

**Special Local Option Sales Tax Public Meeting**  
**Monday, January 13, 2014**  
**6:00 P.M.**  
**Oconee County Civic Center**

**Minutes**

**Welcome:** Chairman Melvin Davis stated the purpose of the public meeting was to provide information on the suggested 2015 SPLOST projects submitted by individuals, Committees, Department Heads, Constitutional Officers, Mayors and City Councils and to receive public input and recommendations. He noted that Commissioners Jim Luke, John Daniell, Margaret Hale, Mark Saxon, and Watkinsville Mayor Charles Ivie were in attendance. Bishop Mayor Johnny Pritchett and Bogart Mayor Terry Glenn were unable to attend due to a conflict with their Council meetings. North High Shoals Mayor Mike Beall was out of town.

Chairman Davis then reviewed the proposed 2015 SPLOST timeline and stated the next public meeting would be held on February 10, 2014.

Administrative Officer Jeff Benko stated that the SPLOST referendum will be for a six-year period. The 2009 SPLOST will end in October, 2015. The distribution of the 2015 SPLOST funds will be: City of Watkinsville 8.63%, City of Bogart, 2.72%, Town of North High Shoals 1.98%, Town of Bishop, 0.68%, and Oconee County 85.99%. It was noted that the City of Bogart and Town of Bishop Councils were reviewing their SPLOST requests and would forward them following their Council meetings. Administrative Officer Benko estimated that a total of \$55 million in revenue would be collected.

Administrative Officer Benko then presented the suggested 2015 SPLOST projects.

**City of Watkinsville Projects:** The proposed projects included \$900,000 for greenspace and parks; \$2.2 million for transportation needs; \$175,000 for Public Safety; and \$500,000 for a fire truck; for a total request of \$3.775 million.

**Town of North High Shoals Projects:** Proposed projects included \$660,000 for roads, streets, bridges and sidewalks; \$220,000 for recreational and park facilities, and \$220,000 for a Town Hall/Community Building for a total request of \$1.100 million.

**Continuing Debt:** Administrative Officer Jeff Benko reviewed the remaining debt for Law Enforcement which includes \$1 million for the E-911 tower and \$1.1 million for the Jail/EOC/E-911. Parks and Recreation has \$4.592 million remaining in General Obligation Bond Service for Oconee Veterans Park. Total continuing debt is \$6.6 million.

**Law Enforcement Projects:** The requested projects included a mobile data terminal to allow for "data exchange" technology for \$1 million; \$1.5 million for patrol vehicles (currently paid from the General Fund); renovation of the Frank Norris Building to allow utilization as Patrol Headquarters for \$500,000; and \$400,000 to update the Jail Surveillance System for inmate monitoring. The Law Enforcement requested projects totaled \$3.394 million.

**Fire/Rescue Projects:** The requested projects included the construction of two Fire Stations; purchase of three rescue vehicles, two engine trucks, and two tankers; and protective equipment replacement of outdated pagers and breathing apparatuses. The Fire/Rescue request totaled \$4.965 million.

**Public Works – County Roads:** The requested total for county roads of \$12 million would be used for transportation infrastructure; road resurfacing and bridge repair; and intersection improvements. Mr. Benko reported there are approximately 400 miles of public roads in the County, with an expected road life cycle of 20 years. To maintain a life cycle management schedule, 20 miles of roads should be repaired and/or resurfaced each year. Currently the annual average is 10-12 miles of roads.

**Water and Sewer Projects:** The requested projects included upgrading the water distribution system for \$7.715 million; and upgrades to the sewer collection system and wastewater treatment capabilities for \$5.335 million to accommodate projected growth. The request for water and sewer infrastructure projects totaled \$13.5 million.

**Animal Shelter:** It was noted that the current Animal Shelter was constructed in 2001 and is inadequate for the number of animals being served. The Shelter was designed to handle 350-400 animals annually, but it is currently handling 1,430 animals annually. The estimated cost of a new Animal Shelter is \$500,000.

**Coroner Transport Van:** The Coroner has requested a van for transporting bodies for autopsies at an estimated cost of \$55,000.

**Facilities Projects:** The total requested for Facilities projects was \$2 million. The request includes replacement of R-22 type HVAC (including that in the Jail which was built in 2007); building renovations for the Government Annex, Dolvin Building, and others; as well as roof replacement for 3-4 buildings.

**Library Projects:** The Library Advisory Board requested branch expansions for Bogart (\$757,500) and Watkinsville (\$2.3 million). Additionally, funding for acquisition of 3-5 acres to construct a 30,000 sq. ft. future library and material acquisition was requested for both libraries. The total requested was \$5.476 million.

**Parks and Recreation Projects:** The Citizens Advisory Committee on Recreational Affairs requested a total of \$5.5 million to be allocated as follows: \$500,000 for general park improvements to include picnic shelters and playgrounds; completion of the multi-use softball facility for \$2 million; addition of 8 tennis courts at Oconee Veterans Park at a cost of \$1 million; and addressing the traffic flow/congestion issues from Oconee Veterans Park by creating another point of entry/exit to the park through Autry Road.

**Civic Center:** The current facility is 20 years old and is jointly funded with the Board of Education. Options for the Civic Center include renovation of the current facility at a cost of \$500,000 to \$1 million; construction of an addition to the existing facility at a cost of \$2-\$5

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million; or build a new 55,000 sq. ft. facility on a parcel of 10-15 acres. Total of the request for the Civic Center was \$12 million.

**Industrial Development Authority:** The Industrial Development Authority requested a total of \$4.65 million. The request included \$800,000 for economic development; \$850,000 for infrastructure and sewer for Gateway West; and \$3 million for acquisition of 100 acres at an estimated cost of \$30,000 per acre.

**Judicial Courts Technology:** Software upgrades to allow information streamlining between Law Enforcement and the Court systems (Magistrate, Probate, and Superior Court) were requested at a cost of \$475,000.

**Judicial Building:** It was noted that Judge David Sweat recently presented information to the Board regarding concerns over lack of space and security issues at the current Courthouse. The cost to build a new Judicial Building is projected to be \$25 million.

**Georgia State Patrol Post:** A request for a Georgia State Patrol Post to be built in Oconee County is estimated to cost \$2 million.

**Farmland Protection:** It was noted that a formal request has not been received for Farmland Protection, but this project has been funded in the past.

**Historic Properties:** The Historical Society has requested funds for historic preservation. A cost has not yet been assigned to this request.

**Sidewalks near Schools:** Citizens have e-mailed Board members and requested 2015 SPLOST funds be allocated for construction of sidewalks near schools. A cost has not yet been assigned to this request.

**Overview:** Administrative Officer Benko stated the total projected 2015 SPLOST revenue would be \$55 million; with the County projected to receive \$47.3 million of the total. He recommended that only 80% of the projected revenue for the County be budgeted (\$37.8 million). It was noted that the County project requests were in excess of \$97 million.

**Citizen Comments:** Citizens were then encouraged to comment on the proposed projects and to suggest additional projects for consideration.

Dan Matthews suggested that an aquatic center be considered and that bike lanes be included with the infrastructure requests.

Chuck Horton felt that the 2004 SPLOST funds should be utilized for the requested Bogart Library expansion. He also supports the funding of a new Animal Shelter. Mr. Horton urged

the Board to support the requested road improvements, as well as infrastructure for water distribution, sewer collection, and wastewater treatment.

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Kate McDaniel expressed her support of infrastructure upgrades and Farmland Protection.

Carole Ludwig encouraged the Board and citizens to support Farmland Protection to preserve the character of Oconee County.

Penny Mills, member of the Library Advisory Board, spoke in favor of the Library request. She detailed the current services provided by the libraries, and the need for additional space and materials to better serve citizens due to the increase in population. She also noted that library funding comes from multiple sources and that the State has eliminated funding for materials acquisition. She also supported the construction of a future library building to accommodate the growing community. Ms. Mills indicated that the State of Georgia has a construction fund that could provide matching funds for the SPLOST 2015 funding for upgrades to the Bogart and Watkinsville libraries. She anticipates only a .5 staff increase at the Bogart and Watkinsville Libraries as a result of the proposed expansion.

William Powers stated his support for Farmland Protection. He is a 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer and wants to continue the legacy to future generations.

Debbie Harris expressed support for the proposed Tennis Court expansion. The current courts are frequently occupied and players are forced to use facilities in other counties.

Matt Moore voiced his support for the Parks and Recreation request to complete the Softball facility. He feels that the additional ball fields will allow more tournaments which will create additional tourism revenue. He also supports the addition of a second access point to Oconee Veterans Park.

John Webb commented that he did not support funding for a new Courthouse and feels that renovations should be considered for the existing facility. He supports funding for water and wastewater infrastructure, the requested Library projects, and renovation/upgrades to the Civic Center. Mr. Webb questioned the request to construct a State Patrol Post in Oconee County and felt it was the responsibility of the State of Georgia.

Sarah Bell stated she moved to Oconee County for the quality of life. Libraries, Farmland Protection, and historic preservation are priorities to her. She urged the Board to weight carefully the future of this County and feels that the first priority should be to pay off outstanding debt. Ms. Bell also expressed skepticism that the projected \$55 million in 2015 SPLOST revenue would be collected.

Chris Butts, member of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Recreational Affairs, stated the committee had distributed a survey to citizens. Citizen responses supported Oconee Veterans Park completion prior to starting new projects. Mr. Butts expressed concern over the current traffic issues at the park and feels that an additional access point is needed. He

also supports the additional tennis courts, and noted that bike paths were supported by respondents of the survey.

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Robert Wyatt expressed his support of the libraries and the programs they offer to citizens.

Pat Sebring indicated that she recently became a County resident. She encouraged the Board to develop a master plan to identify how the County will evolve. Ms. Sebring also indicated her support of Farmland Preservation and enhanced infrastructure.

Brian Kimsey, Oconee County Little League President, supported completion of the Softball Complex as the current fields are often full.

Administrative Officer Benko stated that the next SPLOST Public Meeting would be held on February 10 at 6:00 p.m. at the Civic Center.

There being no further discussion or comments, the public meeting was adjourned.

Prepared by Jane I. Greathouse, County Clerk