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Vaughn: Voter scare tactics may backfire

By Jenny Hartley-Senior Reporter

The price tag to build a new Lancaster County Courthouse may be scary to some people, says County Councilman Bryan Vaughn.

He also suggested that using "scare tactics" to sell a referendum to voters might not be a good strategy.

County Council on Monday approved second reading to establish a referendum for voters, who will decide in November whether to add a 1 percent sales tax in the county.

Proceeds from the tax would pay off bonds to build a new courthouse.

The bonds are required because the county cannot borrow the amount of money it would take to build a new courthouse. The existing courthouse on North Main Street was built in 1828.

A commission is working to write the ballot question for the referendum and has looked over several different proposals for a new courthouse

Commission members recently told County Council members that they believe a \$33 million courthouse would be suitable and spacious enough for the county's needs for years to come.

Vaughn said he hoped saying the state would force the county to build a new courthouse or find another facility to hold court, doesn't backfire.

He said it's unlikely the state would force the county to hold court somewhere else due to an inadequate facility.

The county could find a large, vacant building to use until the time is right to build a new courthouse, Vaughn said.

"I'm fearful the price tag is going to scare some people away," he said.

Council Chairman Rudy Carter said several judges have written letters to council about the condition and security of the existing courthouse.

"That thing is 180 years old," Carter said. "We need to do something that will be here in the long run. The people will decide in November."

"I do think we should be realistic. It is a firetrap," Councilman Larry Honeycutt said.

The courthouse steps that lead to the second floor from the outside of the building were deemed unsafe a few

years ago and closed.

Councilman Wayne Kersey said the alternative – burdening homeowners with the building cost – is scarier than a new sales tax, which will be shared by more than just homeowners.

"It's the only way to go," he said.

County Administrator Steve Willis wrote in a guest column that was published in The Lancaster News in May that he foresees significant consequences if a referendum to build a new courthouse isn't approved this year.

He said state officials realize that the current courthouse is outdated and inadequate. The state Supreme Court could issue an order closing it down if the county doesn't take action to build a safer, larger facility, Willis said.

Council approved second reading to establish the sales tax referendum 6-1, with Vaughn voting against it. One more reading by council is required to establish the referendum.

Indian Land library funding approved

With little discussion, council unanimously approved giving \$200,000 to buy furniture and books for the Del Webb Library at Indian Land on Monday night.

When the item came up on the agenda, Honeycutt said, "Can we just cut to the chase and call for the vote?"

Council's vote was applauded by Lancaster County Library Director Richard Band and a few members of the library board.

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