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MAPS 3 could generate public safety money, Oklahoma City says

By John Estus [Comments](#)  43

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Oklahoma City officials announced today plans to use MAPS 3-related revenue for public safety if voters approve the package next month.

The city's police and fire unions oppose MAPS 3 because it does not include money specifically for public safety.

"I can assure you that if MAPS does not pass, our public safety issues multiply," Mayor Mick Cornett said at a news conference called in response to union opposition to MAPS 3.

Cornett said if MAPS 3 passes, the city will give MAPS 3 use tax revenue to public safety.

Use taxes are charged instead of sales taxes to businesses who buy items from outside Oklahoma City for use within the city. A use tax typically accompanies a voter-approved sales tax.

City records show public safety has received \$60 million of use tax revenue from MAPS For Kids, which passed in 2001. The money has been used for public safety capital projects.

Union officials said they would have no comment on the use tax plan or MAPS 3 until a news conference Friday.

The unions are locked in a work contract dispute with the city concerning staffing and pay. Union officials have formed a campaign committee called "Not This MAPS," claiming the city needs to first deal with understaffing in the police and fire departments.

Cornett declined to discuss specifics of the latest contract offer the city made to the unions this past week, but said MAPS 3 use tax revenue could pay for additional police officers and firefighters in addition to capital projects.

"The MAPS use tax can be used to help ensure that public safety remains a top priority. We will not have that option if MAPS 3 does not pass," Cornett said.

Sagging sales tax revenues have forced the city to make across the board budget cuts this year. Layoffs are possible if revenue continues to decline.

District Attorney David Prater said he's convinced the city has a good plan to address the staffing concerns that are at the heart of the unions' opposition to MAPS 3 and their contract dispute.

Prater, a former police officer, said the use tax plan guarantees no police officers will lose their jobs in the next two years. He also said the plan convinced him to support MAPS 3.

"My concern all along, as far as about a year ago, was talking about increasing our public safety and I believe this proposal right now does exactly that," Prater said.

Ward 1 Councilman Gary Marrs, a former fire chief, said he's upset about union claims that the city doesn't adequately support public safety. He noted that two-thirds of the city's annual general fund budget goes to public safety.

"I don't know how you can say we don't support public safety when you make that kind of commitment on a yearly basis," Marrs said, also citing past bond issues that included money for public safety.

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