

The Columbus Dispatch

Opinion

Editorial: Columbus City Council should approve revised ticket tax

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A well-intentioned idea for boosting support for the arts got better when Columbus City Council came out with its own version last week.

Opponents still are vowing a ballot fight if the City Council approves a proposed ticket tax on Dec. 10. That unwillingness to compromise is not surprising, given that naysayers have signaled they would not be happy with any such tax. That is unfortunate because at \$1.25 per \$25 ticket, that surcharge costing less than a candy bar will not drive away business as they suggest. This is clearly evidenced by the continued success of arts and sports venues in peer cities with such taxes.

Columbus is already late to the nationwide trend of cities asking those who attend arts and sporting events to kick in a small fee to help support a vibrant local arts scene. The Dispatch is glad to see City Council appears ready to get on that bandwagon with a 5 percent fee for admission to certain activities.

The Greater Columbus Arts Council was wise to initially raise the concept of a local ticket tax following extensive research and introspection on what is needed to keep local arts organizations viable and why that is important for central Ohio's economic health and quality of life.

But GCAC aimed a bit too high in seeking a 7 percent fee. And it missed the mark by shying away from applying the tax to the biggest games in town — Ohio State University football and basketball.

There was also understandable community consternation with an aspect of the original plan to earmark 30 percent of proceeds for the Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority to maintain county-owned Nationwide Arena.

We were comfortable with estimates that the arena would be a net contributor for arts support, based on calculations that the tax on arena concerts and Blue Jackets hockey games would generate about 40 percent of the overall proceeds.

City council made the distinction clearer by separating ticket fees generated at the arena from other venues.

Beyond the arena, the tax is to apply at places with more than 400 seats for tickets costing more than \$10.

The effect is the same, but the distinction specifies the arena will receive a portion of proceeds from only the tax on its events and none generated by other arts and sports tickets. That erases opponents' groundless claims that other venues should not support arena upkeep.

As for Ohio State, a local reluctance to apply the tax to Buckeye games might be understood in a context of possible legal prohibitions. It is not clear that such an application is not allowed, but neither are there ready examples of other municipalities taxing such NCAA events.

We applaud City Council for not leaving it at that, however, and seeking instead some larger measure of support for the arts from the university. And to OSU's credit, it has promised a \$1 million annual contribution to the arts if City Council enacts the ticket tax.

The \$6.6 million in estimated revenue to be raised by the tax as modified would be less than the \$12 million to \$14 million originally sought, but is a good and reasonable start.