

Poll: City charter status opposed

Worries are jobs, economy

By Scott Mobley

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A majority of Redding residents oppose a city charter, according to a poll commissioned by a heavy construction industry lobbying organization.

The Sacramento-based California Alliance for Jobs released the poll Monday, a day before the City Council considers whether to go ahead with a charter.

A council-appointed committee will not issue a recommendation this evening for or against proceeding.

The 10-member group split after two months of research, discussion and testimony on the pros and cons of changing Redding from a general law to a charter city.

The California Constitution grants charter cities full power over purely "municipal affairs" such as deciding whether the city attorney should be elected, setting salaries for officials and claiming exemption from prevailing wages laws on city-funded public works.

The state Supreme Court may overturn charter city exemption from prevailing wage, a major construction industry concern.

The California Alliance for Jobs poll found 58 percent of residents

against a charter and 23 percent in favor. Nineteen percent of those polled had no opinion. The poll's error margin is 5.3 percent.

J. Moore Methods, a Sacramento-based polling firm, surveyed 350 residents by phone June 1-2. Eighty-one percent of those polled said they did not belong to a labor union and 61 percent said they supported less government and lower taxes.

The poll found adopting a city charter low on the list of concerns facing Redding residents. Top worries were jobs and the economy (a "very" serious issue for 83 percent polled), housing foreclosures (71 percent), local government budget deficits (58 percent) and police protection (46 percent).

Twenty-three percent polled called a charter city a serious issue and 42 percent had no opinion.

Overall, 35 percent of those polled said the city of Redding is going in the right direction and 45 percent said it's going in the wrong direction. Twenty percent had no opinion.

Yet 64 percent of respondents said things are going in the right direction for them personally.

California Alliance for Jobs represents 1,700 heavy construction firms and 50,000 unionized workers between Bakersfield and the Oregon border, according to its website.

The organization recently launched a "ReBuild California" campaign encouraging major investment in the state's freeways, bridges, ports, airports, power plants and water and sewer systems.

James Earp, who directs the Alliance for Jobs, also sits on the California Transportation Commission. He was finance chair on the

campaign for the \$20 billion high speed rail bond voters passed in 2008.

The organization has conducted polls on numerous issues, Earp said Monday. But the Redding poll was a first on charter cities, he said.

The California Alliance for Jobs took notice of charter cities after officials in Bell were charged with voting themselves exorbitant salaries.

City charters, which grant local officials authority over purely local matters under a "home rule" provision, seems ripe for abuse, Earp said.

"Our main concern is there's adequate funding for local resources," Earp said. "You've got to have enough money to maintain roads, public safety, schools and other vital services."

Charter proponents in Redding have said Bell was a criminal anomaly. Any local charter would likely put stronger limits on local government than general law under the state constitution, they have said.