

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### COUNTY HARBOR COMMISSIONERS BRENNAN & LARENAS SUPPORT DISTRICT ELECTIONS

SAN MATEO COUNTY— Harbor Commissioners Larenas and Brennan are calling for district elections to save millions in property tax funds currently being wasted on a countywide at-large election system. The Harbor District paid the County \$752,490 for the Nov 2017 countywide at-large election. Switching to district elections would improve accountability; increase citizen participation including marginalized communities and lower taxpayer costs.

*It is time to change the Harbor District's election system to the much more equitable District Elections.*

—Edmundo Larenas, SMC Harbor Commissioner

*The current countywide at-large system for electing Harbor Commissioners prevents voters from holding incumbents accountable. In Feb 2018, Commissioner Tom Mattusch admitted to sexual misconduct. A countywide recall initiative would require a staggering number of signatures to qualify for the ballot. The at-large system blocks the path for removing a commissioner. District elections empower voters to take action when the public trust is violated.*

—Sabrina Brennan, SMC Harbor Commissioner

At-large elections have been abandoned by many local agencies because they favor candidates with deep pockets and politically connected incumbents, making it prohibitive for lower-income people and people of color to run successful campaigns. In 2009, the benefits of district elections were supported by the SMC Civil Grand Jury, which issued a formal recommendation to the County Board of Supervisors in favor of district elections. In Nov 2012, the voters overwhelmingly supported a ballot measure to dismantle the at-large elections system for county supervisors. In Oct 2017, the Menlo Park City Council adopted a resolution declaring the intent to transition to district-based elections.

In 2010, Sabrina Brennan first proposed district elections as a way to reduce election costs.

Half Moon Bay Review – July 12, 2010

Resident suggests new format for harbor elections

[http://www.hmbreview.com/news/resident-suggests-new-format-for-harbor-elections/article\\_33bb87d8-cc56-11e1-87d1-0019bb2963f4.html](http://www.hmbreview.com/news/resident-suggests-new-format-for-harbor-elections/article_33bb87d8-cc56-11e1-87d1-0019bb2963f4.html)

*According to Brennan, lowering the cost would not only relieve the burden on taxpayers but also encourage more qualified candidates to run for board positions.*

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*"I'm concerned about the fact that for people who want to run, like myself ... it costs a lot of money," she said, citing it would cost \$7,000 for a candidate to place an optional statement onto the voter pamphlet.*

It's time to eliminate at-large elections and comply with the California Voting Rights Act.

Local agencies that have switched to district as a result of CVRA challenges:

- At least 169 school districts
- 32 community college districts
- Over 78 cities including the City of Menlo Park
- San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
- 10 water and other special districts

Due to the significant costs of defending against CVRA lawsuits, the vast majority of local agencies approved voluntarily transitions to district elections.

Examples of settlements:

- Anaheim - \$1.1 million
- Hanford Joint Union Schools - \$118,000
- Madera Unified - about \$170,000
- Merced City - \$42,000
- Modesto - \$3 million plaintiff's attorney fees and \$1.7 million for its own lawyers
- Palmdale - \$4.7 million
- Placentia - \$20,000
- Santa Barbara - \$600,000
- Tulare Hospital - \$500,000
- West Covina - \$220,000
- Whittier - \$1 million

Bringing SMC Harbor District government closer to home would increase countywide awareness about the following:

- Public Harbors and Marinas
- California Coastal Trail and Bay Trail Access
- Wildlife and Marine Environment Education
- Water Quality and Environmental Protection
- Public Transportation to and from District facilities
- Human Powered Vessel Rental and Launch Opportunities

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- Commercial Fishing Industry and Sports Fishing
- Ocean and Bay Safety
- Sea Rise Preparedness
- Tsunami Inundation Evacuation Routes