



Parking Community Joins to Fight Tax Increase in San Francisco

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In August 2006, four members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors placed a measure on the ballot, Prop E, to increase the parking tax from 25 to 35 percent. The additional 10 percent surcharge represented a 40 percent increase to the current tax, which was already one of the highest in the nation.

Upon hearing the news, the parking community immediately convened meetings with the major stakeholders who considered the potential tax increase as a detriment to the economic vitality of San Francisco. City Park led the charge in fighting the proposed new tax, along with Impark and Ampco, and assembled a team to fight the ballot measure aggressively. With San Francisco's liberal voting populous embracing anti-car positions in the past, there was a concern that the measure might pass if the facts were not made available to all concerned voters.

group that provides strategic, political consultation to San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, whose approval ratings are skyrocketing at 81 percent.

The Storefront Political Media group immediately helped the committee of parking operators to create and file all the required documentation with the city of San Francisco in opposition to the parking tax measure. Formal filings included registering with the city, preparing arguments for the voter's handbook and selecting the appropriate treasurer to properly track contributions in keeping with city election protocol. Storefront also developed a line item budget that delineated all costs required to generate all the related materials, along with a media plan that would be required to beat this measure. Our fundraising target was \$300,000 to put on an effective campaign to properly educate the voters against the "dangerous" proposed tax increase.

The parking committee reached out and enlisted the help of their Teamsters Union Local 665 to help in the fight. The Teamsters helped with fundraising

City Park's committee of parking operators came up with a plan of action that included the hiring of a top political campaign strategist, the Storefront Political Media group. Storefront Political Media is the same



and provided workers that were stationed in the garages as “ambassadors” to help get the word out on the negative impact of more parking taxes. The Teamsters and their “ambassadors” were very effective, distributing materials and answering our customers’ questions as most of our parkers that vote did not understand the potential impact of the initiative.

With the help of Storefront Political Media, the parking committee put together a number of arguments against the parking tax increase including:

- The cost of living in San Francisco is already too high—any additional taxes would drive people away from downtown market centers, and adversely impact our fragile economy that was just recovering from the dot com implosion of 2001.
- The measure was put on the ballot by liberal Supervisor Chris Daly, who had lost favor with the voting populous in recent years.
- The addition of any new taxes was unwarranted as San Francisco had a surplus of over \$100 million in city coffers.
- Recommending that the city should focus on properly collecting taxes first before raising any new taxes. (Tax auditing and collection had been recently bolstered by new legislation allowing more strident rules around tax collection.)
- The proposed tax was a regressive tax, where wealthy individuals weren’t impacted. Other workers who needed their cars (single mothers, handicapped, sales people, construction workers, etc.) would be unfairly penalized by the tax.
- Dramatic parking tax increases can kill the vitality of a downtown center as it has in Pittsburgh,

Pa., with its 50 percent tax. Studies there show a dramatic diminution in merchant activity, restaurant visits and business visits. Overall, 500,000 fewer visits were made to the downtown Pittsburgh community.

The Parking Committee then reached out to the property owners and business associations in the core downtown area. Organizations such as the Building Owners and Managers Association, Union Square Association, Golden Gate Restaurant Association and Yerba Buena Alliance stepped up in support of the cause. Significant property owners with garages also joined the effort along with the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. In the end, all parties were able to step up and raise more than \$350,000 to fight the measure.

The \$350,000 “war chest” raised in the fight against increasing the parking tax was expertly deployed by our political advisors during the campaign. Over \$90,000 went towards developing a television commercial along with plans to air commercials frequently during the last three weeks of the campaign. Mailers with strong graphics warning voters to “Stop the dangerous tax increase” were provided and sent to all registered voters on three occasions during the campaign.

Voter polls were also taken along the way that indicated that voters felt that parking in San Francisco was already too costly, and that there were not enough garages/parking spaces to support the demand. Early survey figures confirmed that voters were **against** any future tax increases on parking.

Each week, the Parking Committee met with Storefront Political Media to coordinate its next strategic steps. The Committee only had 90 days to put together its team, do fundraising, garner the support of business associations and get the word out in the garages. Time was of the essence.

When the voters went to the polls in early November, they delivered a resounding victory, with 62 percent voting in favor of no increased parking tax. It sent a clear message to political and the business community alike that reasonably priced parking is a critical ingredient to the economic vitality to our San Francisco downtown community. 