

Five Ex-County Council Members Urge a NO Vote on New 1% Transportation Sales Tax

We are former members of Beaufort County Council with 26 years of experience in the internal workings of that Council, over 40 years' experience in county government and, collectively, we have enjoyed living in Beaufort County for over 100 years. Based on what those experiences have taught us, we believe everyone should **Vote NO on the upcoming referendum for an additional 1% Transportation Sales Tax.** Please consider the following points.

- If we vote yes, the County will assume that we approved the projects. Based on all of our past experience, we may not like the details when we finally get to see them, but, by then, we will have lost our leverage. It will be too late. It is much wiser to have the County provide more design and visual detail on each project before we vote to approve it.
- The County has shown us very little ability to listen to, and act on, public input. For example, the County Council Vice Chair recently told a citizens' group and a Town Councilperson: *"We are not going to vote on your comments whether you like it or not...After we have voted, we will hear you out"*.
- Likewise, the County has shown no talent for risk and budget management. For example, one of the **2018** projects has more than doubled its proposed cost and has a current shortfall so large that it cannot be filled, even with the proposed new tax. It will need to absorb every available tax dollar in the County, displacing other projects, and still not be able to find enough funds. When asked, the Beaufort County staff person responsible replied: *"We are on a righteous path. If the November Referendum does not pass, Beaufort County is definitely resilient, I have no fear."* This is an Ostrich-like head-in-the-sand approach.
- The County's description of the Referendum projects indicates collection of \$950 million. Yet the projects on the list only add up to \$900 million. Thus, there appears to be another \$50 million slush fund to explain to taxpayers. So much for fiscal transparency.
- The "Penny Tax" wording the County is using is a gross distortion of the true costs. That penny tax will cost each person in the County **\$238.72 per year**. It will cost a family of four (4) over \$9,500 during the 10-year life of the tax –even if 50% of the funding is paid for by visitors, as County Council claims.
- Making massive amounts of cash available in advance without stronger justification will only further encourage the County's secretive and already poor and irresponsible planning and management.
- The County has demonstrated very little ability to manage multiple projects at once. The 2018 version of this Tax contained 34 projects **but only 4 (12%) are currently complete**. It would be a mistake to add to this backlog the 15 new projects on the 2024 list.

- The County has promised to provide a Citizen Led Oversight Committee (CLOC) if we fund their tax. But that is too late – the dollars will already be out of the bag, so to speak. Furthermore, can County Council be trusted to run or suggest names for any oversight team? Council is led by members of a secretive and highly biased Chamber-linked group (the GIC) who just succeeded in electing another crony to the County Transportation Committee. Any self-audit or oversight would become a rubber-stamp SHAM.
- There is no reason for taxpayers to provide a 10-year blank check to a list of projects whose details we have not yet seen. It is much wiser for citizens to demand that these projects be addressed in smaller, more transparent bites, subject to our pre-approval only after we see a higher level of detail for each project.

Sincerely,

Steven Baer
Mike Covert

Cynthia Bensch
Steve Fobes

Rick Caporale