

Study: Travelers not interested in paying higher taxes, fees

By Bonnie Eslinger, Palo Alto Daily News

A nationwide survey of convention, trade show and meeting industry professionals concludes they would have second thoughts about holding an event in the Bay Area if San Mateo County voters approve June 5 ballot measures that would raise the hotel tax and start taxing commercial parking lot and car rental businesses in unincorporated areas, as well as at San Francisco International Airport.

The poll, conducted by the U.S. Travel Association, says that more than 40 percent of 366 respondents would “definitely” search for a new meeting destination or “reconsider” holding their next meeting or event in the Bay Area, according to a press release the organization released Thursday. In addition, 25 percent said they would have to cut back on their meeting expenses if they held an event in the region.

U.S. Travel Association COO Geoff Freeman said there’s a tipping point, even for popular destinations, when tourism professionals can’t justify spending more there than in other locations fighting for their dollars. That’s how New York lost some of its travel business he said.

San Mateo County is showing a “pure disregard for visitors,” Freeman said. Asked why the association got involved in the county’s affairs, Freeman said it has been keeping an eye and ear out in recent years for such taxes, which have become more common in the current economy.

The Board of Supervisors voted in February to place the tax measures on the June ballot.

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