

# Des Moines metro voters weigh 1-cent sales tax, promise of lower property taxes

Austin Cannon and Ian Richardson | Des Moines Register | 1:04 pm CST March 2, 2019



Polk County voters in five cities will decide Tuesday whether to approve a 1-cent local option sales tax.

What would you be willing to raise your own taxes to pay for?

That's the question A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy posed to Des Moines residents last summer after voters shot down an effort to raise the sales tax in Polk County.

What they heard: Better roads, extended library hours, more money to clean up neighborhoods.

On Tuesday, voters in six Polk County cities — Alleman, Altoona, Des Moines, Pleasant Hill, West Des Moines and Windsor Heights — once again will consider raising the sales tax 1 cent.

If approved, the sales tax will go from 6 cents to 7 cents on every dollar spent on taxable goods and services.



Voters in Des Moines and five suburbs will decide Tuesday whether to increase the sales tax by 1 cent.

That would put Des Moines and the other cities in line with the vast majority of the state. Ninety-seven percent of Iowa counties have a 1-cent local-option sales tax. The most recent to adopt the tax was Dallas County in 2017.

Across the six cities, it could bring in an extra \$48.4 million per year to cut down property taxes and fund city projects.

Des Moines alone is expected to get \$37 million annually from the increase, with half going to the types of projects identified by volunteers last summer.

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“I want to see this pass so we can invest in what we need to in this city,” said Mel Pins, president of the Somerset Neighborhood Association.

He's part of a group encouraging voters to approve the sales tax. It includes neighborhood groups, current and former city council members, Des Moines police and firefighters union, and local churches.

Des Moines would devote the remaining \$18.5 million to [reducing property taxes](#). The city has vowed to cut the property tax rate 60 cents if the sales tax passes. If it fails, the City Council is ready to vote on a 30-cent property tax rate increase.

The 90-cent swing represents about \$72 per year for the owner of a \$150,000 home.

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But opponents say a sales tax increase would shift more of the tax burden onto poorer residents — those less likely to own a home and more likely to spend a greater portion of their money on taxable items.

“Sales taxes hit the poor the hardest,” said Ed Fallon, a former state lawmaker and a vocal opponent of raising the sales tax.

A February [Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa Poll](#) found that 55 percent of Iowans view the amount paid in property taxes as too high, while 37 percent think it's "about right." In contrast, just 21 percent of Iowans view the amount paid in sales taxes as too high, while 71 percent of Iowans think it's about right.

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