

The Register-Guard

Eugene to consider payroll tax for public safety expansion

By Christian Hill

Posted Feb 13, 2019 at 1:53 PM

Updated Feb 13, 2019 at 4:52 PM

Proposed tax would be paid by both employees and businesses to generate \$22.8 million a year for 126 FTEs.

The Eugene City Council will consider a proposed payroll tax paid by both employers and employees that would generate an estimated \$22.8 million a year to pay for a massive expansion of the municipal public safety system.

The proposed payroll tax is the recommendation of an advisory committee tasked last year by the council to identify long-term funding to bolster staffing and beds at the police department, municipal court, jail and through homeless outreach.

City officials have said the system is under strain because staffing is not keeping up with Eugene's population; long wait times or no response by police officers to low-priority service calls has been the most visible sign of this strain to the public.

City staff unveiled the proposal to the City Council during a meeting Wednesday. City councilors agreed to more discussion at future meetings; no councilor raised objections to the proposed tax. The city has the authority under Eugene's municipal charter to impose the tax through an ordinance, according to the city attorney's office; no public vote was proposed or discussed.

Three city councilors who served on the committee voiced their support for the proposal, meaning it needs only two more votes to be enacted by ordinance. City councilors are required to schedule a public hearing before

approving any ordinance.

The proposal would add 126 full-time-equivalent employees, about a 8 percent increase of the city's current workforce.

The proposal would add 40 patrol officers, four sergeants, 10 unarmed community service officers and five detectives. In addition, there would be funding to lease 10 or more jail beds, open a third municipal courtroom and expand two alternative courts and services for the homeless.

The council would need to set the specific rate. Under preliminary estimates, a 0.2 and 0.3 percent payroll tax on a business that has a gross payroll of \$500,00 a year would be \$85 and \$125 a month, respectively.

Employees who earn \$20 an hour would pay \$7 and \$10 a month under a 0.2 percent and 0.3 percent payroll tax, respectively.

Late last year, the City Council approved \$8.6 million in one-time money to help bolster the system's staffing for an 18-month period that ends in June 2020.