



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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CARLOS J. PALACIOS, COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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BOARD PLACES SALES TAX ON NOVEMBER BALLOT

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted unanimously to place a half-cent sales tax increase before County voters on the Nov. 6, 2018 general election ballot.

With a track record of responsible fiscal stewardship and citing the need to address critical unmet needs throughout the county, the Board opted to ask voters to approve a sales tax increase to provide services in the areas of homelessness and behavioral health, as well as construct new public parks facilities. Those needs include new North and South County homeless shelters and navigation centers; public safety and behavioral health outreach to low-level street offenders; and completion of several new parks, including LEO's Haven, the County's first all-inclusive playground for children of all abilities.

"We can do more," Supervisors Zach Friend said. "Throughout the County, the public is asking for additional programs and services to address unmet needs, and we believe we can effectively provide those services if voters give us the opportunity to do so."

If approved, sales taxes in the unincorporated area would increase to 9 percent, which remains at or below sales taxes in local cities. The current unincorporated sales tax is 8.5 percent. The tax would sunset after 12 years.

Needs were identified during recent public budget hearings, including a focused deterrence initiative for homeless individuals suffering from mental health and substance use disorders but who are resistant to services.

"There are significant, effective services available for people who want help," Sheriff Jim Hart said. "But we've identified a gap for people with mental health and substance use issues so far outside social norms that it can't be tolerated. These people place themselves and others in danger, and refuse treatment despite repeated encounters



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with law enforcement and the courts. By applying additional public safety and behavioral health resources, we believe we can make a difference and get these individuals the help they need."

The County is also leading local efforts to establish year-round, 24-hour shelter and navigation centers in North and South County, servicing approximately 150 and 40 individuals, respectively. This cost for these permanent shelters would be ongoing.

County staff also identified the need to fulfill the County's commitment of \$1.125 million in matching funds to preserve Chanticleer Park and build LEO's Haven, a new playground with numerous accessible structures and features for children with disabilities.

"We are close to meeting all our fundraising goals for Chanticleer Park and LEO's Haven," said Mariah Roberts, a Live Oak mother who has worked with Watsonville resident Patricia Potts to raise private funding for the park. "To be on the verge of creating something that will have a lasting impact on the children of Santa Cruz County is an opportunity that cannot be missed."

Other park needs include matching funds for a planned Felton Nature Park adjacent to the new Felton Library, which would be the County's first outdoor education facility in the San Lorenzo Valley; the Heart of Soquel Linear Parkway, which connects Soquel Village with Soquel Creek; completion of Mid-County's Farm Park; upgrades to Aptos Village Park; funding for South County parks; restoration and upgrades to Simpkins Family Swim Center; and additional park maintenance and recreation staff to provide oversight for parks facilities and increase youth and senior programs.

If implemented, the sales tax would only apply in unincorporated areas of the county. However, since all residents are expected to benefit from the programs and services, every voter in Santa Cruz County will be allowed to vote on the proposal.