

## Sales tax hike eyed for Yolo

By Jonathan Edwards - Enterprise staff writer

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WOODLAND — Local governments could ask Yolo County voters in November to tax themselves between \$5 million and \$7 million starting next year.

Yolo County and its four cities — Davis, Woodland, Winters and West Sacramento — would have to act quickly if they want to put a half-cent sales tax on the November ballot, said Petrea Marchand, the county's intergovernmental affairs manager.

The countywide tax would partially replace a one-cent state tax set to expire in June 2011. The new tax would kick in July 1, 2011.

That one-cent tax generates money for the state, but Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis said it's debatable whether it helps Yolo County. A countywide tax, however, would keep dollars at home.

Answers to key questions remain hazy. So the Board of Supervisors formed a two-member subcommittee at its meeting Tuesday to talk with representatives of the county's four cities to decide:

- \* How would the money get divvied?
- \* What would it pay for?
- \* How should officials sell it to voters?

“What are we going to ask the voters to support with an increase of taxes?” asked Supervisor Mike McGowan of West Sacramento. That's the “fundamental question.”

A classic tug-of-war between the county and the cities will occur as they negotiate how much money goes where, said Dirk Brazil, deputy county administrator.

“We say things like: 'Your city residents are using our county roads, our county parks, our sheriff's deputies.'

“Well, they counter, 'With 90 percent of the county living in our cities ... you should be providing revenue to us.'

“It's this constant back-and-forth we have.”

The money could restore funds used to preserve farmland from development, McGowan said, or repair roads used by city and county dwellers alike.

Provenza suggested focusing the tax around public safety. A projected \$21 million deficit could force the county to stop around-the-clock sheriff's patrols, let small-time criminals off the hook and force the Sheriff's Department to release hundreds of felons from the county jail.

If the issue is the community's safety, "we would probably get support from voters," Provenza said.

McGowan's not sure his ideas are "sexy enough" for the cities to get on board, and any proposed tax will need nearly unanimous support from local governments if it's going to have a chance at the ballot box.

He lauded the idea of marshaling a subcommittee to help find a "sweet spot we can all agree on."

But "the idea is "not to have a prolonged conversation," Marchand said, since the county would need to have a total package to sell to voters by the summer.

"We're still kind of talking past each other," McGowan said.

First, the cities and county have to agree the tax is a good idea in the first place, Brazil said. He met with the four city managers last week, so "the dialogue has already begun."

A countywide sales tax is not the only option. The cities could go it alone and tax their residents directly, leaving the county, and its 24,000 rural residents, out of the picture.

The county could do the same, but Brazil warned that an overload of tax measures could ruin all efforts.

"The public's tolerance is only going to be so much," he said.

The board selected Provenza and Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland for the subcommittee, which will work with the cities to discuss a possible sales tax as well as other money-raising efforts.

For example, local governments also could team up to apply for regional grants.

Whether it's asking the federal government for road repair money or voters to tax themselves, Marchand said joining forces is best.

"We'll have more influence together," she said.

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