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County needs to tighten its belt first

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A couple of county officials have it right. Larimer County Commissioner Randy Eubanks said last week that before the county pursues a new jail tax he wants to hear more discussion about what can be done to decrease public safety spending.

"I don't think it's going to pass because people haven't seen us tighten our belts at all," he said at a Monday meeting with other county officials.

Eubanks' admonition came on the heels of a similar statement made in May by Clerk and Recorder Scott Doyle, who said he wanted to know the county was trying to control costs before he supported a new tax.

The county's current 0.2 percent jail expansion tax is scheduled to drop to 0.15 in 2013 when the jail expansion debt is paid off, then to expire in 2015.

The tax has provided some of the money needed to operate the jail, so county officials are concerned about what will happen when it expires.

They're considering placing a new tax request on the November ballot.

A proposal detailed by County Manager Frank Lancaster Monday had some interesting points. It would enact a 1 percent sales tax to replace the current 0.2 percent sales tax, but would decrease property taxes by 2 mills.

That would shift some of the tax burden from property owners to anyone who makes purchases in the county, something that might make it palatable to voters who are also property owners.

But in these uncertain economic times, sales tax revenue could fall if residents feel the need to tighten their belts or if tourists stay home.

As county officials continue exploring their options before deciding on whether to go to the voters, they would do well to ask themselves what they've done to show voters that they're willing to tighten their own belts.

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