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San Mateo's tiniest tax

ONE OF the bills awaiting Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's signature would allow San Mateo County to raise its sales tax by one-eighth of a cent to support parks and recreation.

The operative word is *allow*. A tax-increase proposal would need to be put on the ballot by the Board of Supervisors and approved by two-thirds of the county's voters.

This became a legislative issue because state law allows for sales-tax increases in quarter-cent increments. The measure (SB203) was authored by Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, and

gained the support of every legislator representing the county.

If anything, San Mateo's elected officials should be commended for seeking a tax increase that is *smaller* than the standard bite. The only opposition in the Legislature came from Republicans who reflexively oppose any tax increases anywhere. Most of them will never pay a penny of the tax or set foot in a county park.

San Mateo County voters should have a chance to decide for themselves whether the tax — and proposed expenditures — are justified. Schwarzenegger should sign SB203.



The Examiner

October 11, 2005

Voters can decide on sales tax increase

Bay City News

REDWOOD CITY — County voters can decide whether to approve a sales tax increase for the upkeep of county parks and programs, after a new law was signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Schwarzenegger signed Senate bill 203 into law on Friday, after a plea for more revenues to be funneled back into the county's parks and recreation programs was initially made to the county by a group in 2003 called Parks for the Future, the county reported. SB 203 gives the county the right to ask its voters, through a standard two-thirds majority, to vote on a one-eighth-cent sales tax for parks and recreation programs, officials said.

Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, authored the bill, and was supported by the local state legislators. "We appreciate the governor's support and commitment to letting voters have a voice on important local issues," County Super-



Simitian

visor Jerry Hill said in a prepared statement.

Prior to the passage of the bill, the county had the authority to levy sales taxes by up to 2 percent, but they were required to make those changes in one-quarter-cent increments. The county was required to receive special legislative approval for the smaller one-eighth-cent increase. "The enactment of SB 203 allows us to focus on crafting the ballot measure," Atherton Vice-Mayor Charles Marsala said. "The toughest work is ahead, as we must present a compelling case to the voters."

If approved by the voters, the tax would generate between \$13 million to \$16 million a year, officials said. Recreational programs including teen after-school groups, senior fitness and nutrition programs and athletic programs would all benefit from the sales tax, officials said.

"More than manicured lawns for picnics, today's parks and recreation programs support our communities in areas like public safety, health and the environment," Supervisor Adrienne Tissier said.

The county reported that over the next couple of months, representatives from Parks for the Future plan to meet with various parks commissions and city councils throughout the county to discuss the new measure.

More information regarding SB 203 can be found on the San Mateo County Web site at <http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us>.