



COBB | SPLOST

\$103M expected for parks, recreation

By Ricky Leroux
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MARIETTA — If Cobb voters approve extending the county's special one percent sales tax, about \$103 million of the \$750 million the county expects to raise will be spent on improving parks, community centers and libraries in the region.

According to county documents, the county's parks and other public services facilities receive more than six million visits each year. Many of the buildings and athletic fields in the county are more than 30 years old, and normal budgeting does not include the repairs and renovations many of these facilities need, according to county documents.

"Parks and libraries are things that are part of what makes every county great," said Justin O'Dell, a co-chair of Secure Cobb's Future, an advocacy group attempting to educate voters on the benefits of the special purpose local option sales tax.

The SPLOST will expire on Dec. 31, 2015, unless voters approve a six-year extension on Nov. 4.

O'Dell said having these facilities helps attract businesses to Cobb because quality of life is something business owners consider before making a decision to relocate.

"They're looking at quality of life, and public services is a measure of your quality of life," O'Dell said.

Commissioner Lisa Cupid concurred, saying while having low taxes and strong school systems are important, many people are also looking for a high quality of life in a place to live.

SPLOST, 3A



Justin O'Dell

SCHOOLS | WALTON



Walton High School junior Sage Lovell and her father, Joseph Lovell, at their home in east Cobb. Sage Lovell is believed to be the first transgender student elected to a homecoming court in the state of Georgia. / Staff-Jeff Stanton

'I'm so flattered'

Transgender student believed first in state to be elected to homecoming court



By Emily Boorstein
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EAST COBB — In what is believed to be a first for a Georgia high school, a transgender student has been elected to Walton High School's homecoming court.

Sage Lovell, 16, was one of about 50 other girls in the junior class who were first nominated for homecoming court. The junior class then elected her and three other young women to serve on the court. She is not eligible for homecoming queen since that position is only offered to seniors.

Sage said she is excited she was chosen, and has received support from many of her classmates, who came up to her and told her they were going to vote for her.

"I'm so flattered to be representing my school, to be, like, able to, like, just represent my entire junior class," she said.

Sage explained what it means to be transgender: "Transgender means anyone whose gender that they identify in their brain is different from the sexual organs they are given through birth."

She said she is the only openly transgender woman at Walton, but there are others at the school who identify as something other than how they were born.

When she needs to use the restroom, Sage said there are two facilities on Walton's campus that have a single toilet and doors that lock that have been dubbed the unofficial "gender neutral"

ELECTED, 10A

COBB | UTILITIES

Board to vote on increasing streetlight fee

By Ricky Leroux
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MARIETTA — The Cobb Board of Commissioners on Tuesday will consider raising the fee county citizens pay for streetlights in residential areas by 50 cents, which officials say is necessary due to rising electricity costs.

According to the agenda for Tuesday's meeting, the \$3.50 per month fee approximately 116,000 residents pay for streetlights needs to be increased to \$4 effective Jan. 1, 2015, to "generate sufficient revenue to sustain anticipated annual operations" due to increased rates charged by power companies.

The residents who live in the county's approximately 4,000 Street Light Districts are charged the fee on their water bill. The fee is assessed on the water bill because it is the only bill the county sends to residents on a monthly basis, county officials said.

FEE, 7A

POLITICS | GUBERNATORIAL RACE

Governor rocks into Marietta

Deal shares thoughts on Ebola, immigration and Common Core

By Jon Gillooly
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MARIETTA — Gov. Nathan Deal, who is fighting for a second term in office, sat down with the MDJ this week to share his thoughts on the Ebola virus, traffic congestion, illegal immigration and Common Core.

There are three candidates in the Nov. 4 race: Deal, Democrat Jason Carter and Libertarian Andrew Hunt. But Deal believes he can win without a runoff, despite Hunt being in the race.

"I think so," he said. "I think people understand that that's a wasted vote, and I don't think

DEAL, 6A



Gov. Nathan Deal stopped by The Brumby Chair Company in downtown Marietta to outline his focus and give his opinion for the future of Georgia and Cobb County as he talked with the editorial board of the MDJ on Friday. / Staff-Kelly J. Huff

SPLOST

From 1A

"It consists of very basic elements of a community: safety, sidewalks, places for recreation. All of those help to make a strong community," Cupid said.

Additionally, people who live outside the county use these public facilities, O'Dell said, so using the consumption-based SPLOST to fund improvements spreads the cost to anyone who spends time in the county.

"The SPLOST is a beautiful way to make those who are using some of these facilities help chip in to pay for the expansion, improvement and repair of those facilities, rather than Cobb taxpayers footing 100 percent of the bill," O'Dell said.

O'Dell said he heard from some residents who do not use these county facilities and don't believe the SPLOST projects are worthwhile.

He said he tells them these projects improve property values and the ability for the county to attract businesses and new residents, so they still benefit even if they don't use them.

Of the about \$103 million the county plans to spend on public services, about \$77.5 million will be used for park improvements and community centers, \$23.2 million will go toward the county's library system and \$2.2 million will be spent on facilities for senior citizens, which includes a \$2.16 million expansion of the North Cobb Senior Center off Old Highway 41.

Countywide parks projects included in the proposed 2016 SPLOST include installing synthetic turf on rectangular fields used for soccer, lacrosse or football in several county parks.

The county will spend \$2.6 million at the Hubert Soccer Complex off Cobb Parkway in Acworth, \$1 million at Terrell Mill Park in Marietta and \$2.6 million at the Mud Creek Soccer Complex off Barrett Parkway in Powder Springs to install the new synthetic turf.

"Our programs have grown so large that the ability to keep natural turf up is very hard to do," Canon said. "Any time it rains — any kind of moisture on the ground — we have to cancel the programs. What artificial turf does for us is give us the ability that rain doesn't bother us at all."

PARKS

The majority of the county's park system was built in the 1960s and '70s, officials with the county's parks department said. Many of these facilities are no longer meeting the demands of the increased population in the county and SPLOST funding allows for capital improvements not available through normal general fund budgets.

According to parks and recreation officials, more than 98 percent of current capital project funding for parks and recreation comes from the existing 2011 SPLOST.

The biggest park project the county hopes to accomplish using the proposed SPLOST is a build out of the master plan for Jim Miller Park on Callaway Road near Windy Hill Road.

Canon said the project, which has an \$18.2 million price tag, includes completing infrastructure improvements — such as upgrades to electrical, water, sewer and communications systems — which were started using 2011 SPLOST funds.

Much of the park's infrastructure is residential grade and will be replaced with commercial grade systems, Canon said, allowing the park to handle increased demand during

big events.

Buildings A and B, built in about 1970, will be torn down and one large exhibit hall building will be built in the park's southern parking lot, Canon said.

"It will be an exhibit hall where we can host the circus and the fair and the things they do inside, but will also be able to do anything from dog shows to quilt shows — any special event you can imagine," he said.

Moving the exhibit hall will allow the park spread out in order to host multiple events at the same time, Canon added.

The concession plaza will also be torn down and replaced.

Twelve new concession stalls will be built in their place, which can be rented out by local vendors, used in conjunction with fairs and circuses the park hosts or used for events such as Taste of Atlanta, Canon said.

"The plaza just needs to be modernized; it's seen better days," Canon said.

Additionally, Canon said there will be new restroom facilities built at the park. Canon said the existing restrooms were not built to accommodate some of the bigger events taking place at the park.

The county will also use revenue from the proposed SPLOST for improvements to Cobb's "passive" parks, Canon said, such as Price Park on Morris Hill Road in Kennesaw, the Green Meadows Preserve on Dallas Highway in Marietta and Mabry Park on Sandy Plains Road in Marietta.

The passive parks were purchased using a 2008 bond program, Canon said, but there hasn't been any funding available to develop the parks.

Mabry Park will receive about \$4.3 million for walking trails, a community garden and a playground, Canon said. There will also be a treehouse built for educational environmental programs, he said.

The Green Meadows Preserve will get \$1.85 million, and Canon said

the walking trails there will be expanded, a historic house on the property will be renovated and parking areas will be added.

Canon said Price Park will receive \$500,000 for a pavilion, restrooms and improvements to existing walking trails and parking areas.

RECREATION CENTERS

There are six recreation centers in the county, Canon said, the county hopes to build three more using the revenue from the proposed SPLOST.

The three new facilities — one near Osborne High School in south Cobb costing \$10 million, one in Acworth costing \$8.5 million and one in Kennesaw costing \$4.6 million — will have gymnasiums for basketball and volleyball, breakout rooms for arts and crafts or educational programs, game rooms and spaces available to rent for community meetings.

Canon said these centers also have after-school and day camp programs. The exact locations and sizes of the new facilities have not yet been determined, Canon said, as the parks and recreation department is waiting to see whether the SPLOST measure passes before continuing the design process.

Cupid, who represents the area around Osborne High School, said a recreation center is needed there to relieve demand on the high school.

"I think not only will it help to alleviate that burden, it will just help start to begin a sense of place for that community," she said. "You know, I think whenever communities don't have a gathering spot — a place for leisure — you just wonder, where do people have a release? Where do they have an opportunity to convene? Those are vital to having a strong community."

Acworth and Kennesaw will operate the recreation centers planned to be built in those cities, Canon said, and will also contribute to

funding the projects.

LIBRARIES

The county also plans to use SPLOST funds to build two new libraries and upgrade three others.

One of the new libraries will consolidate the Acworth and Kennesaw libraries into a new location between the two cities.

Jackie McMorris, director of public services for the county, said the two libraries were built in the early to mid-1960s in those cities' downtown areas and have outgrown their facilities.

"Those are very small libraries," she said. "So besides the fact that we couldn't expand or do anything with the technology limitations there, we recognized that you have two libraries there in very close proximity that have basically been outgrown by the constituents and the citizens who live around them and use them."

The county will spend about \$8.6 million to construct a new regional library serving both cities. The county has already spent \$800,000 on a six-acre tract on Blue Springs Road, near North Cobb High School in Kennesaw, where it hopes to build the new library if the SPLOST is approved.

The Board of Commissioners approved the purchase in August with a 4-0 vote, with Commissioner JoAnn

Birrell absent.

McMorris said she hopes the new library will have broadband Internet access and Wi-Fi for patrons. She said the improved technology will allow library-goers to use their smartphones and tablets to be more independent in the use of the library.

Using their smartphones, patrons would be able to access catalogs to help them find books on their own, although library staff will still be available to help if needed, McMorris said.

Commissioner Helen Goreham, who represents both Acworth and Kennesaw on the Board of Commissioners, said she has been lobbying for the consolidation for years.

"We've been working on the project for six years now, and I'm very excited it is a project for this upcoming SPLOST," she said. "It allows the county to provide a facility that is updated and current and larger for the community," she said.

For about the same cost of running the two smaller libraries, Goreham said the county will be able to operate the larger, consolidated library.

County officials are

still discussing the fate of the current Acworth and Kennesaw libraries, Goreham said, but most likely, the county will sell the land the libraries are built on and put the revenue generated from the sales back into the library system.

The other new library the county plans to build will replace the East Marietta Library on Lower Roswell Road near South Marietta Parkway.

McMorris said the new \$8.6 million facility will be built at the same location and be a joint-use facility with Parks and Recreation.

The library, to be between 25,000 to 30,000 square feet in size, will have performance space and a gallery for local artists to display their work, McMorris said.

The new library will be state of the art, McMorris said. For example, the county is hoping to have 3D printing technology there, she said.

The Switzer Library, at the corner of Roswell and Alexander streets, will get about \$2.8 million in upgrades and renovations, and the Gritters Library, located in Shaw Park in Marietta, will be expanded from 8,000 to 16,000 square feet, McMorris said.

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Thursday, October 16th, 2014

Mark your calendars & join us for dinner and discussion with award winning novelist, Emily Griffin

This is the fourth annual gala for the Library Foundation whose purpose is to provide funds and build awareness for the library system's programs and services. The Foundation, currently celebrating its 11th year, has funded numerous projects that have enriched the 16 Cobb libraries, including portable computer labs, eGovernment Stations, early learning stations for children and special books and multimedia materials for the Summer Reading Program as well as support of inaugural Teen Center programs and G.E.M.S. (Girls in Engineering, Math and Science) summer program.

Speaker and Award Recipient: Emily Giffin, award-winning author of 7 New York Times best selling novels. "Something Borrowed" made its way to the big screen with the movie starring Kate Hudson, and several of her follow-up novels have been optioned for development in Hollywood. This summer's "The One and Only" shot immediately to #1 on the NYT list.

Event Details: The evening starts with a reception followed by Buffet, Cocktails, Auction. Gala chairs are Atlanta Braves Executive Vice President Mike Plant and his wife, Mary. Rob Garcia, COO, Bank of North Georgia will be emcee.



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