

Sales-tax proposal for cops gains  
Council directs city attorney to draw up ballot measure

By James Nash, Staff Writer

In a tenuous victory for Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton's plan to hire 1,200 officers, a divided City Council moved forward Wednesday with plans to place a one-half percent citywide sales-tax increase on the May 17 mayoral runoff ballot.

The council's 10-5 vote directed the city attorney to write a proposed ballot measure. At least eight votes were needed to draft the measure but 10 votes will be needed to actually place the measure on the May ballot that also will include the runoff election for the top two vote-getters for mayor. The council must act by Feb. 11.

The proposal would raise the citywide sales-tax rate from 8.25 percent to 8.75 percent, the highest in the state. Voters countywide and in the city rejected a similar tax increase in November. A two-thirds majority again will be needed to pass.

The measure will only provide 1,200 of the 3,000 officers Bratton has said the city needs. It would generate about \$200 million a year, and city officials estimated it would cost the average person \$84 a year.

The council debate occasionally turned emotional as members spoke of the human toll of violent crime.

"Quite frankly, the public folly in this city is when a person can't stand outside on their porch without fear of being shot," said Councilman Ed Reyes.

Councilman Bernard Parks, the former police chief who represents a crime-ravaged South Los Angeles district, said city officials are not doing everything they can to cut spending so money could be freed up to hire more police.

"We're not convinced that the city of Los Angeles is using all of its resources properly," Parks said.

Bratton and Mayor James Hahn, who has centered his re-election campaign on public safety, made rare personal appeals to the council to put the measure on the ballot, calling it critical to the Los Angeles Police Department's efforts to reduce violent crime. Homicides dropped to 511 in 2004 from 517 in 2003 and 658 in 2002, the year Bratton took office.

Bratton argued that raising taxes would not harm the Los Angeles economy. Rather, he said, steep declines in crime would encourage businesses and shoppers to invest in Los Angeles.

"Economists are like weathermen here in California -- they're wrong more often than they're right. The economic voodoo that's being practiced here -- that businesses and shoppers will leave -- baloney.

"My prediction is, if you were to pass this, business would improve, safety would improve, and once again the economists would be proven wrong."

Bratton said he met personally with every council member except Parks and Antonio Villaraigosa, who earlier came out against the increase, to urge them to put the tax on the ballot. Parks and Villaraigosa, both of whom are challenging Hahn for mayor, were joined by Greig Smith, Dennis Zine and Jack Weiss in voting not to order the city attorney to draft a ballot measure.

"I consider coming back to the voters to ask again not public policy but public folly," Smith said. "Are we telling the voters that if we don't get what we want, we're going to come back and pound them again and again until we get what we want?"

Smith's motion to expand the 9,100-officer LAPD by as many as 300 officers by borrowing against expected state revenue was unanimously approved by the council Wednesday.

In the split vote on a ballot measure, the council voted to spend 10 percent of the proceeds on Fire Department training and paramedic staffing and 15 percent on anti-gang and intervention programs.

Council President Alex Padilla said he was concerned that the divided response -- on the council and among members of the public who addressed it Wednesday -- suggested that the ballot measure would be a tough sell.

Bill Upchurch of the Northwest San Pedro Neighborhood Council urged council members to let the public decide.

"It's my money," he said. "Let me decide how to spend it."

But Becky Bendikson of the Granada Hills North Neighborhood Council accused council members of ignoring the plight of lower-income residents who would be burdened by new taxes.

"With the salaries and additional benefits you as City Council members receive, I know it's difficult to relate to a substantial population of the city who need every penny they have to survive," Bendikson said.

## HOW THEY VOTED

Council members who voted yes on the police tax were Ed Reyes, Wendy Greuel, Tom LaBonge, Tony Cardenas, Alex Padilla, Jan Perry, Martin Ludlow, Cindy Miscikowski,

Eric Garcetti and Janice Hahn. Voting no were Dennis Zine, Jack Weiss, Bernard Parks, Greig Smith and Antonio Villaraigosa.