

County set to fire pre-emptive strike against arena sales tax

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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Resolution opposing Milwaukee facility funding idea considered by board

The Ozaukee County Board was poised Wednesday to make a pre-emptive strike in a possible fight against a regional sales tax imposed in Ozaukee as well as other counties to finance a new arena and convention center in Milwaukee.

A regional sales tax that would help finance a replacement for the BMO Harris Bradley Center, home of the Milwaukee Bucks and Marquette Golden Eagles basketball teams, as well as the Milwaukee Admirals hockey team, has not been formally proposed, but a resolution that was to be considered by the Ozaukee County Board notes such a tax has been advocated by Milwaukee officials, business leaders and "media organizations."

Ozaukee officials, some of whom begrudgingly note that people who purchase goods and services in the county already pay a 0.1% sales tax to finance Miller Park in Milwaukee, appear unwilling to sit idly by and let the concept of a new tax pick up steam.

"There's been numerous, numerous constituents in my district and outside my district who have contacted me and said they are vehemently opposed to another sales tax," said County Board Chairman Lee Schlenvogt, who had the resolution drafted. "People in Ozaukee County are saying, 'We're already paying for Miller Park. We're done.'"

The 0.1% sales tax used to finance the home of the Milwaukee Brewers, which opened in March 2001, has been levied in Ozaukee, Washington, Waukesha, Racine and Milwaukee counties since 1996.

The tax is to end when the stadium debt is paid. Miller Park district consultants estimate that will be between 2016 and 2020, depending primarily on the economy.

But Ozaukee County officials are leery of talk about extending the tax beyond its so-called sunset to help finance a Milwaukee arena and other attractions in the region.

Under current state law, proceeds from the Miller Park sales tax cannot be used for another purpose unless the Legislature authorizes it, and Ozaukee County wants to be clear on that point.

"The Ozaukee County Board of Supervisors also opposes an extension of the Miller Park stadium regional tax in any manner that deviates from the original intended statutory purpose," according to the resolution.

The resolution points out that Ozaukee County has never asked state officials to make other counties to pay for its "quality of life assets."

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“Ozaukee County and the cities, villages and towns within Ozaukee have their own valued cultural and quality of life assets that they manage and budget for ... and have never lobbied the state to impose a shared tax on the regional taxpayers to help support cultural and quality of life assets in Ozaukee County,” it states.