

*Fairbank,
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Metz &
Associates*

FM3

*Public Opinion Research
& Strategy*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz and Lucia Del Puppo
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

RE: Public Support for Renewing Sonoma County Community Separators

DATE: September 25, 2015

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a survey of likely November 2016 voters in Sonoma County – a survey which shows that **there is strong support for a renewal and expansion of the Sonoma County community separators.**¹ Given draft ballot language and a conceptual description of a ballot measure that would both renew the separators and expand them to include additional natural areas, more than seven in ten voters offered support. Both voters who initially had awareness of the separators – as well as those who learned more during the course of the survey -- had a very positive perception of their impact on the community. In addition, the broad support for the community separators held up strongly after voters heard both pro and con arguments, indicating that a measure placed on the ballot in November 2016 to renew support for the separators would have an excellent chance of winning approval.

Some of the specific findings of the survey include the following:

- **Three-quarters of voters back a measure to renew and expand the community separators.** Survey respondents were initially offered draft ballot questions for measures to renew and expand the community separators: half were offered a measure that would expand them to include lands identified for conservation in the general plan, and half were offered a version that would include protections for additional natural areas beyond those identified in the Plan. As shown in **Figure 1** on the following page, both measures received statistically equal levels of support, averaging 75 percent.

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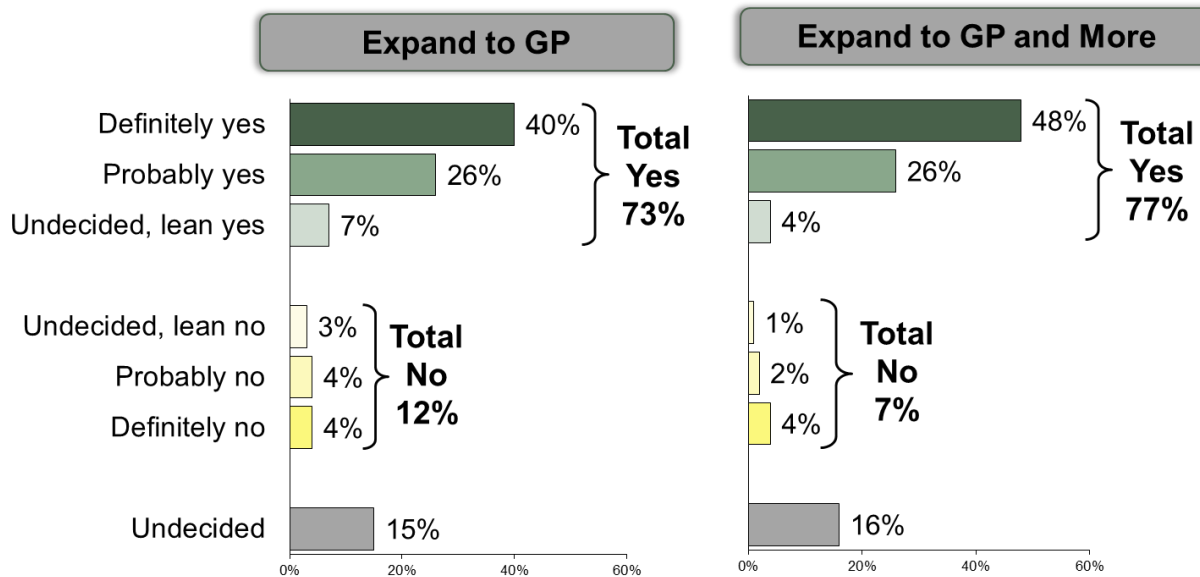
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Figure 1: Voter Support for Expanding the Community Separators

“Sonoma County Community Separator Renewal Measure. In order to preserve Sonoma’s scenic views and community character, protect greenbelts between our cities, prevent sprawl, and protect working farms and ranches, shall an ordinance be approved which:

- Renews existing policies requiring voter approval of changes to a community separator adjacent to a city, and
- designates additional community separators as recommended in the county’s general plan;

(Half Sample Only) and also for the purposes of conserving additional natural areas?”



Support for a ballot measure cut across all segments of the Sonoma County electorate, including the following:

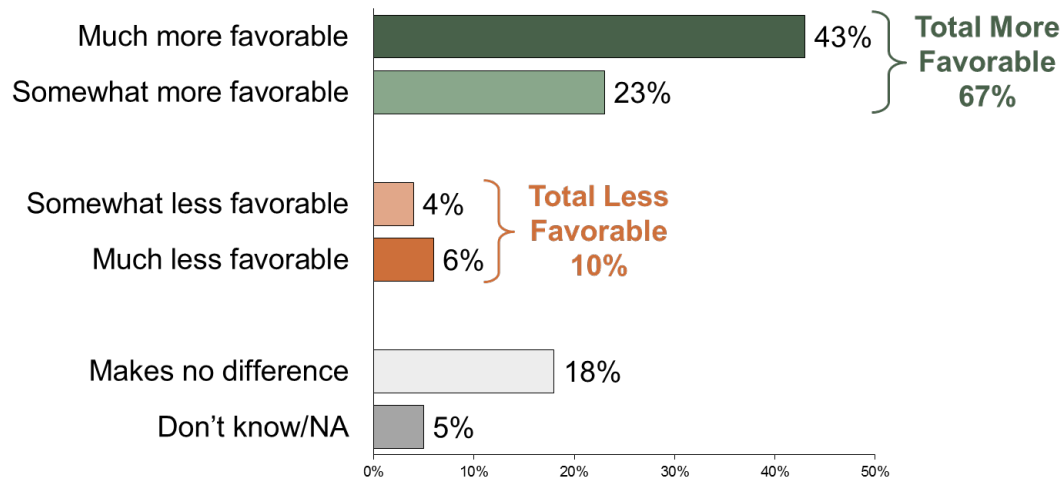
- ✓ 81% of women and 69% of men;
- ✓ 80% of voters under age 50 and 73% of those age 50 and over;
- ✓ 78% of Democrats, 80% of independents, and 63% of Republicans; and
- ✓ At least 69% of voters in each of the County’s five supervisorial districts.

- **Support for the measure comes despite the fact that most voters have little familiarity with community separators; those that do have some awareness perceive the separators’ impact to be very positive.** Thirty-seven percent of voters are aware of the Sonoma County community separators and, of these, 89 percent view them in a positive light.

- **Two-thirds of voters say they would view their supervisor more favorably if they placed this measure on the ballot.** As shown in **Figure 2**, voters overwhelmingly said they would have a more favorable view of a County Supervisor who moved to place the renewal of the community separators on the ballot. These positive perceptions cut across all five supervisorial districts.

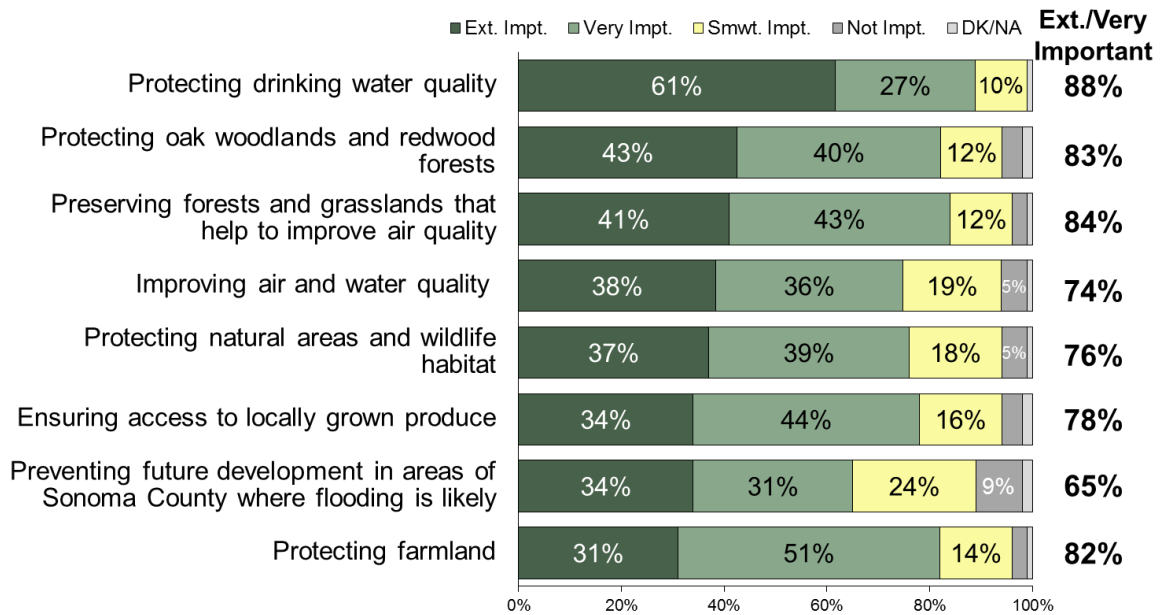
**Figure 2: Impact of Placing a Community Separators Measure on the Ballot
On Perceptions of County Supervisors**

Suppose your representative on the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors voted to place this measure on the ballot for a public vote. If that were the case, would you have a more favorable or less favorable opinion of that County Supervisor?



- **Support for the potential measure remained strong after pro and con messaging.** Survey respondents were offered a list of arguments from potential supporters and opponents of the measure, and the net impact of the messaging was to strengthen support. At the end of the survey, 78 percent voiced support for a potential measure (up from 75 percent initially) while just 13 percent were opposed.
- **Protection of water and air quality, forests, wildlife habitat, and farmland are the top-ranked objectives of the measure.** Survey respondents were offered a list of various impacts that a renewal and expansion of community separators would have, and were asked to rank their importance as either “extremely,” “very,” “somewhat,” or “not important.” As shown in **Figure 3** on the following page, voters placed the highest priority on benefits for protection of drinking water quality, forests and grasslands, and natural areas and wildlife habitat.

Figure 3: Most Important Goals of the Community Separator Measure



Overall, the survey results suggest that **a renewal and expansion of Sonoma County’s community separators is well-positioned to pass in November 2016.** Given the overwhelming support from voters, strong positive perception of the separators’ impact on Sonoma County, and the durability of support as voters learn more about the potential measure the measure is clearly viable for next year’s election.

ⁱ **Survey Methodology:** From September 3 – September 8, 2015, FM3 completed 400 telephone interviews (on landlines and cellphones) with randomly-selected Sonoma County voters likely to participate in the November 2016 election. The survey’s margin of error is +/- 4.9% at the 95% confidence interval. Due to rounding, not all results will sum to 100%.