

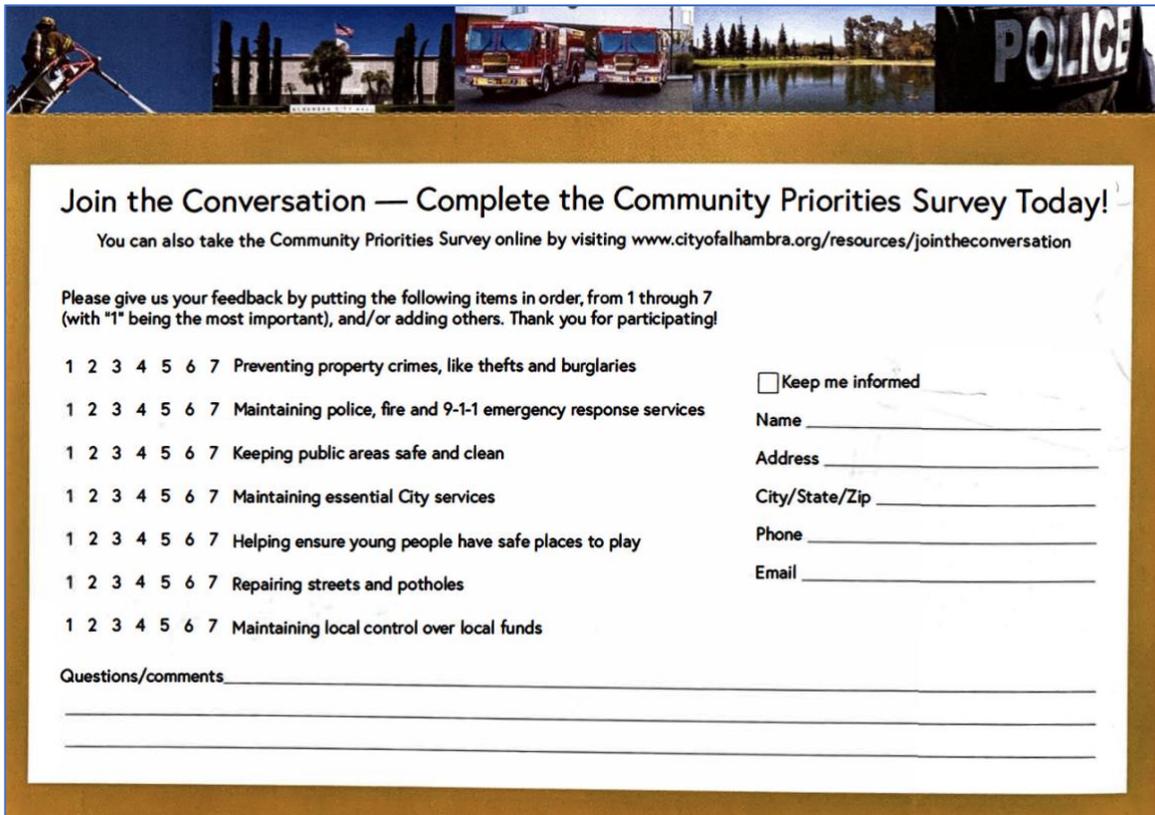
Why I'm voting NO on Measure AL  
By Eric Sunada, February 23, 2020

Alhambra's Measure AL is a money grab by those holding a disproportionate share of power, allowing them to maintain an agenda that remains out of touch with the lived realities of the city's residents. The measure asks for voter approval for a 0.75% sales and use tax hike. The city ostensibly claims Measure AL was borne out of community request as received via a city-wide survey. If approved by a majority of voters on March 3, it would bring the sales tax rate in Alhambra to 10.25%, the maximum allowed by the state (Alhambra's current tax rate is 9.5%). But as the city's own staff report states, a main reason for the increase is "if the City does not adopt this amount, the County or another regional entity can place a measure on the ballot to impose that additional amount."

Such an arrogation of tax revenue was backed by a survey conducted by the city. Their story is that we need Measure AL because of community concerns:

"feedback from hundreds of Alhambra community members, [where] the top priorities for the community in priority order include: Preventing property crimes, like thefts and burglaries; maintaining police, fire and 9-1-1 emergency response; keeping public areas safe and clean; maintaining essential city services; repairing streets and potholes; helping ensure young people have safe places to play; keeping all funds local by using residents' taxpayer dollars to benefit Alhambra."

But this simply mirrors the options presented in the mailer, shown below.



**Join the Conversation — Complete the Community Priorities Survey Today!**  
You can also take the Community Priorities Survey online by visiting [www.cityofalhambra.org/resources/jointheconversation](http://www.cityofalhambra.org/resources/jointheconversation)

Please give us your feedback by putting the following items in order, from 1 through 7 (with "1" being the most important), and/or adding others. Thank you for participating!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Preventing property crimes, like thefts and burglaries	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep me informed
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Maintaining police, fire and 9-1-1 emergency response services	Name _____
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Keeping public areas safe and clean	Address _____
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Maintaining essential City services	City/State/Zip _____
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Helping ensure young people have safe places to play	Phone _____
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Repairing streets and potholes	Email _____
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Maintaining local control over local funds	

Questions/comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, that's correct: the city mailed out a survey to every address in the city, listed the options for you to choose from, and then cited those options back to you as justification for the big ask. We deserve better than that. [Legitimate surveys have shown the community's concerns](#) being much more in touch with our lived environments.

The city’s justification focuses on public safety and infrastructure. But it borders on scare tactics when they cite “[there were nearly six hundred burglaries and car thefts in Alhambra](#)” and [that the city doesn’t have sufficient funds for hiring police officers, impacting overall city safety](#). Yes, there were nearly six hundred burglaries and car thefts last year, but it’s not the full story when they omit the fact that such crimes continue to decrease and have been cut by over 50% since 2005.

Crime rates in Alhambra by year														
Type	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Burglaries</b> (per 100,000)	575 (649.1)	443 (502.3)	426 (485.6)	447 (517.3)	360 (418.8)	345 (405.9)	312 (371.1)	325 (384.8)	344 (406.1)	316 (372.1)	305 (353.9)	422 (490.5)	363 (422.8)	328 (382.7)
<b>Auto thefts</b> (per 100,000)	560 (632.2)	457 (518.2)	393 (448.0)	365 (422.4)	305 (354.8)	270 (317.7)	217 (258.1)	255 (301.9)	234 (276.2)	224 (263.7)	211 (244.9)	238 (276.6)	270 (314.4)	256 (298.7)

<https://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Alhambra-California.html>

Public safety is critical, which is why it’s the largest expenditure, accounting for over 66% of the general fund budget (Alhambra’s total general fund budget is about \$76 million, \$50 millions dollars of which have been allocated to public safety). If needed, I’m all for additional funding with a parcel tax placed on property owners. After all, they are the main beneficiaries of the city’s reasoning that Measure AL will increase the local property values.

Local control can be the most effective of means for directing resources where needed. We have some critical, crisis-level needs that can certainly use the revenue. That the city chose to direct them to two areas that are heavily subsidized and anodyne, safety and infrastructure, is a reflection of the vacuity of our leadership.

But localism only works if we can trust in those responsible for it. If passed, the measure is estimated to bring in \$8 million in extra tax revenue per year. The last time the city was presented with an \$8 million windfall was in 2015 where funding meant for lower income groups was directed for a parking structure at Almansor Park. Another council person at the time wanted it for lighting so his son’s soccer league could play night games. Over the years, millions more have been funneled to the Chamber of Commerce to attract businesses to the area, grant funding used for façade improvements, Rose Parade floats, luxury housing. It’s localism at its worst with a familiar cast of players who control the city: public/private alignment who look to serve themselves first with hopes of trickle-down benefits; city staff who look the other way as public safety unions flood the city with illegally placed Measure AL signs; local politicians worried more about their self-image, engaged in an endless Kabuki dance.

Perhaps the most difficult to take, however, is the regressive nature of a sales tax increase and the city’s plans for the extracted funds. On average, an [Alhambra resident will spend about \\$15,000 on retail purchases per year](#). The \$1,425 in annual sales tax paid may not seem like a big deal, but it makes all the difference to the large number of our residents who are struggling. To add to their plight without mention of how the projected \$8 million in added revenue could be used to address the systemic issues afflicting them is unacceptable. Measure AL will continue to focus the city on transactions. Perhaps its emblematic that 30% of our sales tax revenue comes from auto sales/leases. Selling cars, prioritizing parking for them, and making sure they don’t get broken into seems to be the plan for solvency. Without investing in our people, it’s structurally unsustainable.