

Keep the Penny Augusta!

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Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce

In representing a constituency of 1,200 businesses throughout the region, 800 of which are located in Augusta-Richmond County, the Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce serves as an advocate for tax policy that continues to deliver important municipal services residents and businesses need in the most cost-effective way. Effective tax policy should also ensure that there is a strategic goal on the part of government to invest in capital expenditures and infrastructure improvements that enhance our economic future.

The allocation of a one-cent sales tax on purchases made in Augusta-Richmond County to generate funding for needs in the county is the most economical way of keeping other county taxes low such as property taxes and additionally spreads the cost of improvements beyond Augusta's citizens by leveraging significant visitor spending. The upcoming voter referendum for SPLOST VIII is the continuation of Augusta-Richmond County's current penny sales tax and on March 16th, voters have an important opportunity to see that this penny and the pennies of many others continue to provide resources that keep the county safe and create projects that will keep our community growing.

Voters do not have to look far to see the many benefits of SPLOST programs approved in the past. As one of the most important categories to receive SPLOST funding, public safety improvements in just the last five years have included a new state-of-art P25 radio system, new fire stations, fire trucks and law enforcement patrol vehicles. Previous SPLOST programs have provided the means to continuously improve our recreational opportunities throughout the county such as its canal trails, renovate and rebuild important government services buildings and make the county more attractive for business investment. One such investment to support economic development in the most previous SPLOST was funding to support changes to Gordon Highway for traffic management at the new Gate 6 entering Ft. Gordon. And, let's not forget the important needs for the cities of Blythe and Hephzibah which also depend on this funding to meet the needs of their communities.

SPLOST VIII will generate over \$250MM in support of 45 identified projects and funding of \$9MM for the cities of Blythe and Hephzibah. Of the identified projects, the referendum strikes an important balance between addressing critical infrastructure needs such as roads, drainage and blight, while at the same time works to ensure the county is progressive in its vision to be competitive for new jobs, new population growth and the most attractive county it can be for quality-of-life amenities. By investing over \$65MM in quality-of-life projects, not only do we have the opportunity to continue building out a vibrant place for families who live here but continue to raise the profile of Augusta as a unique destination in the Southeast that attracts tourism and the spending that brings.

Conservative estimates on the number of visitors coming to Augusta-Richmond County for festivals, concerts, conferences, trade shows and sporting events easily reaches over 9 million people per year. On a daily basis, estimates indicate that employers located in Augusta-Richmond County import as many as 64,000 workers per day from surrounding counties. This adds up to the potential of \$75MM to \$100MM of the entire cost of projects being paid for by people using services in the county and sharing in the cost of maintaining the urban center of our region.

The Augusta Metro Chamber believes that SPLOST VIII represents continued progress and vision for our region and has endorsed this referendum. We hope that all voters will go to polls on Tuesday, March 16th, as informed citizens on the merits of keeping the penny.