

Beaufort County Council, fill in some blanks before asking voters to approve \$1.65 billion | Opinion

David Lauderdale : : 2/18/2024

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Beaufort County Council is considering a resolution on November's ballot that would add another 1% to the sales tax for 15 years and raise \$1.65 billion for transportation-related projects in a booming county. Hilton Head Packet File Photo

Beaufort County Council is considering a [resolution on November's ballot](#) that would add another 1% to the sales tax for 15 years and raise \$1.65 billion for transportation-related projects.

That's b-b-billion with a "b."

That's a staggering dollar figure, but maybe it shouldn't be scary considering the high cost of such things. But what is scary is the first part: Beaufort County Council.

As for its luck in getting voter approval, I'd tell the members to start by looking in a mirror. I'd tell them something my father used to trot out to me from time to time, with good reason: "You can't sell soap with a dirty face."

Unfortunately, Beaufort County Council has a lot of dirt on its face. And that has been the case for so long that the shop they run has been [likened to Animal House](#).

Before asking us to even begin judging whether the projects they've mentioned are worth a "yes" vote, here are some things the council should do:

- Show the public what you've done to clean up Animal House.

Former county administrator Eric [Greenway was fired](#), but then what? The local solicitor passed its investigation into county affairs [to the state attorney general](#) because he can take advantage of the greater investigative powers of a state grand jury.

Not much can be said about what a grand jury is doing, but County Council ordered its own in-house audits. Tell the public what was discovered and what has changed.

- Show the public what happened to the blankets. Yes, the [weighted blankets](#).

In the last episode of the County Council soap opera, we saw that a single county employee can create a

new six-figure position for a friend after already rewarding that friend with a consulting gig of \$275 per hour, and can go so far as to get an invoice for 587 weighted blankets being sold by the deputy county administrator's husband.

In other words, we saw no oversight, and no checks and balances.

What has changed?

- Answer this for the public: If you can't successfully handle a transportation task as relatively simple as ferry service to the people of Daufuskie Island, how can you be trusted with \$1.65 billion?

You've shown that you didn't know what you were getting into. Now show the public how you can resolve your problem.

- Show the public how it has fared with previous stashes of money approved by voters.

Get down to the penny, and each individual project, to show where the \$120 million has gone that voters approved in 2018 for transportation improvements.

The bulk of it was to be for the U.S. 278 corridor at the bridges to Hilton Head Island, with another \$30 million for Lady's Island and \$10 million for sidewalks and pathway improvements. Show what happened.

Show the public how the new money would be leveraged to attract money from other sources to meet local needs. Show the public what existing taxes and fees are doing for our roads and bridges.

List all the local projects that have been taken care of by the increased state tax on gasoline.

Remember that in 2017, when the legislature approved this 12-cent hike to be phased in over six years, they were goaded in part by a banner towed behind an airplane flying low over the RBC Heritage golf tournament on Hilton Head. It read: "Fix The Damn Roads."

What damn roads have been fixed?

In 2022, Beaufort County voters overwhelmingly approved a sales tax referendum to raise \$100 million for green space to curb the impact of rampant growth.

Show the public how that money has been spent.

And it would be helpful to start working on matters of trust before the referendum public relations spin doctors get involved.

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