

## Board to pursue sales tax

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By **RON PAZOLA** Staff Writer

In a special meeting Thursday, the DuPage County Board voted to put a quarter-cent public safety sales tax on a Feb. 5 public referendum, while tabling indefinitely a vehicle sticker tax.

Both taxes would have warded off the cutting of 235 jobs and \$10 million from next year's corporate budget by generating \$25 million this year.

Michael Connelly of Lisle was the only board member to vote against taking the sales tax to a referendum.

"We need to do a line-by-line study of the budget," he said. "Let's figure out where we can cut our expenses and find ways to shift money around."

Connelly also believed it is still possible to generate \$20 million from a cigarette tax.

But board member Debra Olson of Wheaton favored a referendum that will allow voters to approve or reject the sales tax. "It's time for the voters to decide," she said. "We need long-term, meaningful ways to generate income for the county."

Board member J.R. McBride of Glen Ellyn said the county board is in a predicament because it doesn't have much time left to pass the budget. The board only has until Nov. 30 to approve the 2008 budget, since the fiscal year begins Dec. 1.

McBride emphasized the importance of maintaining a healthy judiciary system. "Our judiciary system is understaffed and the people in it work long hours," McBride noted. "If we need a public safety sales tax to generate additional money for our judiciary system than I support the tax."

During a press conference after the meeting, County Board Chairman Bob Schillerstrom said he believed more board members supported the vehicle sticker tax. "My take on the last board meeting was that the board wanted a sticker tax, but you saw how they voted this evening (Thursday)."

The board voted 11 to 7 to table the sticker tax.

In Schillerstrom's opinion, the vehicle sticker tax is dead.

Requiring drivers to purchase a \$50 sticker per vehicle would have raised about \$25 million annually, officials said. This was the only revenue option that the board can implement without approval from the state legislature or voters.

In regards to the safety sales tax, Schillerstrom said even if it passes in the referendum, the county won't be able to use it as a revenue source when the board passes the budget by Nov. 30.

"The board has chosen to do a cut budget," Schillerstrom said. "They will have to decide what cuts they want to make."

Schillerstrom disagreed with board members who said the budget can still be modified to avoid cuts or that a cigarette tax is still a viable option to generate additional revenue.

"We've looked at this budget very carefully," he said. "We've cut the fat. Now we have to make real cuts that impact lives and cost people their jobs."

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## **No \$50 DuPage Vehicle Sticker But Public Safety Tax A Possibility**

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Bob Roberts Reporting

**(WBBM)** - DuPage County residents won't have to worry about obtaining a \$50 vehicle tax sticker in 2008 - but they will be asked to decide whether to impose a public safety tax.

WBBM'S Bob Roberts reports.

The DuPage County Board took less than 10 minutes Thursday, at a special meeting, to indefinitely table the vehicle tax proposal 11-7, surprising Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom, and to approve the referendum question by a vote of 17-1.

The board has only two weeks to decide how it will balance its 2008 budget, which currently calls for 235 layoffs, mostly in law enforcement.

The ballot question won't appear until Feb. 5, so it will be of no help to the 2008 budget.

Board member Michael Connelly (R-Lisle) cast the lone dissenting vote on the public safety tax referendum.

"We still have two weeks to vet this budget. We have ample opportunity to see if we can balance it without laying people off, without cutting services. The layoffs and cuts are things that are near and dear to my heart," said Connelly a former assistant state's attorney who called law enforcement "critical" to county government.

Connelly said there is still a chance that authority to levy a cigarette tax or a one-quarter of one percentage point sales tax could be levied as part of an RTA funding solution.

But Schillerstrom said the legislature is not even scheduled to convene again this month and that it would be "irresponsible" to budget based on the potential for funding, instead of what the county has on hand. And he said he does not believe the budget can be balanced through spending cuts or shifts in funds.

"We've obviously looked at this budget very carefully," he said. "I've said all along that we have made the cuts. We've cut the fat, and now the cuts that are going to have to take place are going to be real cuts that are going to have impacts on people's lives and people are going to lose their jobs," he said.

He said that some county funds are in restricted accounts and cannot be "swept" for use elsewhere.

Schillerstrom said he would work for passage of the February referendum question, but said county public safety officials must take the lead.

"Obviously it's very important that public safety officials get out there and tell the people why this needs to pass," he said. "There's a lot of respect in this community for our public safety leaders. I think people listen to them and they have to get out and make the case."

Drafts of the budget call for the layoffs of 179 employees in law enforcement, decreases to the health department that would end a free urgent dental-care clinic and shutting down the DuPage Historical Museum.

Schillerstrom said he had expected enough support to be there to pass the vehicle tax, which would have raised an estimated \$25 million.

"You have to deal with the hand you're dealt," he said. "You have X amount of money and you have to budget for that. No fewer than eight DuPage County board members have circulated a request calling for a special meeting on the board at 9 a.m. Tuesday to discuss budget issues. Schillerstrom said he was in favor of meetings, "every day" if possible, to resolve budget issues.