

Santa Monica Votes: Airport Issues, Measures D & LC:

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The future of Santa Monica Airport is a leading controversial issue heading to the ballot on Nov. 4.

The fate of one of the most controversial pieces of land in the city, Santa Monica Municipal Airport (SMO), will be put in voter's hands this election on Nov. 4. The decision of ownership, development, and control is on the ballot in the forms of Measures D and LC.

Measure D

Measure D would see the addition of a new provision to the City Charter requiring voter approval of certain decisions about SMO.

Voter approval would be required before a city decision to close or partially close the airport could become effective. Voter approval would also be required before any city decision could become effective to change the use of land, which is now used for the airport or for related aviation services, to non-aviation uses.

The measure defines "voter approval" as a majority of those voting in a general municipal election voting "yes" to approve the City decision.

"The overall effect of this measure would be to reduce the City Council's authority over use of the Airport and of the Airport land that is now used for aviation purposes," according to the City Attorney's office. "The measure would take away from the City Council any ability to close or partially close the Airport or to change Airport land uses.

The measure would insulate SMO against closure or change by imposing a new requirement of voter approval, and it would protect aviation-related use of Airport land until that requirement was fulfilled. Likewise, aviation services currently provided by private businesses at the Airport would be protected until after a vote to close the Airport.

Measure LC

Measure LC would amend the City Charter to prohibit new development on SMO land, except for parks, public open spaces, and public recreational facilities, until the voters approve limits on the uses and development that may occur on the land; and affirm the City Council's authority to manage SMO and to close all or part of it.

"This measure is expressly intended to compete with, prevail over, and nullify all provisions of a competing measure on the same ballot sponsored by aviation interests," the City Attorney's office stated.

"Unlike that measure, this one does not require a vote of the people to close the airport or to restrict aviation fuel sales or the use of aviation facilities. However, this measure does require that parameters for airport development following closure must receive voter approval before new, non-recreational development can occur on the land."

Lobby groups

There are two main committees weighing in financially on the debate: Santa Monicans for Open and Honest Development Decisions, Sponsored and Major Funding by Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (SMOHDD) (Yes on D, No on LC), and the Committee for Local Control of Santa Monica Airport Land (CLCSMAL) (No on D, Yes on LC).

SMOHDD has raised \$613,311 for their campaign; CLCSMAL has raised \$82,641, according to filings with the City Clerk's office at time of publication.

SMOHDD supports "the charter amendment requiring a vote of the people before 227 low-density acres of Santa Monica Airport can be redeveloped for other purposes."

"It's long past time to put any decisions to redevelop Santa Monica Airport land in the hands of the voters rather than leaving it to politicians and developers," SMOHDD states on their website.

Meanwhile, CLCSMAL rebuffs on their website: "This land was bought by the City with a Parks Bond back in the 1920s and it is high time it went back to community, not special interest uses."

"Our goal is to defeat the AOPA ballot initiative (Measure D) and support the opposing City initiative (Measure LC)...By so doing we will prevent wealthy special interests denying the public access to the land that is at the airport when some or all of the airport closes down starting in July 2015."

Yes on D, No on LC

A yes vote on Measure D means that unless voters approved the closure of the airport, and until that decision is effective, the City would be required to continue to operate the airport in a manner that supported its aviation purposes.

A yes vote would prohibit the City from imposing upon aviation services providers new restrictions that would inhibit the sale of fuel or the “full use” of aviation facilities.

Additionally, a yes vote sees the measure include a retroactivity provision. It states that any City decision about the airport that is made after the filing of the Notice of Intention to Circulate the initiative petition (but before the election), and that would require voter approval under the measure, would be ineffective unless approved by the voters.

The measure could limit the City Council’s ability to address environmental concerns and adverse impacts of Airport operations for however long the airport remains open, according to the City Attorney.

Yes on LC, No on D

A yes to LC would see City Council take full authority, without voter approval, to regulate use of the Santa Monica Airport, manage airport leaseholds, condition leases, and permanently close all or part of the airport to aviation use.

If all or part of the airport land is permanently closed to aviation use, no new development of that land shall be allowed until the voters have approved limits on the uses and development that may occur on the land.

The City Council could approve the development of parks, public open spaces, and public recreational facilities; and the maintenance and replacement of existing cultural, arts and education uses if they close the airport. This could be done without voter approval.

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(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added, but only to add analysis & clarification)**