

## **New sales tax measures under review by Yolo County**

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Posted: 03/15/16, 3:42 PM PDT | Updated: 10 hrs ago

<http://www.dailydemocrat.com/government-and-politics/20160315/new-sales-tax-measures-under-review-by-yolo-county>

Two sales tax measures may be added to the November 2016 ballot pending an investigation by a County ad hoc subcommittee.

Last week, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors appointed supervisors Oscar Villegas and Jim Provenza to an ad hoc subcommittee to assist with fact-finding on new sales tax measures which would seek to develop two new local programs — one pertaining to universal pre-school, Quality Preschool for All, and one addressing transportation infrastructure.

According to Yolo County Administrator Patrick Blacklock, these programs have been challenged by a lack of adequate, stable funding.

Blacklock asked that the subcommittee present its findings in April so that the Board can discuss the topic again and be more well informed on how to proceed.

The Yolo County Office of Education is completing a cost and program study regarding the preschool proposal, however, proponents argue that at least 41 percent of three- and four year olds in Yolo County do not experience preschool before starting Kindergarten which has created a “school readiness gap.”

They cite income disparities, rural locations, and family mobility as obstacles to quality preschool which could be remedied through this program.

Proponents go on to state that, without access to preschool, low-income children, and dual language learners often start out behind and stay behind as they progress through school.

The preschool program would be developed with the support of existing private and public providers in the area, and would strive to complement — rather than duplicate or replace — existing programs.

It is also said that the program would put a standardized accountability system in place to measure teacher quality that could be expanded and replicated to County school districts.

Several supporters spoke to supervisors about the school plan. Supporters pointed to a similar program in West Sacramento that has been recognized nationally, as a model that could help shape a countywide program.

As for the other proposed tax measure, according to the Yolo County Transportation District, the total cost of the non-transit transportation infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance needs in the County and incorporated cities through 2036 is \$431 million.

They have further stated that a local transportation tax measure has the potential to raise \$200 to \$400 million — ¼ cent and ½ cent, respectively — through 2036.

Raising money at the local level for these improvements may allow the County to become a “self-help county” which could unlock additional state funding for Yolo transportation projects.

Jeff Merwin, president of the Yolo County Farm Bureau attended the Board meeting to share his thoughts about the proposed tax measure noting “I can’t particularly say we support a tax in any way, but our roads are in deplorable condition so we are willing to listen to see what we can put together here.”

County staff have reported that a sales tax increase of only a quarter- or half-cent would generate an estimated \$8.4 to \$6.8 million countywide per year for public purposes.

Before such a measure can be implemented, however, voter approval is required and the tax must be designated as general, special, or general with an added advisory measure.

If the new tax is categorized as general, the proceeds would go into the County’s general fund to be spent on general governmental purposes which would need to be approved by a two-thirds vote of all members of the Board and the majority vote of voters.

Should the tax be categorized as special, the proceeds would go to the funding of a specific governmental project or program and would need to be approved by a two-thirds vote of all members of the Board and two-thirds vote of County voters.

The tax could also be designated as general with an advisory measure expressing voter preference on how the tax measure can be spent.

For the latter categorization, the advisory cannot be compulsory and the validity of one of the measures cannot be dependant on the passage of the other.

State law caps the combined rate of all local sales taxes in a county at 2 percent, which can only be waived by special legislation.

The County does not have a local sales tax in place and the city of Woodland has a local sales tax of 0.75 percent, which is the highest local sales tax in the County after Davis’ 1 percent.

These local taxes, or lack thereof, are added to the statewide sales tax of 7.5 percent.

A final decision must be filed with the Board of Supervisors by July and all arguments and rebuttals regarding the measure must be submitted by the end of August.