



# Election Recap

*What passed, what failed, who won, what's ahead*

Voters, by a slim margin, gave thumbs down to the capital project sales tax referendum on Nov. 2, the second time in two years Beaufort County citizens have rejected an initiative that would improve road infrastructure in southern Beaufort County.

The margin, after a mandatory recount, was 141 votes. The final tally was 26,702 to 26,561. That's 50.13 percent "no" to 49.87 percent "yes."

In southern Beaufort County, referendum supporters won 13,784 to 12,466, a 1,318 margin. The referendum failed in northern Beaufort County 9,825 to 7,958, a 1,867 margin. Twenty-seven of northern Beaufort County's 33 precincts said "no."

Hilton Head Island residents also rejected the referendum 7,402 to 7,010, a 392 vote difference. Only seven of 27 precincts voted "yes."

Bluffton and Sun City residents supported the tax. In Bluffton, supporters won 4,132 to 3,086, capturing eight of 10 precincts by a 1,046 margin. In Sun City, the referendum carried all four precincts 2,120 to 1,451, a 669 margin.

Paula Harper Bethea of Hilton Head Island, who led the effort to build support for the referendum, said the county's road infrastructure needs are now back in the hands of political officials.

"I'm sorry the county missed this opportunity (to pay for road needs through the sales tax)," Bethea said. "I worry how we're going to manage the issues in front of us. Some of the projects on the list need to be done before the next two years. I hope we can find some way to answer the

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Bethea said several factors contributed to the defeat. "I don't think I can point to any one thing," she said. "It was the coming together of five or six things." They included the impact of the county's property reassessment, the timing of the property tax bills arriving in mailboxes a day before the election, the introduction of the U.S. 278 express lane concept by the county, and the confusion concerning

SCDOT's plans for U.S. 17 in northern Beaufort County, she said.

Sales tax opponent Bob Warden of Hilton Head Island said the referendum's "pork barrel" list contributed to the defeat. He pointed to projects in northern Beaufort County that included a municipal facility and parks. "They did it in order to buy votes."

Warden said, "Planning needs to come first, and developers need to pay for their impact. The developers are the ones creating the density without the infrastructure to deal with it."

Warden also blasted the state legislature for being "spineless and totally lacking in courage" for not having the political will to raise the gas tax and the sales tax on vehicles, which could help fund various transportation improvements throughout the county.

Another question resolved on the 2nd was the state's notorious mini-bottle law, judged "Worst S.C. law/local policy" in this month's Reader's Choice Poll (see page 50). By an overwhelming (though surprisingly close, to some) 59 to 41 majority, voters voiced their desire to bring the state of South Carolina into step with the rest of the free-pour country.