

Open space bond measure badly flawed

I'm not going to win any popularity contests with this column. I'm sure I'll get emails and letters calling me all sorts of names. That's because I'm



Dave Price

writing about one of the biggest sacred cows around, the beloved Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

The district is credited with saving the foothills from development. So it's just assumed that whatever the district does, it's unquestionably good.

Rarely does Midpen get any scrutiny from the fawning local news media.

But I can't bring myself to vote for Midpen's \$300 million bond issue, Measure AA, on the June ballot. I don't think Midpen has been spending the taxes that it receives wisely.

Look at the salaries. General Manager Steve Abbors made \$210,782 last year — more than Gov. Jerry Brown, who was paid \$173,987.

Midpen justifies that high salary by saying Abbors should be paid what city managers make on the Peninsula. But he has far fewer employees or responsibilities than city managers, who oversee police, fire, public works and planning departments.

A fat bureaucracy

Midpen has 21 employees who get more than \$100,000 a year, and its payroll grew 9.7% from 2012 to 2013 — far more than inflation.

And the district's payroll doesn't show the people who do the real work of pulling weeds and clearing trails. That's outsourced.

It looks like a fat bureaucracy. But it gets worse.

Last year, Midpen spent \$792,529 on consultants who helped its board create a "vision plan," a wish list for what the district wants to do in the future.

The board of directors — who are elected — should have been the ones to create such a list, not consultants. I'm sick and tired of consultants pulling down huge fees for work elected officials are paid to do. It's just plain lazy.

This "vision plan" is an example of how Midpen is just wasting tax funds, thinking such expenditures will never be scrutinized by the public or its friends in the media.

Then the board proposed this \$300 million bond issue. It will cost taxpayers up to \$3.18 a year for every \$100,000 of assessed value — or \$31.80 for the owner of a home assessed at \$1 million.

If approved, everybody will pay.

Even renters. (Yes, landlords pass on tax increases to tenants.)

A waste of money

But the cost won't be \$300 million. Taxpayers will fork over more than double that amount because of interest. So the taxpayers over 30 years will have to pay more than \$600 million in order to get \$300 million in spending power.

That's wasteful. Bond issues are supposed to take care of an immediate need, like a new school or water line, which has to get done tomorrow, so you do a bond issue to borrow the money to get the project done ASAP.

Yet none of the Midpen projects proposed for funding seem immediate to me. Read your voter guide. Does any of that have to get done tomorrow?

The better route would be to raise [See PRICE, page 10]

LETTERS

School speaker flap

Dear Editor: I'd like to express my thanks to the Daily Post and reporter Angela Ruggiero for Thursday's article regarding Notre Dame High School in Belmont withdrawing an invitation to Gregg Cassin.

I have a senior at Notre Dame and a daughter who graduated in 2010.

Gregg Cassin's talks had a positive and lasting effect for both girls. I am so

disappointed in the administration's decision and also how they failed to manage this issue.

Notre Dame allowed the bigoted bully (Cal Catholic) to win.

We teach our daughters to be loving to all, to be leaders, to stand up for the oppressed and those that are bullied, but the school's administration was not able to do the same.

This lack of Catholic women leadership is a sad and embarrassing example

to our daughters. It seems it was easier to cave than fight the good fight. At least they had a very different example this week of where the bigoted bully lost (Donald Sterling, owner of the Clippers) and strong leadership prevailed (NBA Commissioner Adam Silver).

Marie O'Riordan
San Carlos

Editor's note: The above letter was written before Notre Dame High School said it made a "mistake" unin-

viting HIV activist Gregg Cassin, and asked him to return to the school.

Privacy concerns

Dear Editor: I certainly do not support what LA Clippers' owner David Sterling said, but we become a communist state when one can't even "think" or have private discussions that are considered "racist" or politically incorrect without being publicly exposed and [See LETTERS, page 10]

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