

City, county approve sending sales tax measures to voters in November

June 28, 2020



**NOVEMBER 3
ELECTION
Sales Tax
Increase?**

Crescent City and Del Norte County are both moving forward with plans to place proposed sales tax increases on the Nov. 3 general election ballot.

On Wednesday, the Crescent City Council voted unanimously to have staff develop language for a one cent general sales tax that would apply within the city limits only.

In response, the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to have county staff develop a separate one cent general sales tax for the unincorporated areas of the county.

District 1 Supervisor Roger Gitlin, the only no vote, wanted the county to develop a specific sales tax measure to help fund the sheriff's office. Such a measure would require a two-thirds majority vote, while a general sales tax proposal needs only a simple majority of voters.

The county and city had initially explored developing a joint measure. The two governments funded a poll of the community by Godbe Research from June 6 to 11. Bryan Godbe told both leadership groups a one cent sales tax increase for the incorporated and unincorporated areas of the county would yield about \$3 million in annual revenues. If managed as a joint measure, the county would retain control of the revenue and allocate about 40% to the city, or about \$1.2 million. He said the same tax increase imposed by the city would result in about the same \$1.2 million.

However, it was the lack of control of the funds that led the Crescent City leaders to go their own route.

“I was apprehensive about joining forces on this for a variety of reasons. Not the least of which, with the county measure, it is a county measure, and the county controls those funds. And we cannot have a binding agreement prior to the voters and it be a general tax,” Mayor Inscore said. “If we have a binding agreement before the vote, then it is a special tax and it’s going to require a 2/3 majority. Most of us realize, and the research shows, the idea of getting 67% of the people voting for a special tax I just don’t see any chance of that happening.”

The mayor said he knew going alone would not be popular with some.

The plans for \$1.2 million generate by the sales tax is extensive. City Manager Eric Wier explained about \$307,000 would go toward the city’s share of implementing the Crescent City Fire Protection District Board 10-year master plan to pay for additional manpower, equipment and training.

The city would use the additional \$1.2 million to shore up its budget.

City Manager Eric Wier said about \$307,000 would go toward the city’s share of implementing the Crescent City Fire Protection District Board’s 10-year master plan, paying for additional manpower, equipment and training.

Another \$373,000 would fund an extended staffing plan at the police department. About \$400,000 would help fund the Fred Endert Municipal Pool. The rest would pay for pothole repair and street maintenance and funding first responders.

The county’s sales tax measure would also go to fund critical services, including, disaster preparation, emergency response, street work and other general services.

The increased sales tax in the unincorporated area would help the county fund critical services including disaster preparation, emergency response, street work and other general services.

Godbe polled 438 residents, from a total 9,774 voter base in Del Norte County. With a plus or minus error rate of 4.58, he found 60.3% of respondents supporting a city-only sales tax and 54.6% in favor of an unincorporated county tax. Godbe said with the margin of error, that equates to a statistical tie. What complicates the results, he said, was additional measures being added to the ballot in November.

“It’s not just city versus county. It’s considering what happens if the school district does something,” Godge said. “If the school district puts a bond measure on the ballot, I don’t think a sales tax is

adversely affected.”

However, he pointed to a fire district measure that was delayed in the spring due to COVID-19, which could be revived in the fall. Godbe said voters living within the Crescent City Fire Protection District may also see a separate property tax increase ballot measure in September and October.

“I think that does have an impact because if the county did a general sales tax (increase) and the fire district did a measure, given that we’re voting absentee statewide in November, you could have two ballots on a person’s coffee table at the same time and a big portion of them would be fire district related. If the county and the fire district were on the ballot at the same time, that probably leads to both of them failing,” Godbe said.

He said both the city’s and county’s measures need to be submitted to the Del Norte County Elections Office by Aug. 6 to appear on the November ballot.