

[https://thebrunswicknews.com/news/local\\_news/glynn-county-democrats-host-splost-2021-forum/article\\_c24a9835-564c-514f-b9b3-ad59a01158a0.html](https://thebrunswicknews.com/news/local_news/glynn-county-democrats-host-splost-2021-forum/article_c24a9835-564c-514f-b9b3-ad59a01158a0.html)

## Glynn County Democrats host SPLOST 2021 forum

By TAYLOR COOPER [tcooper@thebrunswicknews.com](mailto:tcooper@thebrunswicknews.com)

Mar 2, 2021

Glynn County Commissioner Allen Booker, whose district is mostly comprised of the city of Brunswick, said at a Monday forum that it would be “dangerous” and morally questionable to vote against Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax 2021.

“This is a very important issue to the county but in particular to my district, which encompasses most of the city of Brunswick and the Black community,” Booker said to a panel of five at a virtual public SPLOST 2021 forum hosted by the Glynn County Democratic Party. Party Chairwoman Julie Jordan moderated the event.

His district is usually one of the last to get the funding it needs, he said, pointing to the recently completed L Street drainage and reconstruction project.

“That hasn’t happened since I was a kid living in the neighborhood over 50 years ago,” Booker said. “The SPLOST dollars are important, that’s why I support it.”

Booker called it a “luxury” to live in a district that doesn’t need SPLOST funds. The city government has a tax base suppressed by a lot of tax-exempt properties, including the College of Coastal Georgia, churches and Glynn County government buildings and courts.

“The city needs the money, therefore the Black community needs it,” Booker said. “It’s a third of the city budget. If it doesn’t pass, that means the city doesn’t get a third of its budget for critical infrastructure projects.”

Booker said no SPLOST list is going to make everyone happy, but making decisions that aren’t popular is part of leadership. Commissioners are elected to lead, they make a lot of decisions on projects that many may not agree with.

He wasn’t entirely happy with the SPLOST as a whole, but it included enough money concentrated on the areas that need it to earn his support.

Early voting in the SPLOST 2021 special election is ongoing until March 12.

On the ballot are two referendums, one to ratify SPLOST 2021 and another to declare the Oglethorpe Conference Center an infeasible project, thereby providing an avenue to return to the taxpayers \$2.5 million in SPLOST IV and V proceeds that remain allocated for the project.

Glynn County commissioners propose implementing a 1 percent sales tax for three years, which would generate a total of \$68.5 million split among the county, city of Brunswick, Brunswick-Glynn County Joint Water and Sewer Commission and Jekyll Island Authority for infrastructure and capital projects.

Registered voters can cast a ballot at three locations from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays at the Office Park Building at 1815 Gloucester St. in Brunswick; the Ballard Community Building at 30 Nimitz Drive; and on St. Simons Island at Glynn County Fire Station No. 2, 1929 Demere Road.

All polling precincts will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on March 16.

Rachael Thompson, executive director of the Glynn Environmental Coalition, was among the dissenting voices on the panel.

“Our main concerns from an environmental standpoint are the fact that we are in a climate crisis at the moment,” Thompson said. “We feel the Glynn County Commission could have done a better job to prioritize climate resilience projects for inclusion on the project list, and those projects would help the residents of Brunswick and the greater county.”

She said the GEC was also against a proposed overhaul of the intersection of Frederica and Sea Island roads on St. Simons Island, which may encroach on Twitty Park. The GEC took Glynn County to court in 2016 to protect the park.

She was not alone.

“My concern for SPLOST 2021 is process and concessions,” said A Better Glynn co-founder Bobby Henderson. “I think the process was rushed, I don’t think a lot of planning when into deciding how to spend such a large amount of funds coming into the county.”

Concessions will also be important, he said, to make sure the county is spending the money equitably to service the parts of the county that need it most.

“I think that the money is divided in a way that does not project equity,” Henderson said. “Because 60 percent of the revenue is generated on the mainland and so it should be spent on the mainland.”

Commissioner David O’Quinn backed Booker up at the forum, disputing the idea that the SPLOST 2021 list was hurried. The county spent a lot of time in 2019 and 2020 working on a list for SPLOST 2020, which was tabled after the COVID-19 pandemic reached Georgia early last year. SPLOST 2021 was actually downsized from that, he said.

“When some say well, you’ve kind of rushed this list, I’d say we’ve been working on it quite some time,” O’Quinn said.

He also said the county is spending its cut of the \$68.5 million equitably. Roughly 22 percent of the county’s share is going to St. Simons, O’Quinn explained.

“Maybe some districts get more than others, but maybe there’s other ways to address these projects,” he said.

He also suggested the project list does address some environmental issues in the form of stormwater drainage projects in the city of Brunswick and sewer repairs on the Brunswick-Glynn County Joint Water and Sewer Commission’s project list.

“SPLOST is not a perfect vehicle and I know not everyone is going to like it,” O’Quinn said. “If you look at the totality of what it brings to our community and how it improves the lives of so many people, I think it’s important.”

Tim McDermott, a member of the local Democratic party familiar with the county's handling of SPLOST 2016, said he had a lot of concerns about whether the county could responsibly manage another SPLOST.

The county is not doing enough legwork in advance to get the most accurate estimates on projects, essentially guessing as to the cost of many of them, and some have simply been poorly managed.

On that subject, Henderson said his career is in project management. He felt the commission was working backward when estimating the cost of projects.

"It feels out of order, giving a raw estimate of round figures and then projects come in with change orders that change the cost of a project, it doesn't feel as if the projects have been drilled down into to eliminate waste and narrow the project to not the specific dollar but at least a range of cost the public can trust is being budgeted correctly," Henderson said.

O'Quinn acknowledged the estimates are typically not perfect. Multiple things cause estimates to be wrong, including conditions at worksites not matching expectations, inflation, and "project creep," or gradual additions to the scope until the final product is much larger than the original concept.

"The reality is there probably will be some projects that don't come in under budget, but we have tried to take every step we could based on the concepts to come up with some ideas on pricing," O'Quinn said.

Booker added that the people involved are professionals who do plenty of legwork to develop good estimates, but some costs can't be accounted for in advance. He used the SPLOST 2016 Altama Connector improvement project as an example. In that instance, the county had to negotiate with several national corporations to buy the needed right-of-way. Negotiations are still ongoing.

Henderson also asked whether the need for a SPLOST was indicative of a failure of the county to upkeep infrastructure.

Both conceded that may be the case for the county's portion of District 5, Booker's district, but that the city has effectively spent what little it has over the years.

The panel also took some questions from the public.

In response to a question about oversight, O'Quinn said he believed the commission would create an oversight committee somewhat modified from the SPLOST 2016 oversight committee. Further, a dedicated SPLOST project manager would report directly to the oversight committee.

Another asked why the county could not use reserves to pay for some of the projects.

O'Quinn said the commission would not likely spend more than \$5 million to \$6 million of that to maintain enough money to respond to emergencies, like a hurricane. The county does have some undesignated money in its general fund, Booker said, which may be used for some infrastructure work.

One touched on the intersection of Frederica Road and Sea Island Road, for which some commissioners favor the construction of a roundabout. The citizen asked why the commission included such a pork-belly project in SPLOST when there are greater needs in drainage and sewer utilities.

Booker said he did not consider the project wasteful, as a roundabout would greatly improve safety. O'Quinn said the project may not necessarily be a roundabout, but an upgrade to the current traffic signal intersection.

Voters can check their registration status or find their polling place by visiting [glynncounty.org/elections](http://glynncounty.org/elections). Absentee ballot applications can be found at [www.mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov) or the Glynn County Board of Elections office, 1815 Gloucester St. in Brunswick. The elections office can be reached at 912-554-7060.

Because this is a new election cycle, all voters must submit new mail-in ballot requests.

Here is a breakdown of projects to be funded by the proposed SPLOST 2021:

## **Glynn County**

### **\$37.8 million**

- Access and right-of-way improvements at intersection of Frederica Road and Sea Island Road – \$6 million
- Access and right-of-way improvements at intersection of Glyngo Parkway and Canal Road – \$5 million
- Glyngo Parkway improvements – \$2 million

- St. Simons Gateway project – \$750,000
- Road repaving – \$3 million
- Somersby Pointe drainage improvements – \$1.3 million
- Perry Lane Road drainage improvements – \$1.5 million
- St. Simons Island Village drainage improvements – \$1 million
- Fire Station No. 5 reconstruction at Brunswick Golden Isles Airport – \$3.5 million
- Judicial system space needs project – \$2 million
- Blythe Island Regional Park improvements – \$1.5 million
- Coast Guard Beach Park improvements – \$2.5 million
- North Glynn Park improvements – \$1 million
- Selden Park improvements – \$750,000
- North Harrington sidewalk – \$450,000
- Old Cypress Mill Road sidewalk – \$515,800
- Fourth Street sidewalk – \$300,000
- I-95 gateway signage – \$800,000
- Wayfinding signage – \$300,000
- St. Simons Airport airfield safety and pavement improvements – \$800,000
- Brunswick Golden Isles Airport compass calibration pad and access taxilane – \$300,000
- Economic development site development and improvements – \$2.5 million

## **Brunswick-Glynn County Water and Sewer Commission**

### **\$15 million**

- Sewer line rehabilitation gravity sewers – \$1.75 million
- Dunbar Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant rehabilitation – \$3.25 million
- Transite water main replacements – \$1.5 million
- Arco area service extension – \$3.5 million
- Community Road area service extension – \$2.5 million
- Exit 42 water tower – \$2.5 million

## **Jekyll Island Authority**

### **\$2.5 million**

- Clam Creek Pier access and safety improvements – \$1 million
- Bike path paving – \$1.5 million

## **City of Brunswick**

### **\$13.23 million**

- Mill and pave various streets – \$3.54 million
- Sidewalk replacement and upgrade – \$300,000
- Storm drainage improvements – \$4.25 million
- Norwich Street redevelopment – \$140,000
- Downtown parking and infrastructure – \$300,000
- City building improvements – \$300,000
- Trails and boardwalks – \$450,000
- Public Works capital vehicles and equipment – \$600,000

- Replacement of police vehicles – \$350,000
- Replacement of fire ladder truck – \$1.1 million
- Ritz Theater renovation – \$300,000
- Mary Ross Park development project – \$200,000
- R. Lawrence Youth Center – \$750,000
- R. Harris Senior Center improvements – \$150,000
- Other park improvements – \$250,000
- Information technology integrated software – \$250,000

---

Taylor Cooper