

## 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

For the EDITORIALS, here are some items to consider.

**Call it the "FOOL ME TWICE Tax".**

- **Do You Want To Trust A County Council and Administration With Nine (9) Active Ethics Investigations for Misappropriation of Funds and Malfeasance? *Can You Trust Them With Your Tax Dollars?***
- **Council talks about a \$950 Million taxpayer liability. *They fail to mention the \$515 Million Bond That's totals \$1.465 BILLION Taxpayer Liability + Interest over 10 years!***
- **They claim that the 2018 Projects were under funded. However, *less than 20% are completed*, and the vast majority are in the pre-design or design stage. Let's complete the seriously needed projects and deplete the fund, before asking us for more money.**
- **It *includes "Re-Imagine Ribaut"* which, we have said NO to several times. Bury the utilities under the sidewalks, and update the traffic control devices. But, **DO NOT** change the roadways or include traffic circles.**
- ***Almost each project includes mixed use pathways and bike paths. Many are on roads with NO PEDESTRIAN or Bike Traffic. In 2018, it was estimated the cost per mile was \$1.4 Million. What is it in today's dollars? Has anyone done the math and, let the public be informed?***
- **There was a mixed use walkway and bike path from Laurel Bay to the Marine Corp Air Station, previously. No One Used It! Yet, the County, under the 2018 Tax revenue, it is currently rebuilding a pathway, which no one is bound to use.**
- **It *includes incomplete 2018 Sales Tax Projects*, we already paid for.**

The County Planners of the 2018 Sales Tax Projects ***failed to meet the design requirements to access State and Federal Funds.*** These failures raised the cost to you, the taxpayer, for these projects. What makes you think they got it right for the 2024 TST?

- **There are **2 SLUSH FUNDS**. One is for possible "Future Projects" and the other, a "Maybe, We Might Need" projects. Sounds like a slush fund for pals of the Council with their own wish list for taxpayer gifts.**
- **It *hits the poorest among us*, including the elderly. It becomes a regressive 10-year tax during an inflationary economy.**
- ***Tourists WILL NOT PAY* the vast majority of tax. A recent report from the College of Charleston listed the 2022 collected tourist tax revenue for Beaufort County. I did the math and that revenue will result in less than 25% of the 2024 Transportation Sales Tax.**

Ask yourself and Council, why this tax, now? Why not complete the important and immediate projects, then come back with a comprehensive and clear-cut list of new projects at a later date?

## Submit a Letter to the Editor

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Letters guidelines:

- 200 words or less.
- Signed with first and last names.
- Include street address and daytime telephone number for verification.
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- Not all submitted letters will be published.

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