

The Sparta Ishmaelite

Wednesday October 28, 2026



**Heidelberg
Materials**

Wake Up People!

By Karen West, News Reporter

December 2024

December 2024 is when the special use permit from Heidelberg Materials for moving and expanding its aggregate quarry first went before the Board of Hancock County Commissioners. With a new Board being sworn in for January 2025, the matter was tabled by the previous Commission (in a 4-1 vote) to be decided on by the new incoming Board of County Commissioners and new Chairman Adrick Ingram.

The decision still has not been made, almost TWO YEARS later. The vote has been tabled again and again and again instead of being brought up for a vote.... WHY?

The official answer is that they are still studying the situation, however few of the Commissioners have actually visited the facility, to gauge the effects on the community - immediate or longterm.

The request is for a special use permit to move and enlarge the aggregate quarry to make it less invasive to the Shoals Road community that is adjacent to it. The Shoals Road group has been very vocal in denying the expansion, citing noise and potential residential blast damage, for almost TWO YEARS. Yet, there has been only ONE official complaint registered about potential blast damage to a residence - a complaint that was found to have no basis. ONLY ONE COMPLAINT REGISTERED.

Basically, Heidelberg Materials is seeking a special use permit to increase the working part of the quarry to an adjacent 500 acres, land they have had in their possession for quite some time. The move would potentially increase the lifespan of the aggregate mining by about 100

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Another Look at SPLOST

By Karen West, News Reporter

With this addition to the upcoming November 3 ballot for countywide vote, many people are asking, what exactly is a SPLOST?

A SPLOST - Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax in Georgia works as a temporary 1% sales tax added to most retail purchases within a county to fund local infrastructure and capital projects.

How It Works -

Initiation - The County Board of Commissioners proposes a tax and creates a SPECIFIC list of capital projects, in order of importance, along with total dollar amounts for each project.

Intergovernmental Agreements- The County negotiates agreements with cities inside its borders (in this case, the City of Sparta is the only participant) to share a portion of proceeds, based on population or project needs.

Voter Approval- Residents must approve the tax and the project list via a public vote with the referendum lasting an average of 5-6 years.

Collection - The 1% sales tax is added to most retail purchases made within the county that are subject to the state sales tax paid by residents, visitors, and online shoppers. In the case of online purchases the tax is applied based on where the purchased product is delivered, not by the buyers' home county or sellers' location.

Renewal - Once the time or money limit has been reached, the tax ends unless the commissioners vote to reapprove a new phase under another referendum.

What exactly is an allowable project under SPLOST?

SPLOST may be used for capital projects for the benefit of the community such as roads, bridges, public safety equipment, courthouses, parks, recreation centers, and retiring general obligation debt. It CANNOT be used for day to day operating expenses, employee salaries, routine maintenance, public school operations (these are covered by other taxes).

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Rest Easy Paramedic 33192

By Karen West,
News Reporter

On October 25 the Hancock County High School was the site of a heathbreaking ceremony. All kinds of first responders' vehicles were in attendance from a number of local communities. DeShawn Frier, first responder, paramedic, and firefighter was being honored and laid to rest.

DeShawn Frier, a highly respected and much admired professional, had passed away on October 19, a victim of suicide.

His death is a reminder that behind every uniform is a human being - a human being that needs the continuous love and support of his family, friends, co-workers and community- no matter how strong they may appear on the surface.



First responders collectively rank as one of the professions with the highest risk of suicide.

The average civilian ex-

periences, on average, a small handful of critically traumatic events in a lifetime. But first responders encounter about EIGHT HUNDRED

such events a year and sometimes into the tens of thousands over the course of a career, which generally averages only 3-7 years. Emergency Medical Service professionals experience an extremely high turnover rate according to the CDC, for a variety of reasons.

High burnout from the sheer number of traumatic experiences is at the top of the list. Everyone has helped a friend or family member through a emotionally draining day from a death, sudden illness, debilitating car accident, effects of a chronic illness, severe child or elder abuse or other traumatic experience - but imagine going through that same scenario of suffering EVERY SINGLE WORK DAY, sometimes multiple times during a single shift. Add to that emotional

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East Lake Fire Rescues Engine 2 Participates In Community Events



Roger Medbery
Admin

East Lake Fire Rescues Engine 2 has had a long busy weekend of community involvement.

Starting Friday with an appearance at Amigos at the Coves Halloween Bash. Then Saturdays Fall Festival at Island Creek Baptist Church where the



kids (and some adults) got to spray some water from a fire hose. And then today (Sunday) Engine 2 was part of a procession for Deshawn E. Frier, a Firefighter/EMT who recently passed.

Thanks to East Lake Firefighters Tom Canough, Jacob Penley and Maelyn Tinsley for selflessly giving their time to make it all happen.

Making A Difference - By Hand



Here's Captain Roger with the latest donation from Stephanie and Mama Yia Yia.

By Karen West,
News Reporter

Stephanie Matsis' 92 year old mother loves to knit. Getting close enough for a hug, although always welcome, can sometimes be

dangerous because "Mama Yia Yia" ALWAYS has knitting needles in her hands, which are never idle.

And Stephanie is just as productive stitching up unique gift items, like her kitchen towels, that everyone can use. Together they



This is Mama Yia Yia

produce a variety of fun, brightly colorful items for children, adults, and pets that you didn't know that you just can't live without - until you see them.

Every Friday at Our Sparta FRESH Farmers Market you can find Steph-

anie with multiple tables and racks full of creative and colorful handmade goodies - and the profits she and her mom give to our local volunteer Fire and Rescue!

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Hickory Grove Missionary Baptist Church, Inc
4933 Hickory Grove Church Road/Post Office Box 402 Sparta, Georgia 31087
www.hickorygrovembc.org Reverend Michael Curry, Pastor

Pre-Pastoral Revival

The Glenns Mary Baptist Church in Sparta, GA will be hosting a two-night Pre-Pastoral revival on November 5-6, 2026 at 7pm nightly.
The Rev. Brandy Bailey of the Jones Chapel AME Church will be the Guest Speaker Thursday night, and Dr. Nathaniel Snead, Jr. and the Macedonia Baptist Church will be the Guest Speaker on Friday Night.
We will culminate the celebration on Sunday, November 8th @ 2pm with our Pastor, the Rev, Kenneth Lester's 4th Pastoral Anniversary. Bishop W.J. McCalla and the Saint Galilee Baptist Church will be the special guest.
Everyone is invited to attend this joyous occasion.

Tabernacle Baptist Church Pastor Terry Boone
New St. Sparta, Ga. 706-833-8747

Shivers Grove Community Church
347 Shivers Grove Road Sparta, Ga. 31087

Services every 3rd Sunday Sunday School starts @ 11:00 AM
Church Worship @ 12:00 Noon
Reverend Marion Hargrove, Pastor Sister Mary Leslie, Secretary

ZEBULON COMMUNITY CHURCH
7266 BROWN CHAPEL RD. 31087

PASTOR BRO. BILLY CARROLL PHONE 706-829-4403
SERVICES EVERY SUNDAY 11:00-----SUNDAY SCHOOL 10:00

A BREATH OF LIFE

By: **EDWARD WILLIAMS - DEACON & Gideon**

“Then the Lord of God formed the dust of ground and breathed unto his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living SOUL (-(Genesis-2;7)
Every breath we take is a is a remember of the power of God. From the very beginning, life itself came from Him. When God created man, He did not simple form a body from the dust of the earth; He breathed His own breath of life into humanity. That breath transformed lifeless dust into a living soul. It was a sign our lives are connected to God in a personal way.
Often in the business of life, we forget how dependent we are of Him . We make plans, pursue goals, and carry burdens, yet every heart beat every breath is sustained by the grace of God. The breath we receive is a gift from God, with out Him we have nothing; with Him we have life, purpos , and hope. There are moments when life us weary, and exhausted. Trials, disappointment, and worries can drain our strength and cloud our minds. Sometimes we feel spiritually empty, as if the pressure of life have taken the wind out of our souls. Yet God still breathes life into tired hearts. His Spirits, renews, restores, and revives those who seek Him.
Just as dry bones came alive when God breathed upon them in the vision of Ezekiel. God can breath fresh hope into our situations today. He can revive broken dreams, restore joy, and renew faith that grows weak. No circumstances is to dead, to hopeless, or to broken for the breath of God to bring life again. A breath of life is more than physical existence; it is presence, of God working with in us.
His spirit gives peace in difficult seasons, strength in weakness, and courage for tomorrow, When we spend time in prayer, and in His Word, our souls are refreshed and our hearts are remind that God is near. Today, pause and thank God for the breath your lungs, and the life He has given you. Do not waste the gift of today worrying about tomorrow. Instead , trust the one who holds every breath in His hands.

Explaining The Memory Verse

“God Called on Gideon”

Background Scripture: Judges 6:1-27

“Don’t Forget God’s Goodness” Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:47

EXPLAINING THE MEMORY VERSE

“The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” (Judges 6:14).

God chose and called Gideon. Gideon was not strong enough by himself. But God was with him. God called him and sent him to deliver Israel from the Midianites.

TELLING HOW TO LIVE

Have you ever cried out to the Lord to help you because of some trouble you were in? Our lesson tells us how God hears us when we pray to Him when we are truly sorry for our sins. He does not leave us alone, even when it feels like it. He is there to help us. Did you know that God may also call us to help others? Yes, He will.

PRAYER

Dear God in Heaven, thank You for always being with us. Help us to trust You and to do what you have called us to do, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

References:

Minister Minnie Harmon-Boone (DDiv, ECE,AH) HB: NIV, ESV
Author/Jesus Is All Ministries

Golden Universal Outreach Ministries Email-goldenenterprises59@gmail. com
Phone Number-706-833-8747

Send your Community News/Events to :
KAREN WEST
westkaren286@gmail.com or to sandersvillep@gmail.com



Yet Another Look at SPLOST

Hancock County has put a new SPLOST on the November 3 general election ballot.

The lion's share of the SPLOST is for a "County Inmate Housing Unit" or an update and repairs to the Sparta Hancock Detention Center attached to the Hancock County Sheriff's Office. The SPLOST is listed to be \$4 million to be collected over a 6 year period with \$3.5 million in general obligation bonds to be released immediately to fund the projects listed on the SPLOST , the biggest to be the addition and upgrades to the Detention Center.

Sheriff Primus has stated several times to the Board of Commissioners that the existing facility is in such poor repair that he fears lawsuits from inmates due to its derelict condition which could be considered dangerous and a health hazard to the people it houses. The maintenance of the facility has been the subject of special meetings and recently, in the 2025 budget recieved an increase in funding of close to \$300,000.

Chairman of the Hancock County Property Owners (HCPOA), Kim Sanders, spoke during the citizens imput portion of the October 14, 2026 County Commissioners meeting regarding an ORR (Open Records Request) that was sent to the county some time ago. The requested information about the present SPLOST (that is due to end in 2028) accounting records.

"Is that something



Karen West,
News Reporter

you guys will be handling soon?" she asked of Chairman Adrick Ingram. The Chairman replied that he had sent her an e-mail addressing the delay and he was waiting on the report from "the accountants".

"Is there any update on a timeline?" "We have to vote for this (the proposed new SPLOST for the Detention Center) so I'd like some information prior voting so I know how to vote", she continued.

The Chairman assured her that she should have the requested information as soon as it was available. (The entire exchange can be seen on the Hancock County Ga. Government facebook page that posts videos of the meetings).

Answers to the questions regarding previous maintenance, the previous SPLOST, and the present state of the facility have gotten very limited answers with the Chairman indicating that the Commissioners "needed more time to go over the numbers with the accountants".

Concern over the use of the previous SPLOST, appears to be valid with the burden of an extended SPLOST or one that fails to bring in the full amount with the 1 cent sales tax -

General obligation

bonds are backed by the "Full faith and credit of the county" and if the SPLOST revenue is insufficient to make the bond payment, then Hancock County is LEGALLY OBLIGATED TO RAISE PROPERTY TAXES to bridge the financial gap and pay off the remaining bond debt.

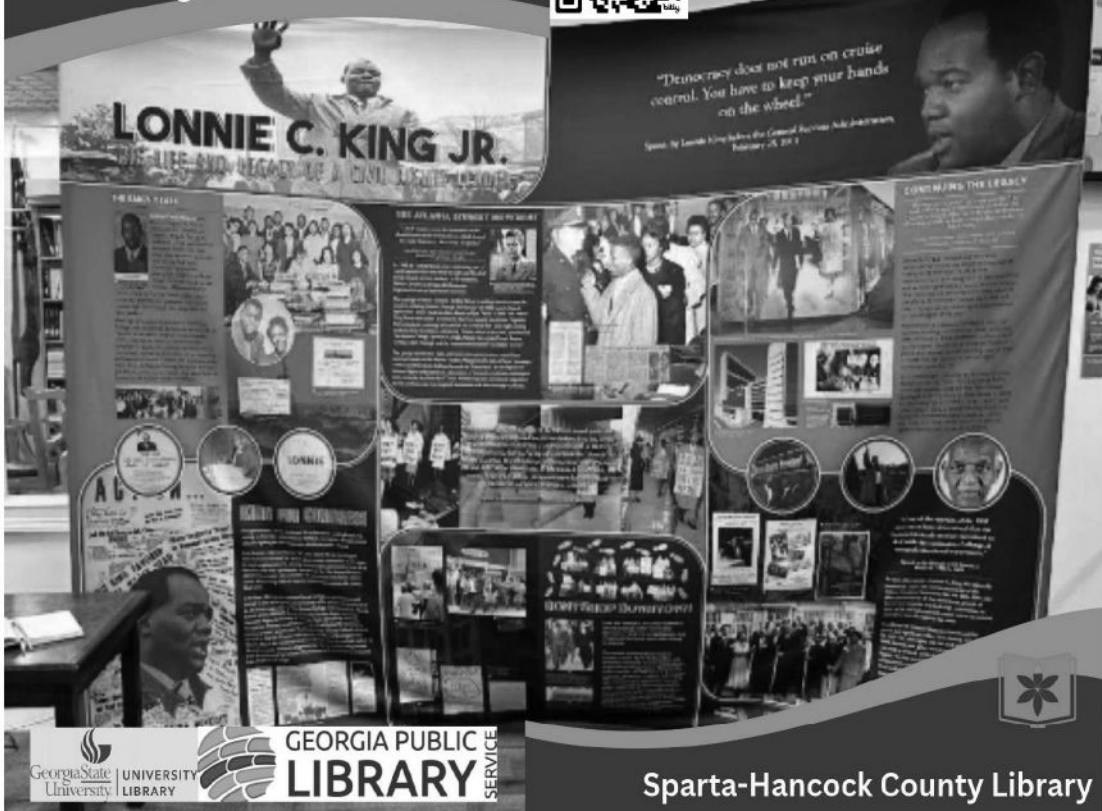
For a county that has just had a major property tax assessment increase of 93%to 338% on average see "A Taxing Situation) and just recently had a large millage rate increase as well, a future of even higher taxes is not very palatable. Add to that the lack of real answers plus a local economy that is miniscule in terms of retail sales tax revenue compared to surrounding counties (see "Can We Afford This SPLOST?" in the Oct 14, 2026 edition of the Sparta Ishmaelite) and citizens have every right for real concern.

In the October 28 County Commissioners meeting, Chairman Ingram tried to reassure Hancock County citizens saying " I, ah, we're going to do everything we can, regardless of what happens with Heidelberg, to keep taxes as low as possible. I want to make sure that is on the record and is stated. Keep the millage rate and taxes as low as possible and still provide services to our citizens."

But without hard numbers and complete transparency, citizens have every right to ask "Can we afford this new SPLOST?"

Its time to take another look at SPLOST and make your voice heard with your vote on November 3rd.

Lonnie C. King, Jr. | The life and legacy of a Civil Rights Leader
Now through Nov. 16



We are proud to host the traveling exhibit “Lonnie C. King Jr.: The Life and Legacy of a Civil Rights Leader at Sparta-Hancock County Library from October 15, 2026 to November 16, 2026. As a student at Morehouse College, King co-authored “An Appeal for Human Rights,” a manifesto that sparked a wave of peaceful protests. This exhibit provides a unique opportunity for people of all ages to learn about his role in the Civil Rights Movement and his legacy of fighting for equality and justice.

Through Georgia Public Library Service, Georgia State University, The Rich’s Foundation, and Georgia Humanities, this unique view into Georgia history is available to our community. For the full tour schedule visit georgialibraries.org/king #CivilRights #AtlantaHistory #GeorgiaLibraries #History

HANCOCK COUNTY LEGAL NOTICES

NOTICE TO DEBTORS AND CREDITORS H26-049 NOTICE TO DEBTORS AND CREDITORS HANCOCK COUNTY All creditors of the estate of Willie Mae Nelson, deceased, late of Hancock County, Georgia, are hereby notified to render in their demands to the undersigned according to law; and all persons indebted to said estate are required to make immediate payment to the undersigned. This 6th of October, 2026. Philemon Nelson Jr Administrator for the Estate 435 Pumping Station Road Sparta, GA 31087 October 14, 21, 28, November 4, 2026	DECEASED ESTATE NO. E-26-060 NOTICE To Whom It May Concern: LORENZA HEATH have petitioned to be appointed Administrator(s) of the estate of CRYSTAL E. GREENE deceased, of said County. All interested parties are hereby notified to show cause why said Petition should not be granted by filing an objection. All objections to the Petition must be in writing, setting forth the grounds of any such objections, and must be filed with the Court on or before OCTOBER 30, 2026. In addition, all objections must be sworn to before a notary public or before a Probate Court Clerk. Filing fees must be tendered with your objection unless you qualify to file as an indigent party. Contact Probate Court personnel for the required amount of filing fees. If any objections are filed, a hearing will be scheduled at a later date. If no objections are filed, the Petition may be granted without a hearing. Sabrina M. Lamar Judge of the Probate Court Jasmine J. Stokes Deputy Clerk of the Probate Court 12630 Broad Street, Sparta, GA 31087 706-444-5343 October 7, 14, 21, 28, 2026	Unknown Heirs at Law MICHAEL ALLEN RANDY ALLEN JOANETTE ALLEN Occupant 111 MAYFIELD CHURCH LN, Hancock County, Georgia. RE: FORECLOSURE OF EQUITY OF REDEMPTION FOR TAX SALE DEED (REF. O.C.G.A. § 48-4-45, 46) Take notice that: The right to redeem the following described property, to wit will expire and be forever foreclosed and barred as of five o'clock (5 p.m.) on December 10, 2026, or 30 days after legal service of the Notice pursuant to OCGA 48-4-45 et seq., whichever date is later: ALL THAT TRACT OR PARCEL OF LAND LYING AND BEING IN THE 112TH GMD OF HANCOCK COUNTY, GEORGIA, IN THE VILLAGE OF MAYFIELD, CONTAINING 2.63 ACRES, MORE OR LESS, AS SHOWN ON THE PLAT OF SURVEY MADE BY T. LARRY RACHELS, R.L.S. #1730, DATED OCTOBER 21, 1981, AND RECORDED IN PLAT BOOK 11, PAGE 62, OFFICE OF HANCOCK COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT, THE METES, BOUNDS, COURSES, AND DISTANCES OF SAID PLAT BEING INCORPORATED HEREIN BY SPECIFIC REFERENCES FOR A MORE COMPLETE DESCRIPTION. That property known as 111 MAYFIELD CHURCH LN, according to the present system of numbering homes and having tax parcel identification number 249016. The tax deed to which this notice relates is dated December 5, 2023, and is recorded in the Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court of Hancock County, Georgia in Deed Book 606 Page 63. The property may be redeemed on or before the time and date stated above by payment of the redemption price as fixed and provided by law to the undersigned at the following address: RAYAN GRANT c/o John Ayoub Esq. Ayoub, Mansour & Bryant, LLC 675 Seminole Avenue, Suite 301 Atlanta, Georgia 30307 404.892.2599 Please be governed accordingly. October 28, November 4, 11, 18, 2026	hereby provide the summaries of the proposed constitutional amendments that will appear on the November 3, 2026, general election ballot for consideration by the people of Georgia (short captions are those adopted by the Constitutional Amendments Publication Board): - 1 - Increases the maximum qualifying acreage for assessment and taxation as bona fide conservation use property. House Resolution No. 32 Ga. L. 2025, p. 1081 () YES () NO Shall the Constitution of Georgia, for the purpose of protecting family farmland, be amended so as to increase the maximum acreage to qualify for assessment and taxation as a bona fide conservation use property from 2,000 acres to 4,000 acres?" Summary This proposal increases the maximum acreage to qualify for assessment and taxation as a bona fide conservation use property from 2,000 acres to 4,000 acres. It amends Article VII, Section I, Paragraph III of the Georgia Constitution, relating to uniformity, classification of property, assessment of agricultural land, and	utilities, by revising subparagraph (e)(1). A copy of this entire proposed constitutional amendment is on file in the office of the judge of the probate court and is available for public inspection. - 2 - Provides for the nonpartisan election of all probate court judges. House Resolution No. 251 Ga. L. 2026, p. 1110 () YES () NO Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to require that all probate court judges be elected in nonpartisan elections?" Summary This proposal provides that all probate judges shall be elected in nonpartisan elections. It amends Article VI, Section VII, Paragraph I of the Georgia Constitution, relating to selection and term of office of judges, by revising subparagraph (a). A copy of this entire proposed constitutional amendment is on file in the office of the judge of the probate court and is available for public inspection. - 3 - Authorizes creation of Georgia Next Generation 9-1-1 Fund for 9-1-1 systems expansion, maintenance, and operation.	House Resolution No. 1243 Ga. L. 2026, p. 1109 () YES () NO Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended so as to authorize the General Assembly to dedicate certain existing revenues, including revenues reallocated by law, to a nonlapsing fund to be used exclusively for the expansion, maintenance, and operation of emergency 9-1-1 systems in this state?" Summary This proposal authorizes the General Assembly to provide by general law for the creation of the Georgia Next Generation 9-1-1 Fund. It amends Article III, Section IX, Paragraph VI of the Georgia Constitution, relating to appropriations to be for specific sums, by adding a new subparagraph (s). A copy of this entire proposed constitutional amendment is on file in the office of the judge of the probate court and is available for public inspection. October 14, 21, 28, 2026
PETITION TO BE APPOINTED H26-048 IN THE PROBATE COURT OF HANCOCK COUNTY STATE OF GEORGIA IN RE: ESTATE OF CRYSTAL ELAYNE GREENE,	PETITION FOR NAME CHANGE H26-053 SUPERIOR COURT OF HANCOCK COUNTY STATE OF GEORGIA Civil Action Filing No. 2026-SU-CV-099 NOTICE OF PETITION TO CHANGE NAME GEORGIA, Hancock County Notice is hereby given that Princess Curry, the undersigned, filed his petition to the Superior Court of Hancock, County, Georgia on the 22nd day of October 2026, praying for a name change from Princess Curry to Princess Copeland. Notice is hereby given pursuant to law to any interested or affected party to appear in said Court and to file objections to such name change. Objections must be filed with said Court within 30 days of the filing of said petition. This 22nd day of October 2026. /s/Princess Curry Petitioner October 28, November 4, 11, 18, 2026	PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS H26-043 SUMMARIES OF PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS Pursuant to requirements of the Georgia Constitution, Attorney General Christopher Carr, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, and Legislative Counsel Betsy Howerton	Rest Easy Paramedic 33192 ...continued from page 1 toll, low relative pay compared to similar professions, causing EMS professionals to work with multiple agencies, along with the heavy physical demands that the job requires and it is apparent why the turnover is so high. A combination of cumulative emotional and psychological trauma, dealing with death and suffering far and above what the general public sees, severe operational burnout, chronic sleep deprivation, and a workplace culture that sometimes views seeking help as a weakness. First responders run toward the events that others try to flee - severe accidents, traumatic child and elder abuse, sudden fatalities, natural disasters, massive casualty events - with an empathy and fearlessness that most of us lack. Emergencies are back to back with little to no time to decompress. The human brain needs time to process shock but EMS professionals rarely have that luxury of time. PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), anxiety, and emotional numbing are often the result. Add to that the irregular shifts, emotional exhaustion, and inability for family members, and other "non-EMS" individuals to understand what goes on in a "normal" shift, often leaves EMS professionals feeling "cut off". Because they are viewed as the professional who gives the answers and brings calm to the worst situations- the questions and help needed for depression that often accompany severe insomnia, chronic back and joint injuries, and the other unique problems of first responders- often go unnoticed or unanswered. The National Institute of Health calls it a "Silent Crisis" as so many EMS professionals fall victim to elevated suicide rates versus seeking help in a profession that often treats mental health among its	members as a weakness. EVERY DAY first responders are there when people are experiencing the worst and most difficult moments of their lives. While they are strenuously trained to address medical emergencies professionally, they are human with brief periods of hopelessness themselves. EMS professionals encounter people going through the very worst experiences- severe trauma, grief, chronic illness, sudden death, substance abuse, results of financial hardships, hopelessness, and mental health challenges every single day. And for a great number of those people, that EMS encounter may be the first opportunity to disclose thoughts of self harm or suicide;but, what happens when its the profesional that is feeling those thoughts? The heavy weight of constantly caring for others, being the calming and steady response to the trauma and suffering, can take its toll over time. But recognizing suicidal ideation or thought processes is not easy or straightforward. Warning signs are most often subtle or unrecognizable- - talking of feeling like a burden - expressions of feeling trapped - withdrawal from family, friends, and events - increased alcohol or substance use - significant mood changes - recent loss, trauma, or major life stressors - previous suicide attempts Remember, asking about suicide attempts does not increase risk. Often asking compassionate and direct questions can provide relief and open a door to meaningful intervention. Listening without judgement, remaining calm, and communicating that help is always available can go a long way to reducing feelings of isolation and depression.	But seeking support isn't always easy and suicide prevention isn't about having all of the answers. Sometimes the person in crisis is a patient, a co-worker, a friend or a family member, and one conversation can sometimes make the difference - sometimes. Sometimes the person in crisis is the happiest person in the room, the one others look to for strength and calm, the one who makes everyone else laugh and feel heard - and they give no warning at all. DeShawn Friers was a first responder, a paramedic, and a firefighter. He worked with Atrium Health Navicent EMS, Hancock County EMS, Washington County EMS, and also served with Jones County Fire, and Monroe County Emergency Services - a combined fire and EMS agency. At his service, he was remembered by his friends and colleagues for "his compassion, sense of humor, infectious laugh, and willingness to help others". Let's make certain that Shawn's story helps us recognize the signs of others in need; that no one else has to suffer in silence. SHAWN DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO HELPING OTHERS, AND THAT IS WHAT DEFINES HIM, not the manner of his death. It is up to us to continue his legacy of caring. "REST EASY PARAMEDIC 33192, WE WILL TAKE THE STREETS FROM HERE."

Wake Up People!

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years and would move the working part of the quarry about one mile further away from the Shoals Road community that is contesting it.

The Shoals Road group has been fighting a privately owned 4.5 mile railroad spur that they incorrectly say that Heidelberg Materials is partnering with. The group has gained national attention on their fight with the private railroad that is trying to use eminent domain to get part of the land to build the railroad on; however, Heidelberg is not a partner in the venture, but has said that they would be interested in being a customer of the line if it is built. This would reduce heavy equipment wear and tear on local roadways - one of the many demands that the group has placed on the existing quarry.

The spur would connect existing quarries to the CSX Transportation mainline near Highway 16, Sparta. The Tarbuton owned Sandersville Railroad Company is the potential builder that is using eminent domain in order to secure part of the necessary land for which they have offered to pay the Shoals Road group fair market value. The question is whether a privately owned company can, by Georgia law, utilize eminent domain. The appeal is currently pending before the Georgia Supreme Court (June 15, 2026 Case # S26C1583).

The Shoals Road group has made a number of demands on the quarry of Heidelberg Materials - including cutting down on noise, closing operations for special holidays- including Juneteenth and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day- cutting down on heavy machinery on local roads, institution of a 35 mph speed limit around the quarry, advance notice of blasting days, and more restrictive hours of operations, as well as many others.

Janet Smith, spokesperson of the Shoals Road group stated in the October 14 Hancock County Commissioners meeting that the 35mph speed limit was the "only" concession that Heidelberg had made to the group; however, records show that each of the requested demands was agreed to.

The new expansion plan includes not only moving the working part of the quarry a mile further away from the Shoals Road community, but the building of noise blocking berms twice the height and length requested. The other demands were also agreed to. The Shoals Road group

has been very vocal in their desire to shut down the expansion - but is the commissioners job to listen to the most vocal or to pay attention to the best interests of the community as a whole?

Not only does the facility offer a number of employment opportunities for

locals, pay much needed taxes, but they contribute to a number of local charities and organizations - the Sparta Police Department, City of Sparta's "It Takes a Village" Event, Toy and Clothing Drives, 4H, Hancock County Schools, Annual Christmas Tree Lighting, and it is safe to say that neither the Boy's and Girls Club or the Pinetree Festival would be in existence without the generous donations from Heidelberg Materials.

The facility is also looking at a number of additional employment opportunities with the expansion and have a good history of hiring locally. Not only would the expansion bring more jobs to our economically challenged community, but the added expansion, new equipment, and increased output of product would generate more tax dollars being paid to the county - experts put the amount at about \$400,000 or more.

Commissioner Charles Jackson, one of the few officials that has toured the Heidelberg Materials facility to observe day to day functions, including blasting, asked the assembled commissioners and citizens -

"What are we going to do, y'all? Are we going to run everything away? That hole has been here for 37 years". He went on to say,

"Are we going to partner and work along with the people here in Hancock County or that want to come here, or are we going to continue to complain? Maybe we can put something in place here that might be better for Hancock County " than what we have now.

He went on to remind people that without the tax income from industries like Heidelberg that taxes for the county's budget would have to come from somewhere and property taxes were the most likely source.

"We all have a date.... and we all are going to have to give an accounting."

"Wake up people. I want to do the best for Hancock County, I'm gonna listen, but let's all pray on how we can make Hancock County better."

Isn't a two year wait on a decision long enough? Wake up people.



Making A Difference - By Hand

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So far this year Stephanie and "Mama Yia Yia" have contributed \$513 to the department - all profits they have earned selling their items at our local Market. Everything from hand knit pom-pommed tobaggons and matching vests, lap blankets, pet sweaters, kitchen towels, aprons, bibs, and so much more - all modestly priced to make great stocking stuffers, hostess gifts, or just a little surprise for someone you love. So when you buy an item from Stephanie at Our Sparta FRESH Farmers Market*, not only are you helping our community's

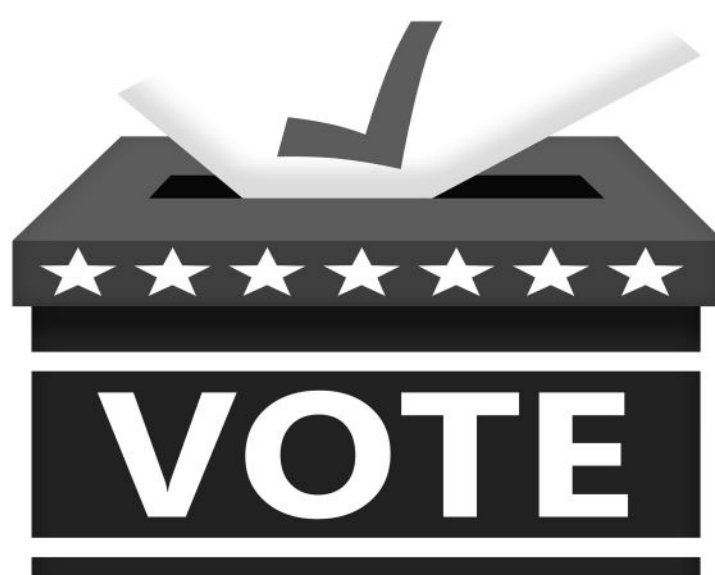
local economy, but you are also helping to keep a mischievous 92 year old out of trouble, and you are making a contribution to our local volunteer fire and rescue as well!

By making each and every purchase, you are helping Stephanie and her mom make a difference - by hand.

*Our Sparta FRESH Farmers Market at Shoots & Spores Mushroom Factory on the corner where Elm Street becomes Powellton Avenue and crosses over Hamilton in historic Downtown Sparta from 1-5 pm (or while supplies last) every FRIDAY through November. Come join the fun!

Another Look at SPLOST

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ered by ESPLOST), or private or nonprofit building projects.

Hancock County has put a SPLOST referendum on the upcoming November 3 general election ballot. This follows a previous SPLOST measure that was narrowly passed in November 2024 with a 53.9% approval vote.

The new proposed SPLOST as defined by the Hancock County Board of Commissioners and reviewed in the October 1, 2026 public town hall meeting is as follows-

- County Inmate Housing Unit - "Constructing a new local inmate housing facility to improve security, inmate management, and eliminate exterior exposure risks".

- Parks and Recreation - "local recreational resources to provide more activities and safe opportunities for children".

- Road Maintenance- "Funding resurfacing and repairs to ensure safer roads, stronger inter-county connections, and better local travel".

- City of Sparta - "Public works equipment specifically allocated for the City of Sparta".

\$4million is to be collected over a period of 6 years with \$3.5 million in general obligation bonds to be released immediately to fund the beforementioned capital projects. This allows the county to borrow funds upfront to kickstart the major construction projects immediately, using the incoming 1% SPLOST sales tax revenue to pay down the debt overtime.

BUT WHAT HAPPENS IF THE FULL AMOUNT IS NOT RAISED BY THE 1% SALES TAX IN THE 6 YEAR TIMEFRAME?

General obligation bonds are backed by the "Full faith and credit" of the county and if the SPLOST revenue is insufficient to make the bond payment, then Hancock County is LEGALLY OBLIGATED TO RAISE LOCAL PROPERTY TAXES to bridge the financial gap and pay off the remaining bond debt.

CAN HANCOCK COUNTY AFFORD THIS SPLOST? Let's look at the math.

At the time of this arti-

cle, Hancock County overall tax bills are lower than the State and National averages with lower local home values, but with the recent new assessments doubling, tripling, and more the previous values, this will no longer be the case.

Currently, the 1% sales tax in Hancock County generates approximately \$666,667 annually. The simple math is-

6 years X \$666,667/ year = \$4,000,002

or just \$2 over the \$4million bond amount.

Since Hancock County has a relatively small local retail base, with total retail sales being historically averaging only about \$27.39million annually, the county relies heavily on these types of "penny" sales taxes, without which capital improvements would have to be entirely funded by local property taxes. How does our sales tax revenue - with few opportunities to increase retail sales- compare to our surrounding neighbors?

Baldwin County averages \$922.5 million in retail sales or more than 34 times higher than Hancock, Greene averages \$538.59 million (20 times higher), Putnam averages \$321.13 million (12 times higher) - only tiny Taliaferro County with the smallest population in Georgia takes in less than Hancock County- of our nearby neighbors- at 2.3 times less or \$11.78 million.

Because Hancock County lacks any real community spending centers, its retail sales per capita are far below our neighboring counties of Putnam (\$14,003) and Greene (\$26,781) annually - compared at just \$3,254/year.

This results in a large

amount of "retail leakage" with a very high percentage of residents driving to Milledgeville (Baldwin Co.) and Greensboro (Greene Co.) to buy groceries, clothing, and other necessities instead of spending to buy them locally in our limited businesses.

Why is all of this important? Because Hancock County's native retail is so small, (\$27.39 million annually) and residents choose to spend their money OUTSIDE the county, it would take DECADES to raise the millions of dollars for major infrastructure through organic sales. Yes, we do have new small businesses opening on a regular basis - much more than in years past; but, the unexpected closing of even one of these with the loss of employee payroll of 10-20 individuals can have a huge impact on our, already small, retail sales tax revenue. Without concentrated and continuous local support, our small businesses cannot adequately contribute to the needed sales tax revenue. And for those that claim that we need to be trying to entice a "big box" merchant to boost those numbers, first realize that our population, retail sales per capita, annual household income, and past retail history is NOWHERE NEAR acceptable for the exacting standards for ANY retail big box stores.

Local experts on SPLOST revenue have called the millions being asked for in the upcoming SPLOST an "unattainable amount of money".

So what is the community to do with a detention facility so derelict that there are constant threats of inmate lawsuits based on conditions? Maybe we first need to ask- What

happened to the previous over \$6 million already earmarked for maintenance, repairs, and improvements on the facility and the huge increase that was granted in the detention center's budget by our current Board of Commissioners and Chairman?

Emails sent by residents asking those very questions got very limited answers from the Hancock County Board of Commissioners and the Chairman indicating that they "needed more time to go over the numbers with accountants". Follow up emails asking for the results of those meetings have resulted in silence with no results from the Hancock County elected officials - and requested audits not being available.

The last official audit was done in 2024. The Board of Commissioners asked for an extension on the 2025 audit, which was granted, but has not, as yet, been made available. Residents who have contacted the State of Georgia about the lack of timely responses by the County are still waiting on a response from the State.

"We need people INVOLVED, asking questions, demanding answers, to avoid being continuously railroaded" said a resident in a recent HCPOA meeting. The Hancock County Property Owners Association -HCPOA is a citizens' organization, "created by citizens to help hold our local government accountable". On their website - HCPOA.net- they regularly ask questions of our local elected officials, and post their answers - whenever they are available.

Remembering what Maxine Waters once said " We have a responsibility as elected officials to good public policy in the best interest of ALL of the people" - we have to ask, as a county already reeling from recent tax hikes -

Can we afford this SPLOST?

Is it good for ALL the people?

Your vote on November 3* will make that decision.

*(Early voting runs Oct. 13 through 30).

LOCAL MATTERS