



Benicia's Citizen Driven initiative "Save Our Streets" By Genevieve Hand, Benicia Magazine

A citizens' committee has formed in Benicia with a succinct goal: Save Our Streets.

The average Benician understands the state of our roadways simply by virtue of navigating them, day in and day out. Yet there exists a Pavement Condition Index (PCI) which tells us the specific state of our roadways on a scale of 0 (worst possible conditions) to 100 (best possible conditions). Our roads currently average at a 57 on this scale, classified as "at risk," and they're only getting worse.

The City of Benicia, recognizing this problem, attempted to pass Measure R in our last election. Measure R, if it passed, would have approved a 0.75% sales tax increase earmarked for street and roadway maintenance. The measure failed by a narrow margin, with many people citing the fact that its funds would have gone into the General Fund rather than a dedicated infrastructure fund, and therefore could be used for anything, as the reason they voted against it, in addition to a lack of oversight.

Since the failure of Measure R, a group of concerned citizens came together to develop another funding proposal that Benicians will support. The measure they came up with is a 0.5% increase to the sales tax. Like any sales tax, this would generate funds from our citizens and visitors to Benicia ordering some food items and buying products in town, as well as purchasing anything online or outside of Benicia to be delivered in Benicia. 100% of the funds generated by this tax would be placed in a dedicated fund for street and roadway improvements and repairs. It would also establish a citizens' oversight committee and require annual audits. And since the measure is a citizens' committee initiative, if it makes it onto the March 5th ballot, it only needs to pass by 50%+1.

We spoke with Mark Hughes, former City Council Member and a member of the Save Our Streets citizens' committee, about this ballot initiative. He informed us that the initiative will first need to gain over 2000 signatures from registered Benicia voters before the end of September. From there, the initiative turns into a bona fide campaign and the measure will appear as an initiative on the March 5th ballot.

Mark notes that some voters may believe the City already has the necessary funds to make the required road improvements via Measure C or our gas tax revenue. He assures that, based on his familiarity with the City and its budget, there are not enough funds to cover the increasing infrastructure expenses due to inflation and other cost-raising factors. And the longer we wait to pass a funding measure, the more expensive the necessary repairs will become.

He also reminds Benicians that our sales tax rate is lower than many surrounding cities' tax rates. Vallejo's sales tax rate is 9.25% and Martinez's is 9.75%. Benicia's current sales tax rate is 8.375% and should the citizens' committee sales tax take effect, it would only raise our tax rate to 8.875%. But, that's only if the initiative makes it past the petition phase.

"I'm typically not an 'increase taxes' kind of guy, but I am a 'preserve the quality of life in Benicia' kind of guy. Improving the quality of our streets is a big part of that and I'm willing to pay a little extra toward that goal," says Mark of his involvement in the Save Our Streets initiative.

If you are interested in helping Save Our Streets by signing the petition or helping to collect signatures, or if you have questions about it, you can reach out to the committee below or at BeniciaSaveOurStreets@gmail.com.

Members include Mark Hughes, Maggie Kolk, David Batchelor, Glenn Loveall, Tim Hamann, Krista Heredia, and Bobbi White.