

Supervisors decline to put sales tax increase on November ballot

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy From page A1 | June 22, 2016

There will be no countywide sales tax increase on the November ballot.

Supporters of a half-cent sales tax to pay for improving roads, increasing access to quality preschool and reducing homelessness were unable to muster the three votes needed Tuesday by the Board of Supervisors to move the proposal to a second reading in July.

Even if they had, it's unlikely the measure would have received the four-fifths vote needed in July to put the measure on the November ballot.

Only Supervisors Jim Provenza and Don Saylor of Davis voted in favor of moving forward on Tuesday.

Three weeks ago, four supervisors — Provenza, Saylor, Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento and Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District — voted to have staff draw up ballot language that supervisors could vote on this week.

But Villegas expressed concerns at the time about such a tax increase being on the same ballot as tax measures by the cities of West Sacramento and Woodland. Woodland is proposing a half-cent sales tax renewal while West Sacramento is considering a new quarter-cent tax increase.

According to county staff, city managers in those cities have suggested that the county wait until 2018 to place a countywide sales tax increase on the ballot.

On Tuesday, Villegas moved to do just that, proposing that supervisors convene an advisory committee in the meantime to prepare such a measure for 2018. However, if the current composition of the board remains the same and Chamberlain and Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland remain opposed, the board would be unable to muster a four-fifths vote to put a tax increase on that ballot either.

Chamberlain, who said last month he wasn't in favor of the tax increase but felt voters should be given the opportunity to decide, has since changed his tune. He said Tuesday that he had talked to a number of constituents who opposed the plan and voted against moving forward.

He also questioned why school boards weren't taking the lead on funding access to preschool and argued that better parenting in general would ameliorate the need.

“Parents must be responsible for their children,” Chamberlain said.

Chamberlain has long been one of the most vocal critics of deteriorating roads and bridges throughout the county but even the possibility of additional revenue for road repairs from the tax increase couldn't sway him.

The \$8 million that a half-cent sales tax would raise annually for roads (in addition to \$8 million for preschool and \$500,000 for reducing homelessness) wouldn't even put a dent in the list of needed repairs, Chamberlain said.

Yolo County currently has an unfunded road maintenance liability of \$375 million and this was the first proposal for beginning to address that liability to go before supervisors.

Tuesday's vote came after a two-hour public hearing featuring more than a dozen community members speaking either for or against the tax proposal.

Most of the discussion focused on the preschool component of the plan, put forward by Yolo County Superintendent of Schools Jesse Ortiz. The proposal would have focused on improving quality, access and affordability in existing public and private preschools and would have been modeled on the highly touted West Sacramento preschool program, UP4WS.

That program has benefited from more than \$7 million over the past 10 years from First 5 Yolo and First 5 California.

Countywide, according to Ortiz, there are approximately 8,377 children between the ages of 2 and 5 but only 4,542 licensed preschool slots available. And while the city of Davis has preschool slots available to 90 percent of its children, West Sacramento has slots available for just 37 percent of children and Woodland for 53 percent. The rural areas of the county are even worse off, with preschool slots available for just 25 percent of children.

“Every child benefits from preschool,” Provenza said before the board voted. “But children from low socioeconomic backgrounds ... benefit more.

“This is something we can do,” he added. “It's concrete. It's based on extending a successful pilot program in West Sacramento, much of which was funded by First 5.”

Saylor spoke in favor of the plan as well, saying, if “we wait two years ... every child who would have otherwise had access to preschool would miss it.”

He also noted that failure to act on funding road repairs will just lead to higher and higher costs in the future.

For his part, Ortiz said after the vote that he was “very disappointed that it’s not happening this year.”

However, he said, “in this last month, (the board) has probably spent about five hours talking about children’s needs, and that’s a lot. It will continue for the next two years.”

Added Gina Daleiden, First 5 Yolo executive director, “First 5 Yolo definitely remains committed to improving access to high-quality early childhood education programs across our county.

“Understanding the proven value of prevention, the investment in preschool and early childhood just makes sense,” she said. “We are heartened to see the commitment of the many thoughtful child advocates who spoke up today, and we look forward to working together on a longer-term effort.”

— Reach Anne Ternus-Bellamy at aternus@davisenterprise.net or 530-747-8051. Follow her on Twitter at [@ATernusBellamy](https://twitter.com/ATernusBellamy)