



### JOINT SPECIAL CALLED MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Spalding County, along with the Griffin City Commissioners, and representatives from the Cities of Orchard Hill and Sunny Side, held a Joint Meeting on Monday, July 25, 2005 in the office of the Spalding County Board of Commissioners in the Courthouse Annex in the City of Griffin, Spalding County, Georgia, beginning at 6:00 o'clock p.m. with Spalding County Board of Commissioners Chairman Edward Goss presiding. Also in attendance were County Commissioners Cecil Davis, Gwen Flowers-Taylor, Eddie Freeman and Johnnie McDaniel; Mayor JoAnne Todd and City Commissioners Bill Landrum, Cynthia Reid Ward, Walker Cook, Doug Hollberg, and Rodney McCord; from the City of Orchard Hill, Mayor Larry Gossett and Billy Slaughter; and from the City of Sunny Side, Mayor Robert G. Morgan and Dan Whitman. Also present were County Manager William Wilson, County Attorney Jim Fortune and Executive Secretary Teresa Watson.

#### **I. OPENING (CALL TO ORDER) – Chairman Edward Goss, Jr.**

#### **II. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Discuss projects to be included on a November 8, 2005 bond referendum for SPLOST  
Mr. Goss noted that public comment would be allowed tonight but the five-minute rule would be enforced.

Cheryl Matlock, Field of Dreams Committee, 110 Green Acres Road, Griffin, Georgia  
In order to protect the integrity of their proposal, Ms. Matlock wanted to clarify the committee's request is now for \$10,000,000 for a 35,000 square foot learning center. The most recent figures place a square footage cost at \$205 rather than the original \$180 per square foot. Initially they planned to build a 40,000 to 45,000 square foot building but reduced the square footage because of the increase in per footage cost.

Regina Abbott, 1129 Placid Road, Griffin, Georgia  
Ms. Abbott who is Chairperson of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission requested that renovations to the Senior Center in the amount of \$600,000 be considered for placement on the 2005 SPLOST referendum. She voiced their support of the SPLOST referendum even without this item being added, but respectfully asked to include the senior center as a county-wide project. The \$600,000 figure was taken from a February 2004 report for an addition that would cost \$1.1 million, but they anticipated a \$500,000 CDBG grant at that time, so only \$600,000 was needed from SPLOST and would be needed now, as well.

Bobby Peurifoy, 917 S. McDonough Road, Griffin, Georgia  
Mr. Peurifoy was concerned about how and where SPLOST money is supposed to be used. He wanted to make sure it could not be used for items other than those placed on referendum. He also wanted to confirm they will cease the tax if adequate funds are collected early. Commissioners assured him that whatever is stipulated in the referendum is what the funds must be used for exclusively. Mr. Peurifoy felt any SPLOST item should be for governmental entities to serve everyone and not just special interest or private groups. He wondered why they were not requesting money for jail expansion or fire stations.

Mr. Peurifoy is opposed to any SPLOST until the County gets a handle on property taxes and hopes that no SPLOST will pass until the County becomes serious about reducing the tax burden on property owners of the County. He suggested the commissioners help senior citizens overburdened with property taxes instead. His taxes went up 41% three years ago, and he knew that reevaluations are coming which will result in more increases. He felt property owners were the last cash cow in Spalding County. Many are leaving because they cannot afford property taxes.

County Commissioner Davis advised that all of the SPLOST projects to date had been for governmental properties and have served the needs of citizens county-wide. He said that of the two needs mentioned, jail expansion and new fire stations, these could be accomplished with impact fees being collected from developers. Mr. Davis noted the fairest of all taxes was indeed the SPLOST. County Commissioner McDaniel confirmed money from impact fees will be used to build fire station(s).

Mr. Peurifoy noted there are two options that might be used to lower property taxes if investigated, Homestead Option Sales Tax (HOST) and Floating Homestead Exemptions which freeze property taxes for longtime residents and shifts the burden to newcomers. Fulton, Gwinnett and Cobb counties and Atlanta have utilized these two options. He urged commissioners to study the issue carefully and get a good handle on property taxes before trying to impost a SPLOST.

Mr. Goss said a constituent voiced the same concerns to him and prompted him to look at his own tax bill. He pointed out to the gentleman his own tax bill and detailed the different taxes that go into the levy, such as schools, fire district, etc. He stated that in budget meetings this year, County personnel did much hard work to cut taxes for property owners.

City Commissioner Landrum said he did not want to see the area make another mistake as when it watched Gordon College go to Barnesville and the I-75 interchange to Butts County. He felt they should go forward with the UGA learning center and the communications system on this SPLOST referendum. He was in favor of those two items only.

City Commissioner Cook said the UGA facility, along with the radio communications system, were most important right now, but the radio system is important particularly in light of recent bombings and terrorist threats. This community needs to reverse past SPLOST failures and if one item only was needed to get this one passed that would be acceptable, but he would be for the radio system, as well. His goal and that of others should be to educate the public with correct information and let them make decision. The public has the power.

City Commissioner Hollberg said he felt the radio system is the number one priority; emergency personnel need to have good system that is dependable and provides adequate coverage. The next item he would also support would be the UGA learning center.

City Commissioner McCord noted he would support the radio system and senior center only.

City Commissioner Cynthia Reid Ward said she supported the two item SPLOST: 800 MHz radio system and UGA learning facility.

Griffin Mayor JoAnne Todd said she conducted an informal poll which showed one-third of her constituents queried were against implementation of a SPLOST. Many favored a single item UGA learning center, and another segment seemed to be evenly divided between the radio system and UGA facility. She personally preferred a one-item SPLOST for 18 months for a UGA learning center. The legality of doing something on private property needs to be addressed, but she favors this single item now. Other issues can be addressed with a later SPLOST should this one be successful.

County Commissioner Flowers-Taylor said the single most important item to her was the 800 MHz radio system. The present system is severely outdated and she felt it was imperative the County put the safety of its residents ahead of everything else. To her, it would not be worth it to have people die while others can become smarter. She supported the SPLOST last time but was confused how the facility's price escalated so much from previous discussions. She also questioned just what Gordon College has done for Barnesville. The UGA \$10,000,000 price tag is a lot for a high-risk project. SPLOST issues pass in other areas, so SPLOST must not be a hard thing to do ... perhaps miseducation is to blame for the fact that Spalding County is the only county in the state that hasn't passed a SPLOST in the last two elections. She favors a radio system first and foremost and considered it the first priority.

County Commission Chairman Goss asked how many students would be anticipated later, beyond the 20-25 students now. A \$10,000,000 request for 25 students is not practical.

Dr. Gerald Arkin of the UGA Griffin Campus projected numbers that estimate 1000 students within ten years. The initial core of 20 or so can start with late registration approval from UGA. The Provost wants to broaden offerings beyond agricultural and environmental sciences with participation of other colleges. Representatives from other schools are visiting Griffin now with UGA Griffin Campus personnel, development personnel, elected officials and local governmental staff. The satellite Gwinnett campus will no longer have undergraduate degree programs, and this campus could fill a void. The Tifton campus started the same way with about 20 students the first year, and now has 65-70 students. They have expanded from initial major offerings, as well, for undergraduate degree programs. Students will be transferred primarily from Gordon and other 2-year institutions. The projections for economic contributions to the local area will be similar to that of Gordon College, which is about \$76 million annually. Tifton utilized a SPLOST for its academic program but mostly for the Rural Development Center (a \$5,000,000 SPLOST and an additional \$5,000,000 grant from Governor's Office). The Tifton campus can be seen from the highway right in front of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

Dick Morrow, 263 Westchester, Griffin, Georgia

Mr. Morrow noted the numbers used two years ago was to remodel the Stuckey Building rather than building a new facility. The Stuckey Building could not accommodate this expanded use and they needed more room. The entire economic business machine of Barnesville is driven by revenues generated from Gordon College. One-third of Gordon's impact for us would do well. Impact fees will pay for infrastructure improvements, such as fire stations, parks and recreation, jail, 911 center equipment, and library. Over \$300,000 has been collected so far this year. Money will be available for a fire station before long and three fire stations are in the long-range projection.

John Yates, 961 Birdie Road, Griffin, GA 30223

Students perpetuate the economic impact of higher education. Higher education should be viewed as an industry that affects all aspects of our lives. He wants to encourage local facilities at the UGA Griffin Campus to compliment Griffin Technical College here. The Board of Regents approved this project in April and will be observing its success rate. The Tifton campus started slow, as well. UGA's Hank Huckaby is expecting legislators to appropriate money to refurbish the Stuckey Building in addition to this program. He urged everyone to think of students not just in the short-term, but in the long-term.

Wilbur Bailey, 443 Northwoods Drive, Griffin, Georgia

Mr. Bailey said he would not complain about the request for UGA, but he was in favor of considering the senior citizen center as an additional item on this SPLOST. He stated the seniors will be a large vote on this issue.

Bill Taylor, WKEU, 1000 Memorial Drive, Griffin, Georgia

He thanked the elected officials present for dealing with this tough job. He supports both items being proposed, the UGA learning facility and the 800 MHz communications system. He noted, however, that the UGA center will be around much longer than any radio system which can be replaced by terrestrial systems. He urged commissioners and representatives to be careful as they had much to consider.

County Commissioner Chairman Goss said he supports the radio system but is not convinced that 800 MHz is the best. He wants to find the best and most economical system available since taxpayer monies are used.

County Commissioner Freeman is firmly behind the UGA Campus here. The area cannot draw students, who become adults with families, if we don't have the facilities to attract and accommodate them. He favors an improved radio system but also wants to look at other systems to trim costs. County roads are in bad shape also and he felt there was a need to improve on this infrastructure soon. Mr. Freeman felt this two-item SPLOST would pass.

County Commissioner McDaniel said there are two basic vehicles for funding: SPLOST and property taxes. Some commissioners are in the "senior" category talked about tonight. Property tax collection is the only constant revenue generator here; some counties to the north have more opportunities with greater growth. Growth and an increased tax base can hold the line on property taxes. SPLOST is the best option since property taxes can easily become a bigger

burden than it already is. The County lost the last single item SPLOST with the Parks & Recreation swim and dive center. This SPLOST being proposed will be good for the community that is Spalding County. UGA can have 25 students before any building is built, so the \$10,000,000 should not be viewed as being for 25 students but rather \$10,000,000 is for the future. What would Barnesville be without Gordon may be a better question than the one posed. He recommended the Board look at the long-term picture and view it as a puzzle. No one thing makes a puzzle but many pieces make up the puzzle. The county is growing residentially, and an educated workforce attracts industry. Gordon will go to four-year college at some point and will impact the area, as well. He hoped the County will take advantage of this tremendous opportunity and not look at the issue with short-term, tunnel vision. The 800 MHz system is really needed since first responders have trouble with signals and missed calls. The Fire Chief can't even call the fire station from his home. Mr. McDaniel has a heart for recreation and knows their need is real, but he is afraid of loading up the SPLOST too much as they have in the past.

County Commissioner Davis echoed the concern that this community has missed golden opportunities in the past, and he supports the UGA learning center. Water and sewer customers could use some infrastructure improvements, and seniors would certainly appreciate expansion of their center, but there are a great many good projects worthy of consideration. He supports the two projects discussed, and \$700,000 a month for 36 months totaling \$25,200,000 should be more than adequate. He hoped they could get a success story and come back later for others.

Mayor of Orchard Hill, Robert Morgan, said he supports getting a SPLOST success but Orchard Hill would like to have several improvement projects on a later SPLOST. He wondered about providing a facility on property not owned or controlled by the County. He agrees a college is needed to bring a better quality of life but is issue of taxpayers supporting a facility on UGA property needs to be addressed. Mr. Morgan said he had mixed emotions about the radio system – no 800 MHz system will probably solve all problems. At his employment in Clayton County, they use Nextels and he talks to his wife all across the country. Communication is important but maybe they need to research other providers. He would support a senior center, as well. Orchard Hill is willing to set aside needed projects for now and support SPLOST if their needs can be addressed in a later SPLOST.

Billy Slaughter, representative from Sunny Side, said he supports the senior center, radio system and UGA learning center.

County Commissioner Davis said everyone needed to pull together and not be divisive as some commissioners have been in the past. He said he appreciated the show of support and cooperation by City Commissioners. He felt they had a better chance of success with a reasonable show of unity. He noted that although the County, if the SPLOST is successful, would provide the learning facility at UGA, the university would provide much as well in the way of salaries, program materials, maintenance, insurance, etc.

City Commissioner McCord noted he had stated he will not vote to support the SPLOST if UGA is on referendum.

Mayor JoAnne Todd said she supported Mr. McCord; everyone is entitled to their vote and opinion. She agreed with County Commissioner Davis that a show of support was evident.

City Commissioner Landrum agreed they need to show support, but if it takes adding the senior center to pass, he'll support it. He would rather have two items but will support three projects on the list. Everyone needs to pull together and show that public entities can agree.

Larry Gossett, Mayor of Sunny Side, said he appreciated the SPLOST vehicle and Sunny Side had received \$250,000 in the past. City Hall was built and the walking track with park and playground installed. SPLOST monies support capital improvement projects. He felt, too, that \$14,000 for fire protection is a lot for the county to charge a city as small as Sunny Side.

Dan Whitman, of Sunny Side, echoed Mr. Gossett's comments. He noted the past shortsightedness of local officials who might not have wanted an educated workforce, and stated this community needs the UGA learning center on this SPLOST.

County Commissioner Flowers-Taylor advised she has needs in the area where she lives, as well. Listening to other projects, i.e. senior center, means the Christmas tree is already developing so why not entertain other projects. Ms. Flowers-Taylor said she did not see the advantages afforded Barnesville by Gordon College. The County will experience residential growth by osmosis since we are centrally located. Most university people don't even live here and pay no property taxes, and she asked where Dr. Arkin lived.

Dr. Arkin responded he lived in Peachtree City but eats meals and shops here. The UGA Griffin Campus spends many thousands of dollars on local contracts here. Dr. Arkin advised that many of the 400 employees live and work in Griffin and raise their families here.

Ms. Flowers-Taylor said UGA alumni haven't offered to help match any funds but rather are simply asking this of the citizens of Griffin and Spalding County. She urged them to show something before asking for what she considers an exorbitant amount that will be good but won't benefit the bulk of Spalding County citizens. Many of her constituents need relief for sewerage problems, and she cannot support UGA when that is the case. She had a problem with the cost of the project changing, as well.

City Commissioner Hollberg said work is being done on a Sewer Master Plan but the County hasn't followed through yet on the 1995 plan, as they haven't found a method of funding.

County Manager Wilson said King & Spaulding and A.G. Edwards advised issuing bonds for the \$10,072,500 (\$10,572,500 less a grant for \$500,000) needed for the radio system. The \$10,000,000 for UGA can be pay-as-you-go and it will take approximately 30 months to collect the tax. Or, the County can issue bonds for both and it will take up to 36 months to collect. This estimated collection time assumes a zero growth factor. There would be about \$774,000 in interest and the bond issuance will cost \$150,000 for the radio system project. If bonds are issued for both, interest will be \$1.5 million and the fee for bond issuance will be \$400,000. The County would issue bonds in the amount of \$9,410,000 because interest on the money would make up the \$10 million. An additional project would add another quarter at zero percent growth. He noted if the SPLOST for a communications system is not successful, the County must relinquish the \$500,000 grant. The latest figures on the 800 MHz radio system were effective July 12, 2005. The five tower sites were reduced to three, so that is the reason for a reduction in the radio system's cost. Both City and County have serious safety issues with the current radio system.

County Commission Chairman Goss said he would hate to see the County spend \$10,000,000 on this radio system and still have dead spots. He would like to see more research on the system being proposed.

County Manager Wilson noted the new design specifications cover 99.5% of the County.

Orchard Hill Mayor Robert Morgan said there would be no system that could possibly cover 100% of the area 100% of the time.

Griffin Mayor JoAnne Todd said she had summarized the consensus of City Commissioners as follows: UGA and Radio System but prefers UGA-1; UGA and Radio System-3; UGA, Radio System and Senior Center-1; Radio System Only-1. For Spalding County: UGA and Radio System -3; Radio-1; and she couldn't determine the stance of Ms. Flowers-Taylor. Orchard Hill representatives both supported the two proposed items. Sunny Side: UGA Only-1; and UGA, Radio System and Senior Center-1.

County Commission Goss said perhaps a single or double item SPLOST may not be such a good idea. If people can see how their money is being spent, they may be more apt to support multiple SPLOST items.

County Commissioner Davis asked for a poll of attendees for the UGA learning center, the 800 MHz communications system, and the senior center. Griffin Mayor JoAnne Todd asked if impact fees could not be used for senior center since it was a part of parks and recreation, but it was determined they could not since it was not specifically identified in the Capital Improvements Element of the Impact Fee Ordinance.

**III. ADJOURNMENT**

County Commission Chairman Goss adjourned the meeting at 7:37 p.m.

Please send comments to [updates@griffinwebdesign.com](mailto:updates@griffinwebdesign.com)  
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