

Wood River approves one percent sales tax as April ballot item

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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WOOD RIVER – The Wood River City Council approved the placement of a one-percent sales tax on the upcoming April 2019 ballot during its Monday evening meeting.

Wood River Mayor Cheryl Maguire said the potential tax came as a result of several citizens' meetings held since July. During those meetings, Maguire said she asked the people of Wood River what they wanted and expected from her administration and their city in general. Many of the suggestions centered around a need for a year-round recreation center aimed toward the city's young folks. Other suggestions included making the city more walkable as well as infrastructure improvements and flooding relief.

In order to do that, Maguire said the city would require more revenue. While many municipalities could turn to an increase in property taxes to do the job, Maguire said Wood River citizens will be able to choose whether or not they feel the need for the tax on an upcoming ballot. In the meantime, she said the city will also be launching a media campaign to “inform and educate” voters on the potential new tax.

So what will be under the new tax's umbrella? Mayor Maguire said the tax will be a one percent addition to general merchandise sold throughout the city. This means the tax will not cover groceries, medications or any sort of vehicle requiring licensing – such as a car or boat.

“It's something a lot of communities do,” Maguire said. “One of the citizens we talked to said she gets iced teas from McDonald's. She said she drinks them all the time. If she gets one in Godfrey, it's \$1.08. If she gets one in East Alton, it's \$1.07. If she gets one in Wood River, it's \$1.06. This is the sort of tax difference people will see.

“If someone goes into Wal-Mart with a cart full of groceries, picking up prescriptions and buying a shirt, that one percent sales tax will apply to the shirt.”

Maguire said the tax increase was one of the suggestions put forth from citizens' meetings. If the measure does pass, it would take the burden of all taxes away from specifically Wood River citizens, and extend it to anyone who shops there – especially at convenience marts and box retailers.

If the tax does pass, Maguire said she estimates the potential for an additional million dollars a year in additional revenue for the city, which she said would be used to address citizens' needs discussed previously. She said if such a recreational complex was constructed, it would serve the needs of nearby municipalities too, as Wood River is part of the Tri-City League, which also includes Roxana and East Alton.