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# Mariposa Weekly Gazette. And MINER

## **Local group turns in petition to raise sales tax in order to fund new hospital**

By Greg Little, Editor | October 07, 2021 | Reprinted with Permission



*Beth Tomsick, right, and Suzette Prue submitted a petition recently to the county clerk's office in order to get an initiative on the July 2022 primary ballot. In the background is Courtney Morrow, the chief deputy county clerk who heads up elections in Mariposa County. Submitted Photo*

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They needed 823 signatures. They got 1,706.

"We wanted a guarantee," said Beth Tomsick, co-chair of the Citizens to Save the Hospital group which will have a crucial initiative on the ballot in the 2022 primary election in June.

The group turned in the petitions just over a week ago and if everything goes smoothly, it will be placed on that ballot.

The next step is for the signatures to be certified by the elections office and then it will go to the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors for final approval to be placed on the ballot.

Tomsick stressed the group is not formally associated with the hospital but is a citizens organization which has a simple goal in mind: keep the hospital from closing.

Under current California law, if the hospital is not upgraded by 2030, it will fail to meet California earthquake requirements and have to close.

Tomsick said she became involved last year with the group Support Measure N, which was a similar initiative with one huge difference. That difference was Measure N required a two-thirds majority to pass. It fell just short with 63 percent.

She said during that time, the group became familiar with a measure in Fresno that requested a sales tax increase to improve city parks and it only required a simple majority, which is 50 percent plus one.

“Someone encouraged us to break away as a citizens group,” she said.

They did just that and there are currently nine board members on the Citizens to Save the Hospital group.

There are limitations on the length of the publicity campaign which the group can do, she said, with the expectation to start sometime shortly after the first of the year.

“We will be going out to the community,” said Tomsick.

They’ve already done that with getting signatures for the petition. It all was done during the pandemic, but Tomsick said most people wanted to sign the petition.

“A lot of people were eager to sign,” said Tomsick. “They lined up in some instances. They want to keep the hospital. Some people say no, but by far, there are more who are willing to sign.”

For Tomsick, having a hospital is crucial to the future of Mariposa County.

She said local citizens need a “24/7 emergency room in our community.” Tomsick also said there is a “false assumption” that if the community had an urgent care center, it would always be open. She said that’s not the case in most places in California.

“Most are not open during the night,” she said.

But medical emergencies, she said, happen at any time, day or night.

“Accidents happen at all times,” said Tomsick.

As do heart attacks, strokes and so many more medical issues.

“We don’t want to lose our emergency room and helicopter,” said Tomsick.

The measure, if passed, would add 1 percent to the sales tax for 40 years. Officials are hopeful that would raise enough revenue to fund the bonds which will be needed for a new hospital, which could cost in the area of \$100 million.

Another crucial part of the initiative, she said, is accountability.

As part of the process, hospital officials would have to follow strict accountability and transparency requirements and report to the public on a regular basis.

As of now, the plan is to construct a new hospital building and also refurbish the existing building which could house other services but not be required to meet the earthquake standards. Those standards are specific about buildings where there are patients.

The old building could be used for other functions including administrative and other things.

Tomsick said she is hopeful the measure can meet the muster of the voters.

“I’m optimistic,” said Tomsick. “I really think we can get a simple majority to pass this. We haven’t had a lot of push back, but that doesn’t mean we won’t.”

For Tomsick, having a new hospital is about more than just health — it’s about a healthy economy.

“I think it would not only harm our health, but our economy will be hit very badly,” said Tomsick if the hospital is not built. “People would move away and other people would not come.”

As Tomsick noted, there is a large segment of the local population that is over age 60 and there are people who are moving to this area to retire, which could add to that population.

As an example, Tomsick said when the group went into Idle Wheels, a retirement community in Mariposa, almost every “said they were so glad to have a hospital close by.”

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