



Five-year, \$122 million referendum receives go-ahead for November's ballot

PHOTO BY ROB KAUFMAN

Capital Sales Tax **UPDATE**

William Hilton Parkway will be resurfaced and the parkway's intersection with Squire Pope Road will be reconfigured to increase safety if voters approve Beaufort County's capital project sales tax in this November's general election.

Beaufort County Council approved third and final reading of the one-percent sales tax referendum August 9, giving the go-ahead to place the referendum on November's ballot. Meanwhile, the county's municipalities have endorsed the tax, as have several organizations including the Greater Island Committee.

County Council's final vote on the referendum capped five months of work by a sales tax commission appointed by the county. The commission received input from entities countywide and shaped the five-year, \$122 million, 33-project referendum into its final form. Supporters say visitors to the area will pay 50 percent of the tax.

The tax will end when the \$122 million is collected, or at the end of five years, whichever occurs first. Fifty-two percent of the dollars are slated for projects in southern Beaufort County; 48 percent for northern Beaufort County.

"Everyone on the commission came together with a clear vision of what was needed countywide," said Paula Harper Bethea of Hilton Head Island, who, along with attorney Colden Battey of Beaufort, co-chaired the six-person countywide commission. Bruce Fairchild was Hilton Head Island's other representative.

"Everyone tried to be mindful of the needs of today and to plan for the needs for tomorrow," Bethea told Hilton Head Island Town Council in the meeting where the council approved a resolution in support of the referendum. Councilman George Williams voted against the resolution.

Said Williams during the meeting, "When I reviewed the list (of projects), I had extreme difficulty with spending the amount of dollars on some of the projects. Too much for me to support."

Williams later elaborated and called the list "a grab-bag of nice-to-have-things."

"The town and Bluffton originally kept our list short, consistent, and under financial control – basically \$30 million," Williams said. "And, then when it was sent to the citizens commission, it went helter-skelter, going to \$122 million."

Councilman Ken Heitzke countered that no list will "pacify or please everyone. We are a diverse community."

"We have a safety and traffic problem that must be addressed now," Heitzke said. "It's not going to go away; it's going to get worse. We need to get these projects done now to prevent a future disaster. We can't wait another five or 10 years."

Mayor Tom Peebles echoed Heitzke, saying, "This is as balanced of an approach as possible. We can't let the status quo continue. We can't wait any longer to find solutions."

If successful, the referendum will provide dollars to resurface 9.4 miles

BY TIM BENNETT