

September 15, 2022

**Joint Press Release from:
Habersham County Democrats and Habersham County Republican Parties**

For Immediate Release:



Habersham Democrats



Habersham Republicans

Once again, the Habersham County Democrats and the Habersham County Republican Parties are in agreement in opposing the Habersham County Commissioner's proposed sales tax referendum: T-SPLOST 2022. For the third time, this additional layer of taxation will be brought to the voters of Habersham which will raise our current sales tax paid by 14.3%. This new sales tax increase would raise the sales tax rate to 8 cents and unlike some of the existing sales taxes already in place, no items would be exempt from this new tax. This additional tax would apply to any groceries (currently exempt from some sales taxes already in place), clothing, furniture, farm equipment or building material bought in the county; all phone, gas, water and electricity bills; and would be charged to your bill when you eat at any restaurant in the county.

Currently, Habersham has in place two additional cents on each dollar spent within the county. These are the current SPLOST #7 and E-SPLOST. SPLOST #7 has been in place for more than 40 years. Funding for this sales tax includes paydown of Habersham Medical Center debt, maintenance and replacement of roads and bridges, purchase of safety equipment, and improvement of public communications.

Within the 2020 SPLOST budget are County Projects with estimated expenses for Public Works of road construction and maintenance, bridges updated and repairs/replacements, and road maintenance equipment of more than \$11 Million dollars. Recently the county has hired a full-time experienced Grant Writer who will be able to utilize their skills at finding matching state and federal grants for a majority of Public Works projects. The county's new Grant Writer can bring in an excess of \$10 million for our transportation needs.

Also, the County has not specified any projects for their share of T-SPLOST funds. They have only listed buckets of funding, i.e., road paving, bridges, etc. They want us to "Trust" them to spend these funds on items they think are the most important in these buckets. Why is the county afraid of listing these projects?

Habersham County Commissioners have not spoken about the numerous studies and reports that rate the State of Georgia as one of the top states for roads and bridges. Here are a few that are readily available on the internet for review:

- US News & World Report transportation ranking for 2021 listed Georgia as the 17th Best State in National Transportation, it included overall 5th in Road Quality and 7th in Bridge Quality. Other factors include commute time and public transportation usage which both ranked lower.

- Mission Financial Services also rates Georgia as #8 best state roads and bridges. They describe Georgia's various road and highways as smooth, wide and clean.
- The 2021 American Road & Transportation Builders Association ranking of U.S. bridges rank Georgia in the top 5 for best bridges. Of the 14,987 bridges in the state, only 319 (2.1%) are classified as structurally deficient. No bridge in Habersham County was listed among the major deficient bridges.

Here are some additional items of concern that should be addressed when deciding on your vote for this new tax:

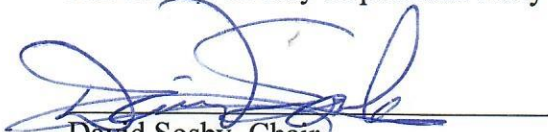
1. Past county commissioners and city officials-have stated that 35-40% of sales tax revenues collected come through those who live outside of Habersham. However, there is NO such report verifying this number or any number stating what the real percentage of sales taxes collected from visitors to Habersham County. While we concede that visitors do pay some sales taxes, we can guarantee that 100% of the citizens in Habersham County pay sales taxes and would pay this tax increase if passed.
2. Current Georgia Gas Tax is 29.1 cents per gallon. That is up 3 cents per gallon from 3 years ago. It is likely to be increased again in the next legislative session.
3. This additional T-SPLOST will adversely affect Habersham County residents who can least afford to pay more taxes, the elderly, the poor and small business owners. While the County states this is a 'Fair Tax' and it spreads the burden off the backs of taxpayers, these individuals and companies will be hit the hardest. Do our citizens want to pay more in taxes of your hard-earned money?
4. When Habersham citizens have a choice to pay a lower tax rate for goods and services, the incentives to cross the county line will be more attractive than paying the higher sales tax rate in Habersham.
5. The County Commissioner's just raised taxes collected from County property owners by 20.40%. Additional taxes to be collected and spent by the County are \$3,275,499 which comes from a 1.00% millage increase and an increase in the County's M&O Digest Value from property value increases. It seems that the County doesn't have a revenue (tax collection) problem, they have a spending problem.
6. Passing this additional layer of taxes on our Habersham County citizens could jeopardize the importance of building a new Habersham County Detention Center. This should be a priority for our county commissioners.
Replacing the old and deteriorated HCDC is a project we both whole heartily support!

Voters, this is the wrong approach. Join the Habersham County Democrats and the Habersham County Republican Parties in rejecting this additional burden of tax being proposed. Vote NO on T-SPLOST 2022.

Habersham County Democrats


Virginia Webb, HCDP

Habersham County Republican Party


David Sosby, Chair