

Mayor touts Measure I

By Paul Eakins
Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — With about two months to sell voters on a \$571 million infrastructure investment measure, Mayor Bob Foster has been making the rounds at community organizations.

On Monday night, Foster and City Manager Pat West made a plea for support to the Wrigley Association at the Veterans Park community center in west-central Long Beach.

The infrastructure plan, which is called Measure I, would levy a parcel tax on residential and commercial properties, amounting to \$120 per year for single-family homes, or \$120 per unit for apartments and other multi-unit buildings. Commercial property owners would pay based on a different formula using the size of their properties.

The tax would continue until 2044 and would finance \$571 million in bonds. Over 10 years, the bonds would fund repairs to streets, sidewalks, storm drains, park facilities and other public structures, as well as building new fire stations, police facilities and a new Main Library, among other projects.

Foster said the projects would be prioritized based on need, not necessarily equally divided among the city's nine districts.

Two-thirds of Long Beach voters must approve the measure on Nov. 4 for it to take effect, and Foster said work could begin as soon as January.

The mayor has argued that much of this work has been long deferred by the city and that the longer the city waits, the more the repairs will eventually cost. On Monday, he compared residents' approval of the plan to

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the work done by previous generations.

"Many of the things that we enjoy every day ... came from the generation after World War II that built things," Foster said. "They built the infrastructure you're using, the bridges, the roads, the public buildings, the water projects. We're not doing that today."

He asked the crowd of almost 100 at Veterans Park to be willing to make sacrifices for the future, a notion that drew some applause, but also many questions and a bit of skepticism.

"They thought beyond just their immediate circumstance of themselves, and I ask you to do the same thing," Foster said. "I ask you to look beyond yourself and your immediate needs and what might hurt you a little bit for a much greater good."

One woman in the audience asked why residents should give the city more money when it hasn't had much success with other investments such along the Pine Avenue business corridor, which has many empty storefronts.

"Tell us a little bit about why we should put our trust in you, when we look at Pine and I'm disappointed," she said.

West said Pine hasn't had the growth city officials had hoped for, but that the single business corridor doesn't reflect the whole of Long Beach's successes and failures.

Foster said that if the city improves its infrastructure,

businesses will want to come to Long Beach.

Some speakers also criticized the high cost of city employee pay raises and pensions that have given the city a \$16.9 million budget deficit in the upcoming fiscal year.

Foster said it was a "cheap shot" to pick on city employees, and said the city is just trying to keep up with competing municipalities to attract quality workers.

"You can't run a city without people," Foster said. "These people deserve to be compensated fairly."

But opponents of the infrastructure measure, including the Long Beach Taxpayers Association, say cuts must be made before officials ask for any more taxes.

Kathy Ryan, a founder of the organization, didn't speak at the meeting because opponents of the measure are scheduled to present their side to the Wrigley Association Oct. 6.

However, after Monday's meeting, she said the mayor's plan can wait.

"I think we need to do first things first," Ryan said. "We need to be doing pension reform," Ryan said. "I don't want to see anything until there's some agreement on reform first."

Some others in attendance said they were swayed by Foster's argument.

"It's necessary, so we all have to pay our part," said Sammy Portillo, 50, a Long Beach resident who works for the city of Los Angeles. "So long as it's based on need and it's equitable."

paul.eakins@presstelegram.com,
562-499-1278



P. O. Box 16192
Long Beach, California 90806

Telephone: (562) 225-9462

wrigleyvillage@att.net
www.neighborhoodlink.com/longbch/wrigley/