

Splost V...from Page 1A

at the end of March 2021. The county expects to collect a total of \$24 million under SPLOST IV.

The sales tax in Union County is 7 percent, or 7 cents on the dollar, and it is made up of a statewide sales tax of 4

percent; a Local Option Sales Tax, or LOST, of 1 percent; a SPLOST of 1 percent; and an Educational-SPLOST of 1 percent.

All but five counties in the state collect LOST revenues, which actually help to offset a rise in property taxes, as LOST monies go into calculating a county's rollback millage rate.

And all but three counties in the state collect SPLOST revenues. SPLOST collections also help to keep property taxes down, said Paris, as the tax burden is placed more fairly upon the shoulders of everyone who purchases goods and services in Union County, including out-of-town visitors.

If it passes in the Nov. 6 General Election, SPLOST V will pick up right where SPLOST IV leaves off, and it, too, is estimated to collect \$24 million over a six-year term.

As previously reported, Paris likes to put each successive SPLOST referendum to vote early, because if it should fail in 2020 – the year before it is set to continue on from SPLOST IV – he would have to wait at least 12 months before asking people to vote for it again. This would cause

a disruption in continuous SPLOST collections.

Holding the vote early, however, would allow the commissioner more time to pitch the tax to residents should the referendum fail.

Normally, holding the vote a year early would situate the SPLOST V referendum in 2019.

But this is problematic, said Paris, because there are no other elections in 2019, meaning the county would have to schedule a special election for the sole purpose of holding the SPLOST vote.

Scheduling a SPLOST-dedicated special election would likely cost the county upwards of \$10,000 or more, according to the Union County Registrar's Office.

So, to save money while giving the SPLOST an extra chance at passing, Paris has decided to piggyback off this year's gubernatorial election in November.

The City of Blairsville will receive 8.5 percent of SPLOST V collections if it passes, and this money will go toward the city's own list of capital outlay projects.

Union County Government accepts a 1 percent admin fee on all collections before distributing the city's portion of the SPLOST each month.

Concerning the SPLOST V project list, the county has estimated its project costs to be \$21.96 million, and the City of Blairsville project estimates are \$2.04 million, bringing total SPLOST V project costs to balance with projected collections of \$24 million.

Making up that \$21.96 million for county projects are \$3.63 million in county administrative facilities

upgrades, improvements, equipment and vehicles; \$130,000 in library upgrades, improvements and equipment; \$5 million in public safety facilities, vehicles and equipment; \$7 million in roads, streets and bridges; \$5 million in parks and recreation upgrades, improvements, facilities, equipment and vehicles; \$200,000 in solid waste upgrades, improvements and equipment; and \$1 million in economic development facilities and land acquisition.

As for the city, it plans to spend \$150,000 on administration buildings and equipment; \$300,000 on public safety equipment and vehicles; \$440,000 on public works vehicles, equipment, roads and sidewalks; and \$1.15 million on water and sewer system improvements.

"You try to make (project lists) general," said Paris. "You've got to be specific enough to comply with the law, but you also want them general enough, because we're talking about starting this thing in 2021, and then, it won't finish until 2027."

"There is no way that you're going to know everything that you need to do without changing it for the next, basically, eight years. So, the generalization of the categories gives you some (flexibility)."

Another consideration for voters will be the county's

ability to borrow up to \$10 million in SPLOST-backed debt, which is part of the upcoming referendum.

"All SPLOSTs always have a section in there where we can impose a debt on the county to prepay for some of the SPLOST projects," said Paris. "The idea is that we can borrow up to \$10 million, and that's part of the ballot question."

"The only reason we would do that is if it's a project that we felt like having it available to the public sooner would be worthwhile paying an interest rate."

"Normally, you're looking at only 1 to 2 percent, (where) 3 percent would be a high interest rate, unless things change. So, this just gives an option and it lays out the schedule of six-year payback at \$1.5 million up to \$1.7 million per year."

As mentioned above, county projects eligible for funding by SPLOST dollars include new buildings, parking lots, and repairs to existing facilities; heat and air equipment; new county vehicles, such as motor graders, sheriff's vehicles, fire engines, etc.; real estate purchases; recreation; road paving and more.

"Just on paving alone, we spend over \$1 million out of our SPLOST, which would require a 17 percent property

tax (increase) just for the paving part if we didn't do anything else with the money," said Paris in his July 24 meeting.

SPLOST dollars have been paid for a number of past projects enjoyed by county residents, including the Union County Public Library, the Union County Saddle Club Arena, the Union County Farmers Market and Canning Plant, the Byron Herbert Reece Farm & Heritage Center, the Suches Community Center, etc.

Projects still in the works under SPLOST IV are upcoming upgrades to the E-911 Center, including radios and other equipment, and Paris plans to expand the county's recreational capabilities even further.

The commissioner is hopeful that construction can begin this year on a double gymnasium, weather pending, "and a new pavilion at Meeks Park will be started this year," said Paris on July 24. "And in the future, (an amphitheater) at Meeks Park, we're hoping for that maybe in about three years from now."

The Union County SPLOST should not be confused with the Union County School System's five-year ESPLOST, which passed with 70 percent support earlier this year in the May 22 General Primary and Nonpartisan Elections.

Nix...from Page 1A

Cousins with his brothers Homer, Clayton and Cranford, and many people have joined Nix to perform as the Country Cousins over the years.

Quite a few of his "Country Cousins" actually have been cousins, and though some have just been friends, he's treated all like family.

From square dances to concerts to family reunions, Nix has done it all, and he's loved every minute of it.

And this Saturday will be a special occasion for Nix as he performs on the Reece Farm, because Nix is one of the few people still around who actually met the poet farmer Byron Herbert Reece.

"I remember him well, and in my mind, I can just tell the tone of his voice," said Nix. "He come to our church one time. He was a lay leader, and he come and preached. He told about his poetry and read a lot of it. We was young, then."

"I liked it, but I would really enjoy it better if I could meet him right now. I'd tell him that he amounted to more than he ever thought he would, and I enjoy it now better than I did then because I understand it better. If he could see his place fixed up like that, he'd really like that."

Nix performs a variety of classic country tunes, after which Sam Ensley will entertain those gathered with his latest songs called "Brasstown Boy" and "I'm Going Back to Where I Came From," both of which celebrate the life of the late Gov. Zell Miller.

Rumor has it that Nix may even collaborate with Winfred and Patsy on some gospel songs that Saturday, and maybe with Sam Ensley on some country songs, so folks will want to make sure and attend for some extra special musical happenings.

People looking to hear

Millage...

from Page 1A

Lamar Paris will be looking to set their millage rates this month so that Knight can get started collecting taxes as soon as possible.

"Taxes for real estate and business personal property are normally due in Union County by Dec. 20 of each year," according to UnionGATax.com, the official website of Tax Commissioner Lee Knight. "Mobile/modular homes are due May 15 of each year, and motor vehicles are due based on the owner's birthday."

"After the due date, for real estate and business personal property, interest at the rate of 1 percent per month is charged. If the property taxes remain unpaid, the tax commissioner has the right and responsibility to levy on the property for non-payment."

The City of Blairsville also levies taxes on the assessed value of 40 percent on properties located within city limits, though the city bills and collects its own property taxes.

After press time Monday, the Blairsville City Council was expected to set its millage rate to 1.945 mills on Tuesday, Aug. 7. This is the same tax rate as 2017 and will result in a total levy of \$123,530. That's \$1,054 less than 2017 total property tax collections in Blairsville.

a good story afterward should ask Nix about his brother Clayton, who befriended Elvis in the Army, or how his brother Cranford played with The Supremes, or just about

music in general throughout the mountains.

The Reece Farm is located one mile north of Vogel State Park on US 129.

Farmers Market celebrates community with free 'mater sandwiches'



Market volunteers preparing 'mater sandwiches'

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

The Union County Farmers Market handed out hundreds of locally sourced tomato sandwiches on Saturday, August 4, during the annual Community Appreciation Day event.

Market volunteers, including the folks who help run the Canning Plant, cut countless tomatoes to make free sandwiches for everyone who wanted one that Saturday.

The Farmers Market celebrates Community Appreciation Day annually by handing out the tomatoes sandwiches to attendees of the market.

Be sure to check out the Farmers Market on August 11 to help Mickey Cummings and Kristy Peney observe National Farmers Market Week.

The Farmers Market is located at 148 Old Smokey Road in Blairsville.