



# County council rejects rule on unused property tax increases

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Clark County voters will not have a say on a proposed charter amendment that would have limited property tax levy increases



After months of consternation and debate, the Clark County council by a vote of 3-2 delivered the killing blow to a charter amendment that would have prevented the council from raising its property tax levy by more than 1 percent without a popular vote

In their now-familiar voting blocs, Chair Marc Boldt, no party preference, and Republican Councilors Julie Olson and Jeanne Stewart voted against an ordinance that would have put the amendment in front of voters this November. Republican Councilors David Madore and Tom Mielke, meanwhile, supported the ordinance.

State law allows taxing districts to raise their tax revenues by only 1 percent. However, governments can choose not to raise taxes at all, banking capacity to be used in later years. Clark County's current banked capacity rests at 5 percent.

Mielke, who originally proposed finding a way to limit the county's ability to use that banked capacity, said he doesn't want that amount hanging over citizens' heads.

Madore authored the charter amendment that would have made Mielke's idea law.

"The government serves the people," Madore said. "It doesn't live off the people."

But Madore and Mielke failed to convince their colleagues to support the amendment. Olson suggested that it may even be illegal because it contradicts the state law that allows for banked capacity, and she said she wanted the attorney general's opinion on the matter.

"There are too many questions for me," Olson said.

Stewart, meanwhile, criticized Madore and Mielke for implying that the council might vote to use banked capacity to raise taxes by more than 1 percent.

"There has been no discussion by this council, or by any of these people, to that fact," Stewart said. "I hope the people who are looking at this do not allow themselves to be drawn into the fearmongering."

The ordinance received mixed reaction from the audience, which over the course of Tuesday's four-hour meeting dwindled to a handful who spoke in favor of or against the amendment.

Christian Berrigan, a state committeeman for the Clark County Republican Party, spoke in favor of the amendment, and warned the councilors that if they voted it down, it would hand him a "wonderful political pommel" on which to campaign against them.

Heidi Owens, a Vancouver resident, said the state's 1 percent tax limit is already working well as it stands

"I think that because there are already limits in place, taxpayers are already protected under the current system," Owens said

Madore introduced the amendment last fall, and Tuesday's decision ended months of debate on the matter. The council was slated to discuss the amendment in March, but after Acting County Manager Mark McCauley decided not to schedule a hearing because he felt it would fail, the council had to delay discussion to this week.

## Attorneys to return

Clark County Deputy Prosecutors Chris Horne and Chris Cook can return to representing the council and planning staff after the board voted 3-2 to grant the two attorneys a conflict-of-interest waiver

At the recommendation of Democratic Prosecutor Tony Golik, Boldt, Olson and Stewart voted to allow the two attorneys to return to representing the council as it considers its Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update, as well as other issues that fall under the Growth Management Act

The two attorneys have not offered advice to the council on growth plan issues for about two weeks after Madore's accusations that the pair lied about the likely impact of Alternative 4, the controversial zoning proposal Madore authored that the council killed earlier this year. Madore has alleged that the attorneys and planning staff advocated against Alternative 4 to promote an "anti-growth" agenda in rural areas

An independent investigator, Rebecca Dean, is looking into Madore's allegations

In a letter to the council, however, Golik denied that Horne or Cook have ever lied to the council

"It is the firm position of the Prosecuting Attorney's Office that neither (Horne) nor (Cook) ever knowingly provided false information to the (council) or otherwise performed their role as legal advisor improperly," he wrote

Tuesday's discussion also revealed that Madore has hired his own attorney, Friday Harbor-based lawyer Nicholas Power, to represent him in the wake of Community Planning Director Oliver Orjiako's whistle-blower and harassment complaints leveled against Madore. In a letter to the council, Power wrote that given the "political dynamic at work," it would be inappropriate to allow the deputy prosecutors to represent and advise the Clark County council

"Unlike a garden-variety conflict of interest scenario that can be solved with knowing and intelligent waiver, the current situation is an entirely different animal," Power wrote. "An allegation by one public official of the willful disregard for truth by attorneys assigned to advise the Board upon which the complaining public official sits."

Golik, however, said Power's letter did not change his opinion on whether Horne and Cook return to representing the council

Madore protested the decision, calling it an "affront to transparency and good governance" for the council to clear Horne and Cook before that investigation is completed

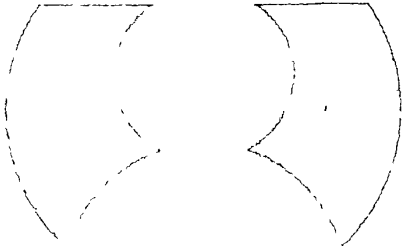
"The people we work for are entitled to have a government that functions and takes ethical matters seriously," Madore said

A visibly frustrated Boldt said that the way Madore has handled the entire issue has been "despicable" and "unethical"

"On a personal note, I totally agree with our prosecuting attorney," Boldt said. "I find no reason even to have a hint that either one of them (Horne or Cook) acted in a manner which Mr. Madore has said."

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**John M. Kowalski** · Camas, Washington

"'he people we work for are entitled to have a government that functions and takes ethical matters seriously,' Madore said "

Ironic, coming from the most corrupt politician in Clark County

Reply 4 hrs



**Sam Atkinson** · Chambersburg Area Senior High School

What a drama queen MeMeMe

Reply 👍 2 8 hrs



**Don Joling**

Councilor Madore you know that if you read before you post on your FB page, and correct it before you push "enter", you'll be able to cut down on those 4,6,8 'Edits' you have for every Single. Post. (Great job with Twitter today Katie Gillespie!)

Reply 👍 2 10 hrs

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