

DEKALB CITIZENS

ADVOCACY COUNCIL

March 5, 2023

Open Letter to DeKalb State Legislators:

DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council (DCAC) is reaching out to you as our delegation members to express several areas of concern regarding HB 431(SPLOST) and its potential impacts for stakeholders.

The areas of concern for which we are requesting your assistance and consideration are: (1) lack of process transparency, (2) countywide project funding, (3) distribution of funds, (4) removal of restrictions, and (5) implications if HB 431 does not pass in this General Assembly session.

1. Lack of Transparency

A proposal of changes to HB 431 was submitted to the House Delegation on February 13, 2023, by CEO Michael Thurmond. This legislation has not been fully vetted, nor were opportunities provided for stakeholder input prior to its submission. In viewing the Board of Commissioners Special Called Meeting about SPLOST held on February 23, 2023, it is evident that even some members of the Board were neither aware nor included in the process prior to submission to the House Delegation. There has been no comprehensive annual reporting of projects (a sample for such a requested report is attached). What has been reported on the county's website is superficial and does not contain any project detail. Lack of transparency has resulted in confusion, misinformation, and an increased level of distrust among stakeholders.

Waiting until after the amendment is passed for the county to then speak to the public about how the SPLOST may (or may not) be allocated, does not constitute transparency on any level. The CEO is well aware of the fact that the SPLOST is highly likely to be approved by voters in a referendum no matter how the county proposes to spend their tax money between now and then, because it is still attached to the eHOST/tax freeze.

Recommendation: Amend HB 431 to include reporting requirement of previous SPLOST funds prior to allocation for any new projects

Recommendation: Amend legislation so that any projects from the initial SPLOST that are incomplete or not started are given priority over any new projects

Recommendation: Amend HB 431 to mandate the publishing of an annual report for each of the six years that SPLOST funding is used

2. Countywide Projects

Countywide projects should be given priority with the allocations off the top of projected revenues. If not, this financial burden will be borne solely by the unincorporated area of the county.

OUR BOARD

Ann Abramowitz

Ryan Brown

Lynn Ganim

Mary Hinkel

Patricia Killingsworth

Claudette Leak

Martha Pacini

Tom Woodward

Recommendation: Amend the legislation to require allocations for countywide projects to be funded prior to any other fund distributions

Recommendation: Amend HB 431 to require a full accounting of the funding of projects

3. Distribution of funds (cities vs. county)

It is unclear as to the sources (other than the 2020 Census) used to determine the per capita basis distribution of funds.

Recommendation: Amend HB 431 language to clarify the sources used in determining per capita allocations

4. Removal of Allocation Restrictions

Due to lack of public input or any knowledge of potential projects, there is a concern that removal of the current 85% (transportation and public safety) and 15% (capital improvement) caps will create an open checkbook to expend funds on anything, whether stakeholders desire it or not. It is unfortunate that the lack of transparency continues a sense of distrust between taxpayers and elected officials. It is a fact that cannot be ignored without some oversight protections in the legislation.

Recommendation: Amend HB 431 to include language that helps to manage project considerations should HB 431 be approved

5. Implications of Not Passing HB 431

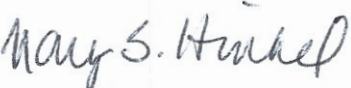
Given the haste with which this legislation has proceeded, it is critical that the concerns expressed are addressed and properly vetted with stakeholders. Please explain implications of passing the current version of SPLOST legislation.

Recommendation: Explain any implications should HB 431 not pass the General Assembly this session

Recommendation: Renew the current SPLOST legislation and delay HB 431 until the 2024 General Assembly session to allow for a better assessment of HB 431

We are requesting your thoughtful consideration of our recommendations for HB 431 to ensure that there is accountability in the use of SPLOST funds to best meets the needs and desires of the taxpayers before asking for their support of a referendum. Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Cordially,


Mary S. Hinkel

PROPOSED REPORT EXAMPLE

SPLOST Year (annually)	Proposed Project Detail	Total Funds Allocated	Funds Expended	Status	Variance Explanation
Transportation					
Road Resurfacing	Number	XX	\$151,250,000	Completed 284 miles	16 miles remain at cost of \$ XX
Pedestrian Improvements	type, number	XX	\$14,450,000	XX	XX
Public Safety					

¹CURRENT REPORTING DeKalb County Government website

Transportation Purposes	
Road Resurfacing.	151,250,000
Federal and State Transportation Project Matching Funds for Transportation Purposes.	25,550,000
Pedestrian Improvements.	14,450,000
Transportation Enhancements which include, but are not limited to, intersection upgrades, widening of narrow lanes, and improvements to roadway alignment, safety lighting, and sight distance.	9,000,000
Multi-Use Trails.	7,000,000
Bridge Repairs and Improvements	7,000,000
Sidewalks to Schools, Transit, and Other Locations.	4,000,000
Traffic Signal Improvements.	2,350,000
Community Improvement District Matching Funds for Transportation Purposes.	1,500,000
Corridor Beautification.	1,250,000
Public Transportation Shelters	150,000
Transportation Project Management	9,701,074
Commission District Transportation Projects.	7,056,673
Total	240,257,747

Public Safety Facilities and Related Capital Equipment	
Replace existing fire station(s) and construct new fire station(s) and related capital equipment.	41,151,612
Repair fire stations and related capital equipment.	3,100,000
Upgrade Fire Radio System.	1,500,000
Purchase Fire Quick Response Units.	2,000,000
Repair and replace police precinct(s) and public safety facility(ies).	2,856,675
Police Vehicles.	5,606,300
Repair or replace Bobby Burgess Building.	27,300,000
Planning and design for public safety training facility.	1,200,000
Total	84,714,587

Parks and Recreation Repairs	
Athletic Fields.	11,650,000
Renovate athletic and recreation facilities including but not limited to roofs, shelters, and pavilions.	8,400,000
Parks, playgrounds, and recreational areas.	6,900,000
Pools and other aquatic facilities.	3,950,000
Resurfacing trails and paved areas.	3,000,000
Golf Courses.	1,000,000
Tennis Court Resurfacing.	2,150,000
Stream Bank Restoration / Drainage and Stormwater Improvements.	200,000
Total	37,250,000

General Repairs	
County Courthouse Administrative Complex Including Parking.	16,500,000
General Senior Center Repairs.	1,000,000
Repair of County Owned Health Care Facilities.	1,000,000
General Library Repairs.	1,500,000
Total	20,000,000

¹ Source: DeKalb County Government Website