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Split council votes to oppose tax bill before state legislature

By **BRAD KELLAR**
 Herald-Banner Staff

GREENVILLE — The Greenville City Council, at least most of the Council, has recommended state legislatures vote against a proposed bill now under consideration.

If approved by lawmakers, the legislation would require an election be held if the city raises local property taxes above the property tax rollback rate.

City Manager Steven Alexander said the measure would remove the option of filing for a rollback election and force balloting no matter what the reasons might be for the tax increase.

"We would prefer that this control remain at the local level," Alexander said.

State Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston) filed SB 700 in February. It moved out of a Senate Committee Monday and is awaiting a vote to send it to the full Senate floor for a debate.

Alexander said Patrick's bill, and the companion legislation being considered in the Texas House, could adversely impact the City of Greenville's ability to generate revenue used to complete projects and provide services.

The rollback rate allows a taxing entity to receive the same amount of tax revenue it spent during the previous fiscal year for maintenance and operations, plus an additional 8 percent — or eight cents per \$100 valuation for school districts — before citizens could file a petition and seek an election to rollback the rate below the threshold.

Patrick's bill, if approved by the Legislature, would mandate the city conduct an election should it adopt a tax rate that exceeds the rollback rate.

Alexander said the Texas Municipal League and several cities have already spoken out against the proposed legislation and asked the Council to adopt a resolution recommending State Sen. Bob Duell to vote against it.

Council member Doug Roszhart, however, said he was of two minds about the issue. Roszhart said he understood why Alexander and his fellow Council members might be opposed to the legislation.

"But sitting on the other side, as a taxpayer, I think it is a good bill," Roszhart said. "It does give more transparency to taxpayers. If I'm representing the citizens, this really is a pretty good bill."

Council member Leahmon Bryant and Mayor Tom Oliver said they were against the bill, arguing that procedures are already in place to allow voters to protest a tax hike, from petitioning for a rollback election to electing a different Council representative.

"I mean, it is just another state mandate I don't care anything about," Bryant said.

"I really feel we have the bases covered already and I don't see any need for it," Oliver said. "This is also, to me, another way of them telling us how to run our city."

In the end, the Council approved the resolution on a 4-2 vote, with Roszhart and Hattie Tennison against. Bryan Herrin was not at the meeting.

If the measure is passed by a two-thirds majority of both houses of the Texas Legislature, it would take effect immediately upon enactment. Otherwise, it would take effect beginning with the 2010 fiscal year.

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