

Prop. Q faces wary voters

By Rick Orlov
Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES - Secession fervor and the general distrust of City Hall - combined with the ongoing soap opera of Los Angeles politics - overshadow the debate over Proposition Q, the \$600 million bond measure on the March 5 ballot.

Originally designed to take advantage of the new sense of patriotism and concern over public safety following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the measure - which would provide funds to build new police and fire facilities and upgrade others - now finds itself fighting for attention from a skeptical electorate.

And it comes as Mayor James Hahn and Police Chief Bernard C. Parks are embroiled in an ugly dispute, with the mayor saying he doesn't want Parks appointed to a second term.

"Would I have preferred to not seeing the mayor and the chief having this dispute at this time? Certainly," said Steve Afriat, the consultant managing the campaign for the measure. "But while they have their disagreement, the one thing they do agree upon is the need for Proposition Q."

The proposal is similar to one voters twice rejected, most recently in 1999 when it failed to get the two-thirds support needed for bond issues.

The specifics of the bond measure were developed in 1998 by a task force created by former Mayor Richard Riordan, which estimated the city would need to spend more than \$1.3 billion over the next 20 years to keep up with its public safety needs.

City officials believe they might have earned more public trust as a result of a bond measure approved in 2000 that provided funds for animal control, library and fire services. All of those projects are on schedule and meeting their budgets, officials said.

"We think people can take some faith in what we've done with the last bond issue and see we can do these programs well," Afriat said.

The city's plan calls for Proposition Q to provide \$120 million for a new emergency operation-fire dispatch center; \$100 million for a Metro jail; \$20 million for bomb squads, including one based in the San Fernando Valley; \$70 million for a new Valley traffic

headquarters building; \$45 million for a mid-Wilshire station; and \$170 million for replacement fire stations, including a new Valley station, replacement of the West Valley facility and improvements at the Van Nuys station.

It is the costs of the measure that has driven some of the opposition - coupled with the addition of debt.

"Paying so much each year out of the general fund is ridiculous," said Walter Prince of the Porter Ranch-based PRIDE organization. "I don't see why they just can't use that money each year to build what is needed as money is available. We shouldn't have to go into debt for this."

City officials, however, argue the amount the city would need for the program is much more than that in initial phases.

"Bonding is the most efficient way to do this program," Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski said. "It allows us to get all these programs under way and not take away from other needed city services."

Bill Powers of the United Chamber of Commerce, who has organized a committee to fight Proposition Q, said he questioned the timing of putting the measure before voters now when they will be asked to decide on secession, possibly in November.

"It's just that the timing is all wrong," Powers said. "Let us take a vote on secession.

If that fails, I'll be the first to tell them to put this on the ballot again."

Richard Close, president of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association and chairman of Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment, also questions the need for the facilities.

"The way the city is going, we don't have enough officers to fill these stations," Close said. "We should concentrate on that first."

Close also has questioned how much Los Angeles would charge a new Valley city to buy those taxpayer-paid facilities, as well as what portion of the debt the new city would bear if voters approve Valley cityhood.

The city has claimed all public buildings, even those in the Valley, would still be owned by Los Angeles if the Valley secedes, but the issue won't be resolved until the county Local Agency Formation Commission decides between conflicting interpretations of state law.

Afriat said the campaign is trying to counter those fears. "We aren't addressing secession, but we are making the argument that response times would be improved, the Valley benefits from this and it is something that is needed, even if a new city is created," Afriat said.

A special mailing for Valley voters is to be sent out in these final days leading up to the election emphasizing those issues.

Los Angeles Times

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2002

LATIMES.COM/CALIFORNIA

City Leaders Celebrate Passage of Prop. Q

By DAREN BRISCOE
TIMES STAFF WRITER

High-ranking city, police and fire officials gathered in North Hollywood on Wednesday to celebrate the passage of Proposition Q, a \$600-million bond measure to upgrade emergency facilities.

Outside the North Hollywood police station, the city's newest City Council President Alex Padilla joined Mayor James K. Hahn, Police Chief Bernard C. Parks, Fire Chief William Bamattre and others to thank voters for supporting the measure.

"Investing in public safety is an investment in the city," said Padilla, suggesting that support "from every corner" indicated

that Valley voters don't want to secede.

Praising the City Council for its leadership on the issue, Hahn said it was "time to support the men and women who are our first responders" to emergencies.

Parks and that Proposition Q would benefit the entire city, because "most of our stations will have upgrades."

The measure needed two-thirds of the vote to pass. About 15,000 votes have yet to be counted, but it now has 66.79% of the vote, said Grace Chavez, a spokeswoman for the registrar-recorder's office.

Steve Afriat, campaign manager for the Yes on Proposition Q Campaign, said the uncounted ballots were unlikely to change the results.