

County denied local option tax funding

by PAMELA HINMAN
Staff Writer

When proposals for a one and a half cent local option tax were made, the understanding was that Story County would receive money to help fund human services.

But the tax passed only in Ames and Huxley and now members of the Analysis Social Service Evaluation Team, the group that recommends funding for services, is being told the county will not receive a dime, according to ASSET member Irene Howard.

"The county gets nothing, unless it passed within the townships of the city. Some programs are mandated. Programs for the mentally ill — but that is all," said Howard, who is also Ames' Human Resource and General Relief Director.

But Lynn Avant, ASSET member and executive director of the United Way, said the group will get a portion of the money.

"Some of it will go to [ASSET]. In the beginning it was not a firm and fast commitment, but there was the understanding if it would pass that some of it would be committed to restore ASSET and the Arts Council," Avant said.

With the possible loss of the local option tax funds,

the only way the county could provide money for ASSET would be to raise property tax, she said.

BUT CHRIS HUNZIKER, ASSET chairwoman, said the possibility of that is slim.

"Fred Mathison (county supervisor) said he would not raise property tax," she said.

City Attorney John Klaus said it is clearly stated within the local option tax law that the county will receive no profits from the tax.

"The statute provides that money only goes to jurisdictions passing the tax," he said.

However, during the campaign for the option tax, supporters expected money would be provided for the county's human services.

"I don't think anyone was trying to be misleading," Avant said. "There was no intention to fool anyone, but the passing [of the tax] was unexpected."

Howard said money can still be provided for human services if the City Council and county supervisors increase their budgets for such programs.

But there is no specific date set for the Council or supervisors to tell ASSET how much money it will be working with and Hunziker said it may not be known until ASSET's meeting with its funders Dec. 10.

Avant said County Attorney Mary Richards is trying to get a ruling from Attorney General Tom Miller to finalize how the money will be distributed.