

# Atherton gives official notice of June 6 election

Once again, the issue is how to pay for the new Town Center



Dry rot is seen in many places on the old portable buildings used by the Town of Atherton Permit Department, on Wednesday, May 6, 2015. Finger pressure can break through the wood at places like this. The white-painted patch at the bottom of this photo is an old traffic sign applied as a make-do repair. (John Orr / Daily News)

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Atherton City Clerk Theresa DellaSanta has published notice that the town will be holding a special election by mail-in ballot on June 6, to ask how the new Town Center should be financed.

The official wording, vetted over a series of City Council meetings, is “Should the Town of Atherton supplement private donations with available non-dedicated General Funds to meet the funding shortfall, where one exists, for construction of the new Town Center?”

The town has spent the past four years designing the new Town Center, which will replace the Atherton Library, the town administration buildings, and the police department. Completed architectural designs have been approved and construction plans are being developed.

The group Atherton Now has spent that same four years raising money from private donations to pay for the Town Center, per 2012’s Measure L, which said donations should be the primary funding source. But not enough money has been collected, and the City Council wants to use general fund money for the job.

Measure L, as City Attorney William B. Connors recently told the City Council, was strictly advisory, and not binding. The City Council can proceed to build the Town Center as it sees fit. The June election will also be advisory only, not binding.



Atherton City Attorney William Connors at the Feb. 15, 2017, City Council meeting. (John Orr / Daily News)

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“At the time of the original measure, the council thought it was binding,” said Mayor Michael Lempres on Monday. “That’s why we’re going back out. It seems like the good thing to do. It’s an opportunity to hear the will of the people again.”

And what if the voters say no, the general funds should not be used?

“I don’t anticipate it to be an issue,” said Lempres. “It could be, but I don’t anticipate it will be. When voters are given the whole story, they will support the use of unallocated funds to build the new civic center. We gave a very good effort to raise all the money privately; now we are talking about a public/private effort to get the civic center built.

“And, it looks like we’ll be able to do it with funds currently on hand. Certainly we’ll do it without new tax increases of any sort.”

The new library is funded thanks to tax funds in hand. The administration buildings, including the offices of city manager and city clerk, the permits department and the planning department, and the police department, are crumbling, old structures that don’t meet modern building codes.

“We need a new civic center, and delays are going to cost more and more,” said Lempres. “I believe that when the voters get information about it, the measure will pass. It’s a common sense thing for the town. It’s better for the town, better for our employees. All in all, it’s a win-win for the town.”

More about the June election can be found at the town’s election web page, <http://bit.ly/at2017election>, including forms for filing ballot arguments and rebuttals. The deadlines for submitting such material is March 17.

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