

Supervisors will ask voters to increase sales tax

July 29, 2020



Del Norte County voters will have the chance to weigh in Nov. 3 on a proposed one percent sales tax increase to pay for law enforcement, road repairs, first responders and other public safety issues.

The board of supervisors approved a resolution July 28 in support of the ordinance that would, if passed, be applied to sales in the county's unincorporated areas. (The city of Crescent City is considering the same proposed increase on the ballot; if the city takes that action Aug. 3 and both measures pass, the sales tax throughout the county would go from 7.5% to 8%.

Support from the board was not unanimous. District 1 Supervisor Roger Gitlin dissented, saying in his report that law enforcement is under siege nationwide and that a sales tax increase would be burdensome.

"This is no time for our county to support a one percent general sales tax when so many of us are hurting," Gitlin said. "It's always so sad and disheartening to see the only answer we have to solve any problem is adding another tax."

In response to Gitlin's concerns, supervisors Chris Howard and Bob Berkowitz pointed out that the board already lent their support for law enforcement in a July 14 resolution the board approved unanimously.

Howard added that the tax measure is an important tool to fund critical services and that to pursue financial assistance through the state, the county often has to take action first.

"I'm fiscally conservative when it comes to this stuff, but you know full well the hit our general fund is taking," Howard said. "I don't want to go back and ask our electorate for this, but we have no choice if we're going to survive."

Berkowitz said the board shows its support for law enforcement by approving the resolution to place the tax measure on the ballot.

"We're not going to dictate what you think and how you should vote, we're going to leave it up to you, the public, and you can tell us what you believe and how important first responders are to you and this community," Berkowitz said. "That's what this is all about."

If approved, the proposed tax increase would generate \$1.2 million annually and go toward supporting "vital local services" including:

- Providing support for law enforcement for emergency response
- Repairing potholes and maintaining streets
- Repairing for and responding to natural disasters and health emergencies
- Maintaining emergency dispatch services for fire, ambulance and law enforcement
- Maintaining jail and criminal justice services
- Addressing blight and public nuisances
- And other general services and infrastructure.

In addition to submitting the tax measure to an annual audit, the ordinance also requires the formation of a citizens' oversight committee to report annually on the revenue generated and how it's being used.

According to the California Dept. of Tax and Fee Administration, the current sales tax rate throughout Del Norte County is 7.5%. Of that, 7.25% is considered the statewide base sales and use tax rate; the remaining .25% was imposed by Del Norte County.

Of the 7.5% that goes to the state, most goes to the General Fund. In 1991, .50% was designated into support local health and social services programs; in 1993, .50% was designated to support local criminal justice activities; and 1.0625% goes to Local Revenue Fund 2011. That fund is designated to reimburse counties for programs paid from the Foster Care, Drug Medi-Cal, and Adoption Assistance Program Subaccounts

The highest sales tax in California currently is 10.5% in the Los Angeles County city of Santa Fe Springs.

