

Orange County Likely to Raise Sales Tax by 1/2 Cent

By WILLIAM BALL
Staff Writer

Orange County might soon face a half-cent increase in sales tax to help alleviate continuing budget woes.

The N.C. House passed a bill Tuesday giving counties the option of raising their sales tax a half-cent.

The legislation also received preliminary approval Tuesday in the state Senate and will go before a final vote today.

The half-cent sales tax option comes

in the wake of Gov. Mike Easley's decision to withhold county reimbursements.

The result was an estimated loss of \$400,000 for Orange County, said Commissioner Moses Carey.

Easley's decision was based on a necessity to trim some expenditure in the midst of a particularly poor economic year for the state, leaving some local governments financially dry in the coming year.

Several Orange County commissioners said the county will most likely take

advantage of the half-cent sales tax option.

Commissioner Alice Gordon said the state's decision to withhold reimbursements is the main cause behind the county considering the sales tax increase.

"We don't want to raise the sales tax," Gordon said. "We're talking about the well-being of citizens of Orange County."

She said planned raises for county employees and capital improvements would suffer setbacks as a result of the

missed reimbursements.

Carey said the tax increase would go into effect Dec. 1.

He said the county probably would not see the relief provided by the tax revenue until next year.

He said there is a slight possibility that Orange County might be able to incur a small gain from the tax after making up the money retracted earlier in the year.

He added that the tax is going to cause problems for those with the lowest incomes in Orange County because it

taxes them where they cannot afford it.

"I don't think anyone is eagerly anticipating it," Carey said.

"We just didn't have any other alternative."

Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, said legislators were particularly wary of raising any tax now because it is an election year and raising taxes is a threat to public approval.

Kinnaird stressed that there are few options left when facing such economic hardships as those in many North Carolina counties, including Orange

County.

Kinnaird said an option available to the county is to not enact the tax until the next fiscal year begins in July 2003.

Orange County Commissioner Stephen Halkiotis said he favors enacting the hike as soon as possible to acquire needed funds.

Kinnaird said that while Orange County citizens will not favor the sales tax increase, she believes it is necessary.

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

ELECTION

From Page 1

Spinks, a graduate student in folklore, and Surface, a graduate student in Russian and European studies, will represent the School of Information and Library Sciences and the College of Arts and Sciences if they accept their seats.

Stephanie Hunter, a graduate student enrolled in the School of Social Work, was elected to represent District 2.

If she accepts, she will represent students in the schools of Education, Social Work, and Journalism and Mass Communication.

The seat in District 3 could be filled by first-year graduate student Megan Shepherd, a student in health policy and administration. District 3 extends across the schools of Nursing, Dentistry and Public Health.

One seat in District 5 will remain vacant after graduate students John Holmes and Marc Nelson both declined to accept the seat. The two students had

been tied for the seat.

Districts 14, 17, 20 and 21 are restricted for undergraduate students.

District 14, Granville Towers, could be represented by Doug Lecompte, a junior business major.

District 17 could seat sophomore English major Piper Monk. The district covers the area east of Airport Road, west of Fordham Boulevard, north of South Road and south of Estes except for where Franklin is north of Estes, in which case East Franklin Street is the north border.

Senior political science major Rob Godfrey received one vote to represent District 21 and was offered the seat.

The final empty seat is in District 20 because sophomore Amy Brooks, who received one vote, does not live there.

Some candidates elected, however, expressed their dedication to the position. Shepherd said, "I look forward to getting involved in a larger campus community."

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ROBBERY

From Page 1

prove to be a major development in the investigation. "The lead we're working right now is with these two photographs."

Another possible lead could be the laptop computer stolen from the Avery room, McCracken said. Locating the computer is one possible way of catching the suspect. "We've taken the serial number and logged it in as stolen in the state computer system," he said. "That way if the thieves try to sell it, we may be able to catch them."

An artist's depictions of both men have been circulated around UNC since Friday but have not yielded any

leads, McCracken said.

Anyone with information to help in identifying and locating the two suspects may call 962-8100 or Carrboro-Chapel Hill-UNC Crime Stoppers at 942-7515. All calls are confidential.

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SALES TAX

From Page 1

"(Local officials) came begging down here for the bill to be passed," he said.

Hackney said the sales tax will help counties recoup about two-thirds of the funds Easley withheld from them.

An earlier proposal that would have given local governments the ability to enact a half-cent sales tax failed in the House 57-60 in July.

The proposal would have raised about \$252 million in revenue for municipalities.

The proposal failed when Republicans and some Democrats banded together in opposition - saying the bill placed too much of a burden on N.C. citizens.

Easley still withheld the money to help account for the state's nearly \$1 billion budget shortfall for the last fiscal year.

Six state counties, along with several cities and towns, have sued N.C. Revenue Secretary Norris Tolson, who is in charge of distributing the funds.

The lawsuit contends that the state did not keep its promise to allot a certain amount of money to local governments.

Hackney said counties need the additional funding to protect education, social services and public transporta-

tion.

Sen. Virginia Foxx, D-Guilford, said the legislation would have a major effect on a large number of North Carolinians.

She said the tax "will hurt the working poor (but) not the poorest" because food is not taxed under the legislation.

Foxx said that "although the General Assembly did not levy the tax, it allowed the opportunity."

"We don't need to be raising taxes," she said.

She said the public will resent another tax increase and blame "greedy politicians."

"North Carolina already has the highest tax rate in the nation," Foxx said. "The state seems to be insatiable in wanting to tax everything."

But Sen. Howard Lee, D-Orange, said the long-term effects of the sales tax could be beneficial to counties.

"Over time it could allow local governments to reduce other tax sources, such as property taxes," he said.

But Foxx said the state should have cut its own budget instead of leaving counties to fend for themselves.

Lee said that he doubts the sales tax increase will refund the money local governments lost but that he believes something needed to be done.

He said, "We still have to supplement their budgets."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

HISTORIC

From Page 1

the Naval Armory to be added to the National Register.

The building provided a training location for all of the naval aviators of World War II.

The Naval Armory is projected to be torn down in 2005 to make way for the construction of a science complex as part of UNC's Master Plan.

Along with the this site, many other buildings in the area have some sort of historical or social significance.

Before being considered for the list, a building or site must receive a nomination stating its importance to the history of the area.

"I would personally like to see Person Hall nominated," said Kapp. The hall was built by a black stonemason in the earliest stages of the school's founding in the 1790s.

Another area of campus that might eventually be considered for nomination as a historic area is Polk Place because of its connection to former president James K. Polk, who studied

at UNC.

To be considered for the National Register, a site or building must be at least 50 years old, have some architectural, social or religious significance or be connected to an important person or event that influenced history.

Two important factors in the process of deciding what is put on the list are significance and integrity as they relate to the history of the area in question.

Kapp said an interesting feature of the campus is the various stages of development that occurred as the University grew in size over 200 years.

The buildings were built in stages of history, including pre-Civil War, turn of the century and World War II.

And plans for more expansion are under way as old buildings are removed or renovated to make room for a larger student body on campus.

Kapp said, "The beauty of the Carolina campus is that it evolved over a number of generations, and we can see those generations."

The Features Editor can be reached at features@unc.edu.

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