

By JESSICA CRAWFORD • Daily Leader Wording regarding the 1-cent sales tax ballot that will be up for a vote in November was once again a topic for discussion between the Focus on the Future group and the Liberal City Commission Thursday evening.

Both entities came to an agreement that initial wording on the ballot would simply ask voters to approve, or disapprove, the 1-cent sales tax. Following the question on the ballot would then be a commitment from the commission to allow the taxpayers to vote in an advisory election in May to determine the next big project funded by the tax. Focus on the Future believes the project should specifically be a recreation center.

Many in attendance were concerned that placing the recreation center on the ballot would possibly cause the 1-cent sales tax to not be renewed.

Commissioner Dave Harrison explained if the 1-cent sales tax does not pass, city repairs and upgrades once paid for by the 1-cent sales tax would have to be paid another way.

“The 1-cent sales tax has allowed us to do those things, there are lots of other works that need to be done,” Harrison said. “But if it goes away, there is only one place it can come from – that’s property tax.”

Mayor Tim Long was concerned voters may not be aware that a recreation center would, in fact, fund itself as the pool has done. No part of the 1-cent sales tax is being used to run the pool, the tax was only used to build it.

“I don’t think that anyone is totally against it,” Long said. “I think they are concerned with building a lot of things with the sales tax. They are wondering if we are going to have to keep the sales tax just to maintain those things. I think we should educate them on things such as the pool. It is not running on tax money, it is running itself. We need to tell them that these things are funding themselves and give them that number of the recreation center. This is what it will cost to run it, this is projected revenues. I think it will pass if we educate people.”

Focus on the Future member Elizabeth Irby urged the commission to keep the wording on the ballot as simple as possible. Misunderstanding the wording alone should not be a reason for the 1-cent sales tax to be discontinued by voters in November.

“Wording is so important,” Irby said. “People have got to understand what the ballot reads. I wonder if (wording) could be made a little simpler. Some people may not understand what you are asking of them.”

After much discussion, most in attendance agreed a good faith resolution would possibly be the best way to pass the 1-cent sales tax. Following the passing of the tax, an advisory election could be conducted in order to determine what voters would like to see come from the tax.

The resolution will come before the city commission on Aug. 24 that will ensure the wishes of

the public are respected regarding the outcome of the election.

Deputy Elections Clerk Crystal Clemens explained the importance of the resolution. It will make certain the projects in the advisory election will or will not be pursued based on the outcome of the advisory election in May.

“An advisory election can be held, (the city) will pay for the cost,” Clemens said. “Just as in a regular election, registered voters would get to vote in it. The difference in an advisory election is that it is not legally binding. The commission, if they make the statement they have been talking about tonight, saying they would hold true to whatever the people chose in the advisory election.

“My understanding at this point is they will pass a resolution to put the 1-cent sales tax on the November ballot,” she explained. “If the 1-cent sales tax passes, then we will have an advisory election in May so the people can choose what they want at that point.”

It is undetermined at this point what projects will be listed on the advisory election ballot in May. A recreation center will most likely find its way on the ballot, but other projects may be up for consideration as well.