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Voters easily approve SPLOST

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CLAYTON—By a margin of almost 2-1, the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) passed easily Tuesday night, with 1,329 yes votes (63.80 percent) and 754 no votes (36.20 percent).

Sky Valley voters also elected a new council member,

choosing Moody Barrick over Hollie Steil as their representative.

Barrick received 97 votes at 55.43 percent, while Steil had 77 votes at 44 percent. There was one write-in vote.

Barrick could not be reached for comment Tuesday night. Steil did not comment on the results.

Out of 11,848 registered voters in Rabun County, 2,093

cast their vote, which is a 17.67 percent turnout.

Tammy Whitmire, elections supervisor, said that the turnout was about average when compared to such elections historically.

“For those who came out and voted, we’d just like to say, thank you,” Whitmire said.

Whitmire credited her staff for their hard work during the election.

“I just want to say how proud I am of my poll workers, staff and my board members. Time after time, after every election, they give 100 percent,” Whitmire said.

A SPLOST is a special-purpose local-option sales tax used as a financing method for funding capital outlay projects. It is an optional one-percent sales tax levied by any county for the purpose of funding the

building of parks, schools, roads, and other public facilities.

According to the intergovernmental agreement between all local governments, the money will be distributed between all local governments as follows:

■ \$15.5 million to county

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SPLOST

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projects. Including, \$1 million for a Sheriff's building, \$3 million for administration/courthouse, \$4 million for jail expansion, \$5 million

for water and sewer and \$2.5 million for roads and bridges.

■ \$2.3 million to Clayton projects. \$1.5 million for roads and streets, \$500,000 for water and sewer improvements, \$240,000 for City Hall maintenance and repair and \$60,000 for public safety.

■ \$440,000 for Dillard projects. \$170,000 to roads and bridges, \$170,000 for water and sewer improvements, and \$100,000 for city complex renovations.

■ \$390,000 for Sky Valley projects. \$50,000 for buildings, \$100,000 for equipment and \$240,000 for roads and streets.

■ \$650,000 for Mountain City projects. \$310,000 for City Complex Renovations, \$250,000 for roads and bridges and \$90,000 for public safety.

■ \$500,000 for Tiger projects. \$350,000 for roads and bridges and \$150,000 for parks and recreation.

■ \$220,000 for Tallulah

Falls projects. \$120,000 for water and sewer improvements. \$50,000 for roads and bridges and \$50,000 for public buildings.

**NORTH GEORGIA
COMMUNITY PLAYERS**

OUR OPINION

Voters made the right choice on SPLOST

The taxpayers have spoken, and their voices could not be clearer.

By voting nearly 2-1 to approve another round of the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), Rabun County taxpayers recognized the importance of the approximately \$20 million that will be raised—much of it from the pockets of non-residents—to contribute toward the future growth of our community.

Thanks to the overwhelming show of support, all residents of Rabun County will benefit in the form of road improvements, public building upgrades, and enhancements to public safety, water, sewer and infrastructure.

SPLOST funds will also pay for additional jail space and improved facilities of the Rabun County Sheriff's Department. The current jail facility has to be expanded sooner or later if current incarceration trends continue. It's wiser, and cheaper, to do this project sooner rather than later.

The city of Clayton in particular will benefit greatly from the SPLOST. They will receive approximately \$2.3 million to go toward improving sidewalks and downtown infrastructure. This work is sorely needed. Clayton is on the cusp of a tremendous growth surge. They were shut out completely in the previous round of SPLOST funding.

Clayton is the economic hub of Rabun County. As we stated recently, it's vital that timely investments be made to keep the wheels of commerce working to benefit all residents.

But with the victory comes another message that local elected officials would be wise to heed.

Voters are tired of the arguing, the court battles and the lack of cooperation and coordination between Rabun County and municipal governments.

Voters will be watching the SPLOST money closely this time around. They will ask lots of questions. They have every right to do so. They want to make sure the money is applied as they were promised.

And if they aren't satisfied real change is taking place, voters have the power, and indeed, an obligation, to "throw the bums out" and elect fresh faces who are able to put the petty differences aside for the good of the community as a whole.

A good start toward a new era of openness in local government would be for county commissioners to revisit an idea that was first put forth in the run-up to the SPLOST referendum.

Some Georgia counties have formed advisory committees to help monitor and report on SPLOST funds and how they are being spent.

Commissioners grumbled previously that such a committee would be an unnecessary burden. They claimed such a committee would usurp their own authority as given them by the voters.

Neither assertion holds water under close scrutiny.

With no power, no vote and no axe to grind, such a citizens committee would serve only one purpose—to keep the taxpayers of Rabun County better informed.

It's a topic that worthy of further consideration in the near future.

But for now, thanks to everyone who came out to make their voice heard Tuesday for and against the SPLOST.

No matter which side of the issue you were on, your vote counted.