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Chatham voters reject tax
Orange County residents could face issue next year

BY LEAH FRIEDMAN, STAFF WRITER

PITTSBORO -- Chatham County voters defeated the land-transfer tax referendum Tuesday in a contest that could preview one to come in Orange County.

Earlier this year the state gave counties the choice of establishing a 0.4 percent land-transfer tax or increasing the local sales tax by a quarter-cent. Chatham put the land-transfer tax on Tuesday's ballot. The Orange County commissioners held off for more study of the options.

With the transfer tax dead for now, Chatham County's \$2,900 impact fee will remain as is. If the transfer tax had passed, the Chatham County commissioners had planned to lower the impact fee to \$1,900. The fee is levied on all new homes regardless of size. The money goes to the schools.

The transfer tax battle was fierce.

The state's real estate and home builders groups poured thousands of dollars into campaigns across the state to defeat the referendum. The N.C. Realtors Association created a local group, the Chatham Coalition for Homeownership, to sway voters to reject the tax.

On Tuesday, Dick Blake left the North Chatham School polling place after he cast his vote against the transfer tax.

"I didn't want to spend the money," Blake said. "I didn't come here to be taxed when I left. I was already taxed when I came here."

Kathryn Howlett, a 21-year-old UNC student also voted against the tax.

"I'm not entirely sure the money will go to the schools, and if it does, I am not sure other funds will be taken from schools," she said.

The land-transfer tax would have produced \$3.5 million in 2009, according to Chatham County officials. Commissioners had agreed to give most of the money to the schools, some of which are overcrowded as more families move to the burgeoning area in the Triangle.

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