

Salsipuedes voters approve measure

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A tax override which will allow the Salsipuedes Fire Protection District to retain its current service levels was approved yesterday by district voters.

The override, known as Measure B, passed 851 to 254, a 77 percent approval. A two-thirds vote was needed for passage.

This override was unusual in that it does not raise taxes, but keeps them the same. Had the measure failed, taxes (and the district's revenue) would have been reduced.

The override allows the district to exceed the limits of Prop. 4, also known as the Gann initiative, which California voters approved in 1979.

The measure established limits on how much tax revenue government agencies can take in. Those limits, which use 1978-79 as a base year, change from year to year based on a formula allowing for inflation and population growth.

In 1982, Salsipuedes voters approved a tax override calling for assessments of \$60 a home. That vote was not specifically, by name, a Gann-limit override.

Art Merrill, then the county auditor, determined that the money collected from the override (about \$130,000) did not count toward the Prop. 4 limit.

But in July of this year, County Auditor Gary Knutson, on advice of county attorneys, told the fire board that the

override funds are counted against the Prop. 4 limit.

That ruling meant not only that the current \$362,000 is about \$80,000 over the Prop. 4 limit, but that the district was \$367,090 over the limit from 1982-87.

Had Measure B failed, the question of whether Salsipuedes would have to return that \$367,090 would undoubtedly have ended up in the courts, Knutson said this morning.

Knutson said county attorneys told him yesterday's override approval "would ratify the past" and means the district does not owe any of the \$367,090.

"We're grateful to the voters," board chairman Robert Hiatt said this morning, adding that the people appreciate that the district needs money for for the growing number of calls it responds to.

Salsipuedes won't be the last district to deal with Prop. 4 limits. Many other government agencies will face the issue in the next few years, Knutson said.

Salsipuedes faced the issue earlier than most because its tax rate before Prop. 4 was low, about 20 cents per \$100 assessed valuation.

The law says the override is only good for four years, so Salsipuedes will have to go back to the voters in 1991.

Meanwhile, the state legislature has been kicking around possible changes in the formula for determining Prop. 4 limits, but no decisions have been made.