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Fort Scott's National History Day State Champions will do a presentation locally. See page 4 for details.

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Headed to state! See a report on the Fort Scott High School baseball team's Regional Championship win on page 8.



# City commissioners want more information on language for sales tax ballot

BY JASON E. SILVERS  
The Fort Scott Tribune

Fort Scott City Commissioners plan to wait until they receive more information on the wording of a sales tax ballot question before voting on a proposal.

On Tuesday, commissioners unanimously passed a motion by Commissioner Tracy Dancer to table discussion on a ballot question until receiving feedback from the county clerk on whether the question can be worded to keep a current half-cent tax with the option to increase the tax another half-cent if the first question passes. The sales tax would be for 10 years.

City Manager Brad Matkin said there was discussion during a Tuesday work session about the current half-cent sales tax, of which 90% goes toward street improvements, including sidewalks, bike lanes and curb and guttering; and 10% goes to parks and community facilities. Matkin said the current tax began in 2022 and expires in 2026. He said a draft of a ballot question must be submitted by June 1.

Matkin presented two options; a half-cent sales tax with 80% going to street improvements, 10% to parks and community facilities and 10% to public safety, which includes fire and police, and a second option which is a one-cent sales tax with the same 80-10-10 allotment.

"We just need a vote of what we would want to see on the ballot," Matkin said.

In response to questions from Dancer, Matkin said a one-cent tax would cover the cost of new trucks for the Fort Scott Fire Department and potentially reduce the mill levy.

"Not on this budget, but the next budget, yes," Matkin said.

Commissioner Matthew Wells said the city has presented a nine-year plan for street projects, and he commended Matkin and city staff for forming the plan, which Wells said "addresses a majority of street issues throughout our entire town." Wells also praised Matkin and city crews for their work on street repairs.

"We have a great opportunity before us as citizens to be able to do something to affect a great change in the drivability of our streets," Wells said.

Using funds from the previous sales tax, city staff have been able to rebuild bridges, complete entire street projects, patch potholes and address other repairs and maintenance projects. The street department has also increased in size from three employees to 14, Wells said.

"We've been able to buy them the equipment that's allowed them to be more effective in what they're getting done," he said.

Wells recommended and later made a motion to move forward with a one-cent tax, asking for an additional half-cent and split the tax in the 80-10-10 format. He said it would also provide the city with an additional revenue source to help pay for fire trucks, first responders and for police vehicles that will need to be replaced soon.

Wells said money would also be available to go toward anticipated repairs on Memorial Hall and other locations. There would also be an opportunity for a two-point reduction in the mill levy.

"Because we won't need the money currently budgeted for in that levy to pay for the fire trucks. We can use the sales tax to pay for the trucks," he said.

Wells said the mill levy is what all citizens who live in Fort Scott pay for property taxes, while the sales tax is paid by out-of-town visitors who help with city needs.

After Wells' motion, Commissioner Dyllon Olson asked if the question would include one or two options. Wells said he would prefer to proceed with the option of a one-cent tax for 10 years being split 80-10-10.

Olson said his choice would be the half-cent tax with an 80-10-10 split, with a second option to ask voters if they support an additional half-cent at the same split, if the first question passes. He said the half-cent tax by itself "would be a small reduction on streets."

"It's not just a one-cent ask, it's they can leave what we have intact plus if voters choose, add onto that," he said.

Dancer said that option would mean continuing with the existing half-cent tax but reallocating funds differently. He asked that language would be possible, and Olson said he has seen it done in the past.

City Attorney Bob Farmer

er said the answer to that question would be up to the county election officer "as to how the ballots are constructed and what she will put on whether it's options one or two."

"There's nothing illegal about what you're asking, the question is whether she can accommodate that," Farmer said.

Olson said he feels his recommendation would be an "easier ask" of citizens than a one-cent tax for 10 years, which if it fails, "we're left at the drawing board" for the commission sitting at the table in January.

Commissioner Kathryn Salsbury said she supports Olson's proposal where the city has an option "and not that we end up with nothing."

There was discussion on the short timeframe, as the ballot question must be submitted by June 1, and conducting a special meeting to approve a proposal. Olson and Dancer said they both support a 10-year tax.

Commissioners discussed Well's motion on the floor, and Mayor Tim VanHoecke said the matter could be tabled until more information is obtained.

"We're going to have to have a special meeting regardless, because if they can do it, we would have a special meeting to approve it, and if they say we can't do it, we still have to look at Commissioner Well's original motion," VanHoecke said.

Dancer said the different reallocation of funds for the tax would need to be "differentiated" in the ballot question, as the reallocation would still occur if the half-cent tax continues.

"The original language would have to change to 80-10-10, so even if the voters only pass this, there would be a change," Olson said.

On May 6, the commission tabled discussion on proposals presented by Matkin to allow time to review options and for a ballot question to be drafted. There was also discussion on conducting a possible town hall meeting before May 20 to inform and hear input from citizens.

Matkin recommended continuing with the half-cent sales tax, but changing the funding allotment to the 80-10-10 format. He said this will help provide funds for fire trucks and other city needs.

## Setting the symbols



Jason E. Silvers/Tribune photo

**Volunteers make quick work of setting up the Symbols of Sacrifice Field of Honor at the Fort Scott National Historic Site Parade Grounds Friday morning. The approximately 8,500 flags commemorate the ultimate sacrifice members of the United States Armed Forces have made to keep this country free. The Symbols of Sacrifice Field of Honor opened Friday and will continue from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. through Memorial Day, Monday, May 26.**

## Splash pad is open



Casey Shockley/Special to the Tribune

**Children and families gather at the splash pad for opening day Saturday, May 17. The event featured a luau with live music by Opening Act, an R.E.O. Speedwagon tribute band, and Bob Jovi, a tribute band to Bon Jovi. The event was sponsored by the City of Fort Scott.**

WEATHER

A chance of showers and thunderstorms, Mostly cloudy, with a high near 68. Wind gusts as high as 18 mph. Chance of precipitation is 70%.



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