



## A Message from Your City Council and the Measure H Oversight Committee

### CITY COUNCIL

Anthony Cannella, Mayor  
Bret Durossette                      Guillermo Ochoa  
Ken Lane                                      Chris Vierra

January 1, 2010

Dear Ceres Citizen:

In November 2007, Ceres voters passed Measure H, which is a ½ cent sales tax increase to fund additional public safety services that were sorely needed to provide protection and service to our community. During 2008 alone, five police officers were hired to improve neighborhood safety, deal with gangs, drug houses and parolees at large. Three firefighter and two battalion chief positions were also funded to increase the fire department's ability to effectively fight fires and save lives and property. To be sure, the intent of the voter-approved Measure H Ordinance was to channel Measure H funds exclusively for the purpose of improving the public safety services of the City of Ceres Police and Fire Divisions, and those funds were not to be used to "supplant" the existing level of the City's General Fund expenditures for police and fire. Upon the passage of the Measure H initiative, the Ceres City Council appointed the Measure H Oversight Committee, as required by the ordinance, to ensure that revenues derived from this special tax are expended in accordance with the provisions of the voter-approved Measure H Ordinance.

The prolonged economic downturn has severely impacted all communities, including the City of Ceres to the extent that to date, 19 City employees, which includes four Public Safety non-sworn employees, have lost their jobs. Since Measure H revenues are directly related to consumer spending in our community, this fund will also be negatively impacted. Fortunately, for the 2009/10 fiscal year, the additional funds generated by Measure H helped prevent the layoffs of sworn police and fire personnel, despite the severity of the City's financial difficulties. Hopefully, this objective can be accomplished for the 2010/11 fiscal year. However, due to the extreme uncertainty of City revenues for the upcoming year as a result of the recession, coupled with the possibility of additional City revenues being "taken" by the State, there is no absolute guarantee that such layoffs can be avoided.

In the case of our City's fire service, Measure H funds are currently being used to provide a 24/7 battalion chief for shift management and the staffing of a three-person engine company at Ceres Fire Station No. 1 (the other three stations are staffed with only two people). The long-term goal is to staff each of the four fire stations with three people. The three-person engine company at Fire Station No. 1 greatly enhances efficiency, firefighter safety, increases man-power, and most importantly, helps better protect the lives and property of the Ceres citizens.

The Ceres Fire Division has 32 sworn positions (including all ranks), which is exactly enough personnel to staff Fire Station No. 1 with a three-person engine company and Stations 2, 3, and 4 with two-person engine companies. If just one firefighter calls in sick or is absent for any other reason, it automatically creates a vacancy that must be filled in order to keep that engine company in service. Over the last year, the Ceres Fire Department experienced serious staffing deficiencies as a result of multiple firefighters who suffered injuries (both on and off the job) that led to long-term absences from the job. This, coupled with a tight overtime budget, has necessitated the use of Measure H personnel (the third person assigned to the Fire Station No. 1 engine company) to fill vacancies created by staff positions that are funded by the City's General Fund. The Fire Administration was faced with the choice of closing one of the City's four fire stations on a daily basis or utilizing Measure H personnel to "backfill" shifts for the injured or sick firefighters. When considering the overall welfare and safety of our citizens, the clear choice was to do what was necessary to keep all four stations open as much as financially possible, rather than maintaining the three-person staffing at Fire Station No. 1.

Both the City Council and the Measure H Oversight Committee believe they have a responsibility to inform the community regarding the City's use of Measure H tax dollars. While the City Council and the Committee acknowledge that using the Measure H funded firefighters flexibly is legally permissible, at the same time, we understand and share the citizens' desire to achieve three-person staffing at the fire stations. It is important to remember that Measure H was a response to the community's request for additional public safety services and the goal of maintaining the staffing at all four fire stations has been achieved. We believe the closure of a fire station, and the resulting reduction of services, would not serve the best interest of our citizens. The City Council intends to continue this current method of staffing only on a temporary basis, until the Ceres Fire Division is fully-staffed and revenues are back on track. The efficiency of the three-person engine company cannot be ignored and the City Council intends to ultimately achieve that staffing level at all four of the City's fire stations, as funding becomes available.

The safety of the Ceres community is at the heart of Measure H, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the funds derived from this special tax fully meet the community's needs and expectations. While we are all enduring difficult times, it is important that the foundations of this City remain intact. We believe public safety is one of the cornerstones of our community and it is our hope that providing you with this information advances the goal of maintaining an "open government," and ensures that Ceres citizens continue to receive the public safety services and protection they need and deserve.

If you have questions about this matter, please contact the Ceres Department of Public Safety Administration at (209) 538-5726 or visit the City website at: <http://www.ci.ceres.ca.us/>



Anthony Cannella, Mayor



Lisa Mantarro Moore, Chairperson  
Measure H Oversight Committee