In E. Palo Alto, courage

EAST PALO ALTANS overwhelmingly sent a most-welcome message to their elected officials when they voted to levy an extra tax upon themselves to help save their city government.

Measure A, which won 62 percent support, is a five-year parcel tax that will provide a financial bridge for the city until several development projects now on the drawing boards come into existence and begin generating additional tax funds for the community. Single-family homeowners will pay an extra $175 per year, and renters will pay up to an extra $60 per year (assuming landlords can pass most or all of the cost on after applying to exemptions from the city's rent control law).

This display of political courage by the voters not only shows a grass-roots commitment to save self-government and protect their community, but it also demonstrates confidence in the leadership being provided by the city's current mayor and three fellow council members who supported Measure A.

"We went to them (with) an honest and straightforward (campaign)," Mayor Bill Vines noted. In effect, he believes the voters said, "we're going to give you the money so you can move ahead and get the city going until development starts up."

The challenge of stabilizing the city's fiscal condition remains the single largest challenge before the City Council. But Measure A gives the council a bit of breathing room to guide East Palo Alto through its financial troubles and, possibly, to bolster some public services.

The victory also places new responsibilities on the city's leaders to put a sound, fiscal program in place over the next five years, with substantive work getting under way as soon as possible. This money should be spent wisely, and no more money should be spent than is reasonably expected to be available.

As divided as East Palo Altans have been in previous city elections, the results of this election clearly indicate that, more than ever before, residents want to focus on the future of their community, not on the past.