

Anti-crime measure has foes

By Bruce Gerstman, Montclairion Fri, Oct. 08, 2004

In March, hills and other Oakland residents voted against Measure R, which would have raised taxes to support crime-prevention programs. Now, contention is building over what many residents see as a second attempt to boost crime-prevention, Measure Y, which is on the November ballot.

The new measure aims to raises about \$20 million a year for more police officers and violence-prevention programs over the next decade. While supporters, like City Councilwoman Jean Quan (District 4-Montclair, Laurel) say the proposal is a successful way to balance the funds, it has spawned critics from two separate camps with nearly identical names.

The proposal would require single-family homeowners to pay a new parcel tax of \$88 a year.

One opposition group, the Committee for No on Measure Y, says the measure fails to secure enough police officers while increasing taxes on parking, property owners, renters and others. Members of the group are also concerned that the measure levies the same tax on all properties, regardless of their property values.

A separate organization, No On Measure Y, says that adding more police is the wrong way to reduce the city's violent crime.

Members of both groups say the descriptions of the social services and police training that the measure would fund are too vague.

"It's bad for Oakland," said Steve Edrington, director of the Committee for No on Measure Y and executive director of the Rental Housing Association of Northern Alameda County. "There's no guarantee that we'll get anything."

Edrington said the legislation allows Oakland to raise money, yet keep the current police force at 739 officers. The legislation does not specifically state that the police force will increase to 802, he said.

The City Attorney, though, interprets the proposal differently. Oakland cannot enact the measure until the city has secured funding for the current police force of 739 officers, according to a summary of the measure written by City Attorney John Russo. If the measure passes and this requirement is met, the city can collect revenue raised by Measure Y and use the funds to hire 63 additional officers.

But adding more officers won't help, said Wilson Riles Jr., a spokesman for No on Measure Y and former City Councilman and mayoral candidate. Oakland police officers need to stop focusing on keeping kids from hanging out on street corners, he said. The city needs better youth services that get at the root of the question: "Why do kids hang out on the corner?" Riles asked.

"We believe that these additional cops will actually do more damage to offset service programs," Riles said.

If voters pass the measure by a margin of more than 66.6 percent, the police department would add one beat officer to each of the city's police beats. More officers also would patrol local schools and work on the city's

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Crime Reduction Teams, which focus on gangs, drugs and other chronic problems in Oakland's most violent areas.

"Measure R didn't even guarantee the numbers of officers," said Quan, who helped draft the new proposal.

Measure Y calls for \$6.4 million in funding for crime-prevention services, such as after-school programs, employment services and counselors to work with victims of child abuse and domestic violence.

If passed, it would also raise \$4 million to reopen two fire engine companies. Some of this money would be used to expand paramedic services, which accounts for more than 75 percent of demand for the fire department's services, said Battalion Chief James Williams.