

## Kelly Hammargren on the Two Competing Streets Measures

*I am on the "Fix the Streets" side as that does the most good with the least risk of "what were you thinking?" and puts better oversight and evaluation into the mix.*

Excerpted from [Activist's Diary, March 28, 2024](#)

The City Auditor Jenny Wong noted the status report from the Department of Public Works on "Fleet Replacement Fund Short Millions & Rocky Road: Berkeley Streets At Risk and Significantly Underfunded" was under Information Reports on the agenda which is an unbearably long title to say our streets are crap and there was no cohesive plan for replacing city owned trucks, cars, etc. I characterize Berkeley streets as the city's answer to permeable paving.

There are two petitions circulating by community groups on Berkeley streets. One is called "Fix the Streets" found in the website "Berkeleyans for Better Planning".

<https://www.berkeleyansforbetterplanning.org/> The other is called "Safe Streets" with the website "Berkeley Citizens for Safe Streets". <https://www.berkeleysafestreets.com/home>

Whichever one passes in November with at least 50% plus 1 and the most votes will prevail. Both are parcel taxes which will show up on the property owners' tax bill. Property owners with very low income can apply for an exemption from parcel taxes.

I was going to do an in-depth side by side comparison into the difference between the two petitions, but I have decided to take a lighter comparison now though somewhat more detailed than you may wish.

Since we won't be voting on the petitions until November we have plenty of time to make up our minds.

For right now the task is gaining signatures. I am on the "Fix the Streets" side. Please sign that petition.

The "Fix the Streets" parcel tax is 13 cents on "improvements" on a parcel (property) and it includes repairing/replacing sidewalks at 100% not the 50/50 sharing between the city and property owners that exists now. Fix the Streets is the same tax for all property owners.

For renters who never see property tax bills, this will be another line on the long list of add-ons (I counted 32 on my bill). Property taxes begin with the gross assessment of the land value and improvements (buildings).

Under Proposition 13 the gross assessment starts with 1% of the purchase price (used as the assessed value) and then increases by no more than 2% per year. Change of ownership or new construction will trigger reassessment. Any property that has not changed hands since before 1975 uses the 1975 value as the base.

Parcel taxes can be a flat tax per parcel with all property owners having the same fee or they can be based on the size of the parcel or the size of improvements i.e. the size of the buildings or livable space. Parcel taxes can be a split roll where the amount of the tax varies on the use of the parcel, i.e. residential versus commercial. Parcel taxes are not based on the assessed value of the property. Bond measures also appear in the list of add-ons.

When I spoke with Jim McGrath who was instrumental in the "Fix the Streets" ballot initiative, a big concern was using the best estimates to fix our deteriorating streets and sidewalks and how long it would take to complete the task. He expressed his concern for all the small independent businesses that are still struggling. That is why the "Fix the Streets" group uses the same 13 cents per square foot for all property owners regardless of use (residential or commercial). The PCI (Pavement Condition Index) to bring all

street to a PCI of 70 or good condition is for the entirety of the street not the average. The parcel tax is for twelve years.

I have my bias. I've had a driver's license for over 60 years. I've driven in all kinds of weather and road conditions all over this country, across Europe, the German autobahn and even in the center of Rome in congested 5 pm traffic. I was the caregiver for a wheelchair dependent partner and driver of our disability modified van. I had a parent who was in constant bone pain for whom walking any distance was painful and difficult. And, I've had my own personal experiences with injuries, casts, crutches, splints, boots, slings. I'm up to thirteen lifetime fractures. These days I mostly walk for exercise and to be a good climate citizen leaving using my car when walking or BART doesn't work.

As I look at who and what is being done in the name of Vision Zero (reducing traffic injuries to zero) some of it is great, some good and some would fall into, "what were you thinking." I see an absence of disabled, mobility limited persons and their caregivers in creating and evaluating plans for street infrastructure. I see bicycle enthusiasts filling the center of transportation planning and those same groups as participants and endorsers of the "Safe Streets" ballot initiative.

Until the big Hopkins Corridor Plan blew up, emergency and evacuation routes and the Fire Department were kind of an afterthought, if considered at all. See "What Has Happened with Hopkins and Why" from April 10, 2023 in the Berkeley Daily Planet for a bigger explanation.  
<https://www.berkeleydailyplanet.com/issue/2023-04-09/article/50248?headline=What-Has-Happened-with-Hopkins-and-Why--Kelly-Hammargren>

The "Safe Streets" ballot initiative is a "split roll" which means the residential rate is 17 cents per square foot and the non-residential rate is at 25 cents per square foot. With "Safe Streets" our neighborhood stores and restaurants will pay almost double the "Fix the Streets" parcel tax not just Bayer and Sutter. Sidewalk repair/replacement stays at 50/50. The PCI is the "average" which means that a street can have potholes in one section and be repaired in the rest, but as long as it averages out it will meet the repair criteria. It also includes infrastructure to the streets like bus lanes, loading platforms, etc. This is where I worry we will get the "what were you thinking" kinds of changes to our streets. This parcel tax runs for fourteen years.

Cities always love more money. You will probably see the elected and politicians jumping for enthusiasm around "Safe Streets" and certainly the bicyclist with their infrastructure change wishes. As for the promise in the ballot initiative not to use "Safe Streets" funds for bicycle lanes on Hopkins from "Safe Streets" there is nothing stopping the city from adding in money from the general fund to finish the job.

There is a lot that is going to change in the coming decade. I would really prefer we weren't put in this bind of choosing one or the other now, but here we are. I am on the "Fix the Streets" side as that does the most good with the least risk of "what were you thinking?" and puts better oversight and evaluation into the mix.

***To request to be placed on Kelly's list to receive her Activist's Diary, write to:***  
[\*\*\*kellyhammargren@gmail.com.\*\*\*](mailto:kellyhammargren@gmail.com)