

Commissioner Questions June 18, 2014 Part IV SPLOST (continued from last week)

The following statements are direct quotes from the complaints filed in the recent bond validation court proceedings by a little group attempting to stop the SPLOST Bond Validation process. These statements are direct quotes from the public records they submitted to the courts.

**Q. "I am writing this letter in opposition to the request of our Sole Commissioner's attempt to obtain moneys through bonds obligating the taxpayers. He is asking for this validation months before collection of the additional penny tax goes into effect."**

A. The bond validation process must be completed prior to borrowing the funds, so there is no reason not to go ahead and validate the bonds now as we have done in the past. In addition, the county could go ahead and borrow some of the money prior to the actual beginning of our sales tax collection if we felt it would be financially favorable to do so. Their statement referred to the tax as being an "additional penny" when we all know it is simply a continuation of the existing one penny we have had for years.

**Q. "Being as the rate of collection on our current SPLOST can never pay off what we are already obligated for, it makes no sense to place us farther in debt."**

A. First, as usual, this group generally makes up their facts. There are plenty of SPLOST sales tax revenues to pay off the current SPLOST debt, and in fact the five million dollars borrowed (bonded) in March of 2009 under the current SPLOST III will be paid in full in March of 2015.

**Q. "If part of this new bond money is planned to be used to pay off this current debt, I ask as a taxpayer how can this be legal?"**

A. It is simple. We comply with the law. We utilize only professionals to guide us in all our large financial decisions, certainly including SPLOST. In addition, if our SPLOST revenue does not increase a single cent over the next six years, we will have more than enough to pay off any current or planned borrowing. Finally, our 2015 SPLOST referendum, passed in November of 2013, clearly gives the county the legal right to borrow (bond) funds and/or pay off the Community Center debt with SPLOST funds. The county has not nor will we ever make "illegal" decisions regarding financial dealings of our county.

**Q. "The company that did our county audit cautioned the commissioner that several of the methods used in accounting for taxpayers money left openings for unethical dealings. Previously "already approved" priority projects are abandoned while minor questionable projects for nonprofit organizations are completed."**

A. These are statements made by people who have no understanding of the SPLOST law. Union County has always hired a consultant to keep the county SPLOST projects not only legal, but on task and within budget as much as possible. One of this group's complaints is that the county said we would expand our jail, but we did not. They also indicated that building a jail was a tier one project and must be completed above all other projects. However, this is also not true. The jail was NOT listed as a tier one project.

**Q. What is a tier one project?**

A. Usually it would include a new courthouse, jail, 911 Center or sports complex, when advertised as such. However, our jail proposed addition was never listed as a tier one project on our current SPLOST, but was listed as simply an expansion, not a tier one project. The law does not require us to complete a project, but we are required to spend money on the project. The purpose is so you can determine if the project should go forward as planned. However, tier one projects must be completed. We spent over \$7,000 in studies, including the jail, to determine if expansion was financially feasible to expand our jail and second, we spent an additional \$ 52,000 replacing all the HVAC units on top of the jail. We also upgraded some of the security at a cost of \$3,500.

**Q. So why do you not go ahead and add on to the jail? We understand that it is over crowded.**

A. First, we discovered that if we add on to the jail and enclose the existing recreation yard as a new pod, there is no where else to move the small recreation area. The only area remaining on the side of the mountain is where all of the electrical grounding mats are installed for the electrical system, which can not be built on or covered with a solid surface.

Second, we currently already spend over \$ 3.6 million on the jail and sheriff's operation per year, plus another \$385,000 which includes the courts, judges, district attorney, public defenders and juvenile court. Then if you add on the Probate Court, Magistrate Court, and Clerk of Court, all who have separate functions, but several include dealing with those who have broken the law, we have a total of \$ 4.7 million dollars spent on criminals every year, which is 33% of our total budget. Nearly five million dollars a year spent on criminals and their crimes is plenty. I want to spend the rest of our funds on projects that directly impact and improve the lives of our law-abiding citizens,

Next week more SPLOST issues including the jail.