



## SALES TAX ELECTION

# Baxter County Jail Sales Tax Election

**ELECTION DATE:** Tuesday, September 12, 2017

### What is being proposed?

Baxter County voters are being asked to vote on two separate sales taxes related to the county jail.

Baxter County is proposing to expand its 13-year-old jail and hire additional jail employees. The county is proposing to pay for the \$4.2 million in construction costs with a temporary 1 percent sales tax. If approved, this tax would begin March 1, 2018 and expire Oct. 31, 2018. A second sales tax of ¼ percent would begin Nov. 1, 2018 to pay for maintaining the jail, housing prisoners and paying jail employees. The quarter-percent sales tax would not expire unless repealed by voters.

These two proposals pertain **only** to the Baxter County jail and are separate from a public safety sales tax election voters in the City of Mountain Home are deciding the same day.

### When is the election?

The election takes place Sept. 12, 2017. Early voting starts Sept. 5, 2017. Baxter County voters can check their voter status or find out where they're supposed to vote on Election Day by calling the Baxter County Clerk's Office at 870-425-3475. You can also check your voter registration status online at [www.voterview.ar-nova.org](http://www.voterview.ar-nova.org).

**PUBLIC POLICY CENTER**

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The following statements are examples of what supporters and opponents have made public either in media statements, campaign literature, on websites or in interviews with Public Policy Center staff. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture does not endorse or validate these statements.

### What do supporters say?

- The jail has been over capacity for the last three or four years. The sheriff is forced to make a decision of who stays in jail and who gets out. It's a public safety issue.
- Summer tourists will help pay for the jail.
- The sales tax to build the addition will be collected for only eight months, with a hard stop collection date. This is a unique approach that is better than the other counties that do a bond and collect sales tax for 12 to 14 years.

### What do opponents say?

- We may need a bigger jail but all we see is repeat offenders being let back out on the street instead of being given prison time.
- I would rather see a property tax increase for local residents to pay for the jail rather than the sales tax increase for everyone.
- I'm in favor of the tax going to the general fund and let the Quorum Court decide on how to appropriate the funds. If the economy is great and the sheriff's department receives more money than necessary, then the money may be spent where not necessary. The Quorum Court has always wisely appropriated the money where needed.

## QUICK LOOK: What does your vote mean?

You will be voting on two separate measures related to the jail.

### **1 Percent County-Wide Sales and Use Tax:**

**FOR:** A FOR vote on the 1 percent county-wide sales and use tax measure means you are in favor of temporarily increasing the Baxter County sales tax rate by 1 percent to pay for the costs associated with acquiring, expanding, constructing, improving, furnishing, equipping, operating and maintaining the Baxter County Jail and for paying the costs of housing prisoners. The tax associated with this measure would expire after eight months of collection.

**AGAINST:** An AGAINST vote on the 1 percent county-wide sales and use tax measure means you are not in favor of temporarily increasing the Baxter County sales tax rate by 1 percent to pay for the costs associated with acquiring, expanding, constructing, improving, furnishing, equipping, operating and maintaining the Baxter County Jail and for paying the costs of housing prisoners.

### **0.25 Percent County-Wide Sales and Use Tax:**

**FOR:** A FOR vote on the 0.25 percent county-wide sales and use tax measure means you are in favor of permanently increasing the Baxter County sales tax rate by 0.25 percent or ¼ percent to pay for the costs associated with acquiring, expanding, constructing, improving, furnishing, equipping, operating and maintaining the Baxter County Jail and for paying the costs of housing prisoners.

**AGAINST:** An AGAINST vote on the .25 percent county-wide sales and use tax measure means you are not in favor of temporarily increasing the Baxter County sales tax rate by .25 percent to pay for the costs associated with acquiring, expanding, constructing, improving, furnishing, equipping, operating and maintaining the Baxter County Jail and for paying the costs of housing prisoners.

### **Why are these issues on the ballot?**

A sales tax must be approved by voters. At a meeting July 11, 2017, the Baxter County Quorum Court voted to place these measures before voters.

### **How much revenue would the taxes generate?**

According to Baxter County officials, the temporary 1 percent sales tax would generate an estimated \$4.6 million in the eight months it is collected.

The 0.25 percent (or 1/4 percent) sales tax would generate an estimated \$1.6 million per year.

### **Why is the existing jail inadequate?**

Baxter County's jail is currently in compliance with state standards for county jails, but the state's Criminal Detention Facilities Review Committee noted in a November 2016 inspection report that the current operation is outpacing staff levels. The jail is understaffed, and the facility often houses more arrested people than there are jail beds.

The 100-bed jail opened in 2004, replacing a 33-bed jail built in 1974. Baxter County paid for the construction with money from the sale of a county hospital. The county did not increase the sheriff's budget to operate the larger jail. Over time, the sheriff was spending more money than what was budgeted to house prisoners. The county proposed a 0.25 percent sales tax in 2012 to help pay for jail operations but voters rejected the measure by a vote of 10,916 to 7,917.

In 2013, the Quorum Court reduced the jail's budget. The sheriff removed half the beds to ensure that the jail would not be over capacity and over budget. In response, the county took money from county general revenue to increase funding for jail maintenance and operation. Today, the jail's annual budget is \$1.1 million. The facility is still understaffed and they routinely house more prisoners than they have space, forcing some prisoners to sleep on the floor.

### **What are the plans for the jail?**

Revenue Baxter County receives from the 1% sales tax would be used for adding on to the existing jail. The proposed \$4.2 million jail addition would add up to 54 additional beds. The new space would include 12 two-person cells that could be used for isolating prisoners. The remaining beds would be dormitory style, according to construction plans. There would also be a lobby area that would serve as a place for visiting inmates, and the infirmary and nurse station would be relocated.

Sales tax revenue would also pay for hiring additional jailers. The county sheriff said the jail is short four jailers now. If both tax proposals pass, the sheriff would hire those jailers

and two additional jailers plus a full-time transport officer. The jail's estimated ongoing annual budget would be \$1.4 million if the ¼ percent sales tax passes.

If the new sales taxes raise more money than the jail's expected budget and construction cost, the sheriff said the money would be put aside for future expansion or operations of the jail.

**Who would pay the additional taxes?**

The taxes would be paid by everyone purchasing goods or services subject to a sales and use tax in the county, including its cities.

**How does Baxter County's sales tax compare to neighboring counties?**

If voters approve the county's two proposed sales taxes, Baxter County's sales tax rate would increase from 1 percent to 2 percent in March 2018. The tax rate would then decrease to 1.25 percent in November 2018 after the 1 percent tax expires Oct. 31, 2018.

Other counties in Arkansas have sales tax rates ranging from 0 percent in Monroe and Saline counties to 3.125 percent in Cleveland County. The median sales tax rate of Arkansas' 75 counties is 1.5 percent. Nearby counties have the following sales tax rates:

County	Current County Sales Tax Rate
Baxter	1% (2%*) (1.25%**)
Fulton	2%
Izard	0.5%
Marion	1.75%
Searcy	1.5%
Stone	1%

\*Temporary sales tax rate if 1 percent tax approved;  
 \*\*Sales tax rate after temporary 1 percent tax expires in October 2018.

Source: Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration, List of Cities and Counties with Local Sales and Use Tax

**Why are the numbers of inmates increasing?**

In public meetings, county officials have said there is not a huge crime wave nor is the living style any worse. Population growth was one reason offered in public meetings. The county has grown about

8 percent since 2000. The county's 2000 population was 38,386. The 2010 Census showed 41,513 people living in the county.

The Sheriff's Office cited several other reasons for the county's increasing inmate population levels including: more people being released on probation than sent to prison, only to re-offend; a backlog of convicted inmates waiting for bed space at state prisons; an increase in people serving time in county jails rather than state prisons when violating probation; a change in classification of drug and property crimes, meaning people who traditionally would have served time in prison for felony convictions are instead serving time in county jails for misdemeanor convictions; and an increase in people waiting for parole violation court hearings.

**What would happen to the money the county currently spends on the jail if the tax passes?**

The money currently spent on the jail would be freed up for the Quorum Court to spend on other county departments. The county did not provide specific examples of what departments would receive additional funding.

It should be noted that the Baxter County Cooperative Extension Service Office's staff and operations are partly funded by the county and the office could benefit from additional funding from the county should the sales tax pass. In producing this voter guide, an effort has been made to ensure information is presented in a fair and balanced way that best represents the facts associated with this ballot issue. As part of this effort, the Public Policy Center and Cooperative Extension Service are committed to disclosing potential conflicts of interest and acknowledging any influence this may have on the educational programs and matter we produce.

**What would happen to the money cities currently pay the county for housing their prisoners?**

By county ordinance, the sheriff's office bills cities \$50 per day per inmate that is housed in the county jail. County officials have said that if voters approve the tax, the Quorum Court will be asked to end the practice of billing cities for their prisoners.

**What would happen if both taxes fail?**

The sheriff said he would continue the practice of releasing prisoners when there isn't enough space for everyone arrested.

**What would happen if one ballot issue passes but not the other?**

If the 1 percent sales tax for building the addition passes but the 0.25 percent tax fails, the county would build the additional beds but the sheriff wouldn't open them until he has additional money for maintenance and operations.

If the 0.25 percent sales tax passes but the 1 percent construction sales tax fails, the county would hire the jailers it needs but would not build the addition at this time.

**Exercising your voting privilege:**

We live in a democratic society where voting is a privilege of citizenship. Democracy works best when informed citizens exercise their voting privilege. **Election Day for these issues is Sept. 12, 2017. Early voting begins Sept. 5, 2017. Please exercise your right to vote on this issue.**

The following is the official wording for both sales tax questions as they will appear on the ballot.

**ONE PERCENT (1.0%) SALES AND USE TAX FOR BAXTER COUNTY JAIL,  
TO BE COLLECTED FOR A PERIOD OF EIGHT (8) MONTHS,  
BEGINNING MARCH 1, 2018 AND ENDING OCTOBER 31, 2018.**

Adoption of a one percent (1.0%) local sales and use tax within Baxter County, the net collections received after deduction of the administrative charges of the State of Arkansas and required rebates will be distributed only to the County and shall be used to acquire, expand, construct, improve, furnish, equip, and provide for the operation and maintenance of the Baxter County Jail facilities and to pay for the costs associated with the housing of prisoners.

FOR . . . . .

AGAINST . . . . .

**ONE QUARTER OF ONE PERCENT (0.25%) SALES AND USE TAX FOR  
BAXTER COUNTY JAIL, TO BE COLLECTED BEGINNING NOVEMBER 1, 2018  
AND CONTINUING THEREAFTER.**

Adoption of a one quarter of one percent (0.25%) local sales and use tax within Baxter County, the net collections received after deduction of the administrative charges of the State of Arkansas and required rebates will be distributed only to the County and shall be used to acquire, expand, construct, improve, furnish, equip, and provide for the operation and maintenance of the Baxter County Jail facilities and to pay for the costs associated with the housing of prisoners.

FOR . . . . .

AGAINST . . . . .

*Conflict of interest: This fact sheet was prepared to provide the citizens of Baxter County with information to help them in making an informed choice on Election Day. An effort has been made to ensure the information is presented in a fair and balanced way that best represents the facts associated with this ballot issue. As part of this effort, we are obligated to divulge potential conflict of interest and to recognize their influence on the educational programs and matter we produce. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and Baxter County Cooperative Extension Service are partially funded by state and county general funds. As such, any laws affecting revenues of the state or county has the potential to affect the Baxter County Extension Office. Extension has requested additional funding from the Baxter County Quorum Court to pay for a Family and Consumer Science agent. If the sales taxes pass, the county may be able to shift the money they had been spending on the jail to other costs, such as the vacant Family and Consumer Science agent position.*