



City Council

Approval of a Resolution Providing for Submission to the Voters at the April 26, 2022, Special Election of a Ballot Proposition Authorizing a One-Tenth of One Percent Increase in Sales and Use Tax for the Purpose of Funding Arts, Science, Cultural, and Heritage Programs

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Title

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Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Move to approve a Resolution providing for submission to the Voters at the April 26, 2022, Special Election of a ballot proposition authorizing a one-tenth of one percent increase in sales and use tax pursuant to RCW 82.14.525 for a period of seven years to be used for the purpose of funding arts, science, cultural, and heritage programs.

Report

Issue:

Whether the City Council should submit a sales and use tax increase proposal to the City's voters at the special election on April 26, 2022, to raise revenue for arts, science, cultural, and heritage programs as permitted by state law.

Staff Contact:

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Mark Barber, City Attorney, 360.753.8338

Presenter:

None - Consent Calendar Item

Background and Analysis:

The Olympia City Council received a briefing about the requirements and benefits of a cultural access program as envisioned by the Legislature during a Council Study Session on August 8, 2021. Staff was directed to explore more fully how a cultural access program could work for Olympia and address community interests, needs, and priorities.

City staff worked in partnership with a nine-member Steering Committee that included local non-profit leaders, business owners, and educators. This group assisted in creating a larger and more representative leadership group of sixteen additional community members, who helped to spread the word, convene meetings, and facilitate small group discussions. Four community meetings were held, engaging over 80 people representing about 40 local organizations. Through targeted questions and discussions input was gathered on their priorities and hopes for expanded cultural access in the Olympia community.

A summary of the primary results from those meetings included a clear call for expanded cultural access in Olympia to contribute to (1) expanded cultural programming; (2) programs in schools; (3) community building and inspiration; (4) economic health of the community; (5) greater cultural access for every Olympia resident; and (6) equity and mentoring for small and new cultural organizations. The groups recommended that sharing the value of cultural access is best done by using the arts, science, culture, and heritage as mediums for communication with storytelling, performance, demonstration, and by showcasing their influence and daily presence in the lives of Olympia's residents, as well as the positive economic impacts in Olympia.

In a separate effort with Council support, the City engaged a research firm to conduct a survey to better understand how the community at large feels about cultural programming and who it should serve. The survey was fielded from October 22 through 29 and gathered a demographically balanced set 417 responses from Olympia residents.

The survey found that there is broad support for arts, science, cultural and heritage programs in Olympia. A total of 85% of respondents indicate it is "somewhat important" (52%) or "very important" (32%) to Olympia's quality of life. Eighty-five percent of respondents initially said that they "strongly support" or "somewhat support" expanded programs for arts, science, culture, and heritage programs. Following a randomized series of pro and con statements, this number fell slightly but stayed strong at 73% in support when the question was repeated at the end of the survey.

Similar to the stakeholder group, the survey respondents place high priority on programs in schools and programs that serve children and youth and see strong public benefits in the areas of community building, providing well-rounded public education and in understanding other cultures. Teacher training and development was also highlighted as an important educational priority. These survey's results were shared with Council in a second Study Session on November 16, 2021.

Later, following the Study Session, during the Council's business meeting, a motion was made and unanimously passed to bring forward a ballot resolution for Council's consideration and action to submit to the voters of the City of Olympia a ballot measure to increase by one-tenth of one percent (0.1%) the sales and use tax in the City of Olympia for the purpose of funding a cultural access program for the arts, science, cultural, and heritage programs as permitted by state law in Chapter 36.160 RCW and RCW 82.14.525.

A sales and use tax increase of 0.1% would raise approximately \$2,300,000 per year for arts, science, cultural, and heritage programming in Olympia, offering free or discounted admission for Olympia's residents, including free transportation for Olympia's public school students to cultural programming. The tax increase equates to ten cents on every \$100.00 of taxable purchases in Olympia.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

The survey reported strong resident support for a cultural access program to fund arts, science, cultural and heritage programming.

Options:

1. Approve the Ballot Resolution to submit the proposition to Olympia's voters at the April 26, 2022, special election.
2. Direct staff to modify the proposed Ballot Resolution.
3. Do nothing at this time.

Financial Impact:

If the City's voters approve the ballot proposal, the sales and use tax within the City's municipal boundaries would increase by one-tenth of one percent to provide funding for arts, science, cultural, and heritage programs for Olympia's residents and students.

Attachments:

Resolution