

Des Moines Weighs in on March 5 Local Option Sales Tax Vote

2 years ago



DES MOINES, Iowa — Des Moines leaders are planning a second attempt to raise the sales tax in March. In March of 2018, Des Moines and nine other communities had to vote as a single entity on the tax hike and it failed. The cities are now allowed to vote individually on the tax. If that were the case this past March, Windsor Heights, West Des Moines, and Des Moines would already have the tax in place.

On the March 5 ballot, voters will be deciding whether or not to raise the sales tax in Des Moines from six cents to seven cents. But, if they turn it down, they could see a repeat of what happened after the 2018 vote when property taxes were raised as a result of it failing.

Residents like Sarah Speidel say, “Another penny? No big deal.”

“I wouldn’t even notice it at all, so it really doesn’t impact me because a penny is a penny. If my pennies can go to help other people or the community, that’s great,” said Speidel.

She’s in the majority, at least in Des Moines. In March of 2018, Des Moines passed the measure by a 54% vote.

Small business owners like Andy Roat of Fleet Feet in Des Moines say it's hard to predict if the tax hike will impact sales.

“Yeah too soon to tell. We hope not. Hopefully customers will know that buying local is a great investment in the community and they'll see that is more valuable over another penny in sales tax. You worry about everything impacting the sales or you're concerned about things impacting the sales, so you try to do everything you can to have the best customer experience. You control the things you can, and the rest you can't worry about,” said Roat.

So, what will the money go to?

The tax increase is expected to raise around \$37 million. Half of that will go to property tax relief; reducing them by 60 cents per \$1,000 of taxable property value.

The remaining \$18.5 million will go to road and storm sewer improvements, blighted property demolition, restoring library hours, pilot projects for lights in parks, and public safety upgrades for fire and police.

One of the city's backers in this plan is A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy, or AMOS. They are organizing a children's mental health crisis task force and say some of the tax money would go to establishing an emergency response service.

“If your family is having a crisis with your child or your youth, you have to call 911 because there's no other number to call, and so who responds is often police, sometimes fire, and that's the city, that's not really the best response for children and everyone knows that,” said AMOS President Sally Boeckholt.

It's in the early stages, but supporters say those responding to a mental health crisis would be therapists or social workers. If the measure fails, City Councilman Josh Mandelbaum says the city would have to raise property taxes by 35 cents per \$1,000 of taxable value or cut city projects.

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