

Disaster Relief Tax Headed For Ballot

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

A disaster relief tax measure to charge an additional \$30 per home per year over the next three years to finance repair of storm-damaged county roads appears headed for the June 8 primary ballot for the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County.

The \$30 per home, along with \$15 for each vacant parcel and \$90 a year for businesses and multiple housing complexes would raise more than \$4.9 million and cover the county's share of the \$21.7 million damage that was done to county roads and drainage system, Acting County Administrator George Newell said this morning.

In his statement to the county board this morning, Newell said that if voters do not approve the tax measure with the necessary two-thirds vote, it would probably mean the county will have to spend its future road funds to

repair the storm damage and that, in turn, the rest of the county's road system will fall into disrepair.

The board held off voting on whether to put the tax measure on the ballot until after it holds a public hearing set for March 2 at 10 a.m. in the board chamber.

All five board members have indicated they favor going to the voters, but there is a board split on whether all the unincorporated area should be asked to support the new tax, or only those areas that were damaged by floods and slides.

Supervisor Wayne Moore warned, "There's a strong feeling among people who weren't hurt that they are going to vote 'no,' a feeling strong enough to defeat the measure in June.

"It's not because they're not sympathetic, but because they can't afford it," Moore said. "People who live in the flatlands don't feel they should bail out those who live in the . . . more intrinsically appetizing mountains."

Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, whose area received the greatest damage, cautioned the board that it should show a united "leadership to mend the wounds" of the storm.

He said, "The debate itself can be destructive" to the mending of the wounds.

Supervisors' Chairwoman Robley Levy encouraged the board to work together, saying the devastation of the early January storm "was visited upon all of us" and reminded her colleagues "fixing the roads is at the heart of politics."

Supervisor Gary Patton took the lead in urging the board to ask the entire unincorporated area to "pull together. For a relatively small cost, we can help each other out and show that we are a community," Patton said.

Speaking of the concern that if the tax fails the on-going road funds will be spent for emergency repair, Patton urged passage of a tax, saying, "It's not only a

humanitarian response, it's the working of the Golden Rule, if we help others, we will be benefitting ourselves."

Supervisor Dan Forbus earlier said he wanted the tax held to the areas of damage, but has relaxed that position since the new tax also will cover repair to drainage systems.

He noted later this morning that Live Oak suffered close to \$1 million damage to the protective drainage system and that it would be worth that area's favorable vote to get the damage repaired.

Forbus said he was concerned about some areas of south county and that maybe the board should eliminate some of those areas from the tax measure.

Newell said that next week he will urge the board to accept his recommendation and that one way or the other, the county should come up with the \$5 million that is necessary to bring in the \$13.8 million state and federal aid to repair the roads.