

New tax will prevent program cuts

By Stephanie Sisson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Lane County residents will vote on a new tax May 17 that, if passed, will balance the county's budget and keep law enforcement and human services from being cut.

The .35 percent real estate transfer tax would be imposed whenever property is sold or transferred from one owner to another. At the proposed rate, a house that sells for \$80,000 would incur a tax of \$280. The tax would be paid by either the seller or the buyer, or shared by both, when the deed is recorded.

If passed, the real estate transfer tax will raise about \$3 million, which would result in a balanced budget for the city and keep services where they are today, said Lane County Commissioner Jerry Rust.

Areas that may be cut if the real estate transfer tax does not pass include: the Lane County jail, services for veterans, food services like Food For Lane County and services for battered women.

Rust stressed that 1990's Ballot Measure 5 was not the reason the county's funds are in trouble. He said that half of the city's general fund is dependent on timber revenue, and the combination of decreasing timber sales and a growing community is causing a "fiscal crisis" in Lane County similar to the one higher education and public schools in the state are facing.

"We're growing like crazy," Rust said. "It's costing lots of money to pay for the growth ... it's got good things, but it's costing in crime, traffic and a myriad of social problems. This is a way to get the

real estate industry to help pay for it. I think it's very fair and modest."

Rust said the county is trying desperately right now to maintain the jail, juvenile services and food and shelter for the homeless.

"For me this is a moment of truth," he said. "We're unfunded, and as a county we need to come together and find a way to pay for these services. We have murder, rape, hunger, homelessness, and we have to come up with a way to pay for these things. We can't pull a rabbit out of a hat."

Some Lane County school board members have already expressed their support for the transfer tax, saying the problem of cutting public health and youth services is not just a Lane County problem but has ramifications that extend to the whole state.

"The services to be cut ... would make the job that schools have to do that much more difficult," said a news release from Fern Ridge school board member David Wilde and Eugene 4J school board member Chris Pryor.

Pryor, a homeowner, calls the real estate transfer tax a "reasonable option."

"The problem's just getting worse and worse," Pryor said. "There's a lot of talk, and nobody's doing anything ... What I do not want is to create a whole class of disposable people so I can save my disposable income."

Some real estate transactions would be exempt from the tax, such as sales less than \$14,000, gifts and inheritances, divorce settlements and court-ordered transfers such as foreclosures and bankruptcies.



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released until next week.

The gift is the third multi-million dollar gift to the University this year. The athletic department got a \$2 million anonymous gift in February. Alumnus Alec Keith, a pharmaceutical

executive, donated \$8.7 million last month.

Simpson said the gifts were part of a \$120 million to \$150 million fund-raising campaign set to officially kick off in October.

"In an era of declining state revenue, private support is exceedingly important to all

public universities," he said. "Friends of the University contribute financially when they believe we are on the right track."

"The announcement we will make next week, the largest single gift in our history, is indicative of the excellence that permeates the University of Oregon."

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