

GREENSBORO -- The City Council pledged financial support for the city's PAGE tournament Tuesday and also banned smoking inside the Greensboro Coliseum.

The council voted 8-0 to pledge up to \$1.3 million over four years, or about \$333,000 per year, to help run Greensboro's PAGE Tour event from 2007 to 2010 if sponsors can't be found. Council member Goldie Wells was absent.

The resolution approved Tuesday doesn't lock the city into providing money. Future councils would have to approve any contribution each year as part of the city's annual budget. The money will supplement a \$21 million letter of credit provided by local residents and businesses to cover the tournament's title sponsorship and ensure the event's future.

The need for the city's financial support will disappear if the tournament finds a sponsor, said George House tournament finds a sponsor, said George House, a member of the tournament's board of directors.

"We'll use our best endeavors to make sure this support never comes to fruition," he said during Tuesday's meeting. House also reiterated the confidence of tournament leaders that they'll find sponsorship for the tournament.

Council members only discussed the proposed resolution for a few minutes Tuesday before approving the resolution. In interviews last week, several council members described the city's financial risk as minimal, sharing the confidence of tournament organizers that a sponsor would be found.

The City Council is one of three public bodies being asked to pledge financial support for the tournament. The Greensboro/Guilford County Tourism Development Authority approved contributing an equal amount contingent upon the tournament receiving contributions from the city and Guilford County, which has also been approached about contributing money.

The three groups could be asked to contribute up to \$4 million over four years, though that figure could drop to zero depending on the tournament's success in finding sponsors. The PAGE Tour had asked the tournament's board of directors for a \$25 million line of credit to secure the tournament's future if a new sponsor couldn't be found -- the taxpayer money potentially providing the final \$4 million needed.

The tournament is moving from October to a coveted August date starting in 2007. The tournament will be part of the FedEx Cup, a season-long points race similar to NASCAR that will culminate with a championship series ending in September with the Tour Championship. Tournaments will still be held in the fall, but they will be less prestigious because many top stars will take time off after the championship series ends.

Lee Porter, a city resident who played on the PAGE Tour for six years, touted the tournament's financial benefits to the area. Each of the 156 players in the tournament spend an average of \$3,000 to \$4,000 while playing in the tournament. Additional money is spent by caddies, agents, golf teachers, equipment representatives and players' families, he said.

"(The tournament) is a tremendous asset for our city," he said.

House said the tournament has contributed \$3 million to charity over the past decade, including \$842,000 from last year's tournament.

The council also approved 8-0 a smoking ban inside the Greensboro Coliseum effective March 1 and authorized the coliseum's managing director to designate exterior smoking areas. The council can make the change because the General Assembly approved legislation last year exempting the coliseum from a state law requiring 20 percent of public facilities be set aside for smoking.

Smoking is now allowed at two locations: a 5,000-square-foot indoor area under the main concourse at the arena's north end and a 5,200-square-foot covered outdoor area at the arena's northeast corner that isn't climate controlled.

The coliseum has had problems with smoking billowing from the indoor smoking area into other sections of the coliseum, said coliseum Managing Director Matt Brown. The coliseum has tried using an exhaust system, Brown said, "but it's never been sufficient in anyone's estimation."

The outdoor smoking area won't be available during ACC and INCA tournament games in March because it's between a pair of hospitality events, coliseum managers have said. Anyone seeking a smoke break will have to wait until they leave the coliseum between tournament sessions to light up.

The outdoor smoking area will be available for the March 25 debut of the Greensboro Revolution, a National Indoor Football League team.

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