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## Forum editorial: Vote 'yes' for Cass flood tax

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Opposition to the proposed Cass County half-cent sales tax for flood control seems centered on the notion that "there is no project." Therefore, opponents say, a tax should not be considered until there is a project.

Both notions are wrong – completely at odds with the most responsible way to fund major public works projects.

First, there is a project. The preferred local option – a North Dakota diversion channel – has been embraced by local governments, the states of North Dakota and Minnesota and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It's a work in progress, as it must be while planning and engineering proceed. Opponents of the tax and/or diversion either haven't been paying attention for the past year, or they are purposefully misrepresenting the situation.

Second, a county sales tax will begin almost immediately to reserve funding for the project without the county having to resort to bonding or borrowing, which would cost taxpayers more. The county tax will match Fargo's special flood sales tax dollar for dollar. The Fargo tax passed with more than 90 percent of the vote in 2009, long before a diversion was even in the conceptual stage, because Fargo voters understood the money would be jackpotted for future flood protection. And that's how Fargo's flood tax revenues have been used.

County tax revenues will be managed the same way: for a diversion and associated flood mitigation work that might be needed for flood protection in the county.

The dual flood tax (city and county) strategy is a win-win program. It will generate a large enough local pool of dollars to leverage state and federal matching funds. The willingness of local taxpayers to take on a significant part of the cost of protecting their communities sells well when requests are made for state and federal dollars. Furthermore, because the sales tax revenue will begin to roll in shortly after the tax goes into effect, funds will be readily available to pay for early project costs.

(As a reminder of the flood threat, the Red River at Fargo will reach minor flood stage on Election Day – at a time of the year when the river should be well below flood level.)

The county sales tax is a small price to pay for permanent flood control. It is the fairest and most reliable way for the people of the county and city to generate local dollars to pay for protection of their homes, businesses and farms. "Yes" is the sensible, fiscally responsible vote.

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