have versions of Police Activities Leagues, touted for the double benefit of providing after-school havens for sports and other children's activities while fostering better relations between police and high-crime communities.

More than 19,000 residents cast votes on the issue last November, a heavy turnout for a special election.

Both sides of the debate at City Hall are quick to tout voters' intentions and wishes, with some council members

saying voters were drawn by some variation of the "more police" slogan that dominated the campaign.

Others contend voters wanted the more multi-faceted approach, including after-school programs and drug-resistance education explicitly written in the ballot language.

On Tuesday, the first assemblage of an ad hoc citizen oversight committee, created as part of Measure Z to monitor expenditure of new funds, deadlocked on how the remaining money should be spent. The committee's energy and grinding negotiations bespoke the issue's importance. Top city officials, including Billdt, were on hand.

In mirroring the elected leaders who appointed them, the eight members present at the meeting ended their debates in a 4-4 draw on whether some Z funds should go to prevention and intervention.

The mayor and the council are set to face off on the issue again Feb. 20.

IF YOU WANT TO GO

WHAT: Youth Light the Way for a Pathway to Hope call for action.

WHEN: 6:30 tonight

WHERE: Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, 1430 W. Fifth St.

WHO: Inland Congregations United for Change and students from seven city high schools

WHY: To reveal data compiled from nearly 8,000 surveys completed by local teens and an action plan formulated from its results. Project leaders say children are dissatisfied with the lack of safety in schools and neighborhoods and a dearth of after-school programs and resources targeted to their needs. Among recommendations will be that some Measure Z proceeds go to youth-targeted anti-crime programs.

THE MEASURES INVOLVED

MEASURE YY: If Measure Z is approved by the voters, shall the proceeds of Measure Z be used only to fund more police officers and support personnel, and to fund anti-gang and anti-crime operations, including drug resistance education and supervised after-school youth activities?

MEASURE Z: To fund more police officers, anti-gang and anti-crime operations, and other urgent general fund programs, and provided it shall be guaranteed to sunset after 15 years, and provided a Citizens Oversight Committee is created to report annually to voters on the use of proceeds, shall an ordinance be adopted to impose a 1/4-cent transaction and use (sales) tax?

WHAT THEY SAID

Should Measure Z proceeds go only to the Police Department or should some also go to youth anti-gang and anti-drug programs?

FROM THE COMMITTEE

Chairwoman JUDITH VALLES, 73

Pat Morris' predecessor as San Bernardino mayor.

Appointed by: Morris

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: Yes

"The kids tell me they need centers for teens."

Vice chairman BOB EVANS, 62

Retired San Bernardino police officer.

Appointed by: Neil Derry

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: No

"I know very little about this PAL (Police Activities League) program."

Other committee members:

PHILIP SAVAGE III, 69

Retired attorney.

Appointed by: Morris

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: Yes

"(Measure Z) is not just for policing but intervention and other activities of that type."

MARLENE EVANS, 55

Self-employed contractor.

Appointed by: Chas Kelley

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: No

"We both (she and Valles) have watched this town go downhill, these (non-police) programs and things, I don't think they're working."

DAVID ROSALES, 49

Minister.

Appointed by: Tobin Brinker

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: Yes

No quote available.

JONATHAN KUHN, 27

Auditor.

Appointed by: Esther Estrada

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: No

"I'm a little disappointed we don't have a more active role."

RAFAEL RAWLS, 24

Representative for Rep. Joe Baca, D-Rialto.

Appointed by: Rikke Van Johnson

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: Yes

"PAL program fosters better relationships with young African Americans. (They learn) early on ` I shouldn't run from the police, I should run to them."

JOHN MAXWELL, 60.

Retired San Bernardino County deputy marshal.

Appointed by: Wendy McCammack

On spending \$114,000 of Measure Z on crime-prevention programs: No

"I do believe all the money should go to the police. I'm very strong on family."

SUSAN LIEN LONGVILLE

Former San Bernardino City Council member.

Appointed by: Dennis Baxter

Not present at Feb. 13 meeting due to car trouble.

FROM THE PUBLIC

CAROL ROBERTS, 57

San Bernardino resident spoken to at Norman F. Feldheim Central Library: "I think too much money goes to the cops and not enough goes to anything else already. When does it end? How big and how much money do they have to have? It's time more money went to other city services."

GLORIA ALEXANDER, retired, 67, San Bernardino resident spoken to at Feldheim Library: "I don't know anymore. I've always been pro-police but I've seen too much that I don't like. They overreact and shoot people too much."

WALT SMITH, retired, 70, spoken to at City Hall: "Spend it on putting more cops on the street, that's what I voted for."

RICHARD ALLEN, San Bernardino High School student, 15, spoken to at City Hall: "Some has to go to youth programs. When you bring more police into the place without recreation or after-school programs, you just get more people mad, with nothing to do, and a bunch of police around. What is that supposed to do?"

ARMANDO HERNANDEZ, San Bernardino High School student, 16, spoken to at City Hall: "There isn't any youth programs now, so they should get some."

DON HELFPHREY, city employee, 40, spoken to at City Hall: "In general, I think we need to balance spending between law enforcement and other programs for the city's youth that get at the root of crime."