

Washington Parish faces looming fiscal cliff

Parish leaders consider sales tax proposal



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WASHINGTON PARISH, La. —

The Washington Parish Council is considering a sales tax proposal that could go before voters as early as April.

Officials are debating the idea because the parish is strapped for cash.

When WDSU News spoke with residents in the parish, many of them said they were well aware of the money issues facing the community and supported a sales tax increase.

"Washington Parish needs it. They need all the help they can get," A&G Enon Quick Stop worker Margaret Amacker said. "You live here, you've got to help. That's the bottom line, you've got to help."

Washington Parish President Richard Thomas said, "It's just come a time we're going to have to ask for a little more."

The council is considering a one-third cent sales tax that would go on the ballot in April.

The parish must already deal with a projected \$250,000 shortfall between now and the end of the year.

If passed next April, the sales tax revenue would pay state-mandated expenses due the clerk of court, the assessor and the sheriff's office for expenses such as medical and feeding prisoners.

"We've met with all the entities and right now we're fixing to have to ask them to be patient with us for a little while," Thomas said.

Even many of the businesses in the community said they are aware of the problem and are willing to help.

"As a taxpayer, this is a small community compared to some, this is the livelihood of this town, so we do need sales tax passed," said Jeff McBeth of J&L Lawnmower Repair.

McBeth runs his small engine shop just outside Franklinton. He said folks need to step up to keep what the parish has.

"We wouldn't have a nice town to live in if it wasn't for taxes. We wouldn't have a sheriff's department, and a police department. We have to have sales taxes," McBeth said.

Certainly not everyone is favor increasing the sales tax but Thomas said the parish is already running bare bones.

"Any way that we could cut, we have cut until now there is no more cutting to be able to still run this office," Thomas said.

At this point, Thomas said he doesn't anticipate employee layoffs, but he admits there's still a financial hill to climb.

If all goes according to plan, Washington Parish voters would decide the sales tax issue in April.