



Office of the Mayor Savannah, Georgia

Van R. Johnson, II
Mayor

November 17, 2022

VIA HAND DELIVERY

Chester A. Ellis, Chairman
Ms. Helen L. Stone
Mr. Larry "Gator" Rivers
Mr. Bobby Lockett
Mr. Patrick Farrell
Ms. Tonya Milton
Mr. Aaron "Adot" Whitley
Mr. Dean Kicklighter
Mr. Kenneth A. Adams
Chatham County Board of Commissioners
124 Bull Street
Savannah, GA 31401

Re: Proposal Regarding Distribution of LOST Proceeds

Dear Mr. Chairman and Honorable Commission Members:

Our Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) agreements have provided the taxpayers of this county reliable property tax stabilization for more than 40 years. For the last 10 years, under our current LOST agreement, the Municipalities and the County have fostered unprecedented growth, economic opportunity, and prosperity in our community—all while keeping property taxes as low as possible because of LOST.

This agreement expires on December 31, 2022, just a few short weeks away. Over the last several weeks, I have heard from dozens of residents and taxpayers who are worried about rising property tax rates, and who are frustrated that their local governments cannot come together to find a workable solution. "What's wrong with the current allocation?" they ask. "Why is my government playing games with my property tax rates?" Frankly, I agree with our residents.

To allow LOST to expire or to otherwise force an inequitable distribution that would hike taxes for nearly 70% of our residents, would equate to public malfeasance. Especially since we have a formula that has worked for the last 40 years. That is why I am calling on the County Commission to join the eight Municipalities of Chatham County and renew our current LOST allocation of 23% to Chatham County and 77% to be divided amongst the eight municipalities for the next 10 years.

Yes, based on the criteria laid out by state law, the data shows that the municipalities should receive an ever-greater percentage in the new agreement. However, it is more important that we come to a fair agreement now than risk raising taxes on our residents by squabbling over a few more percentage points. Likewise, we have researched the impacts of the County's offer of a 50%/50% split, which represents a dramatic shift in LOST allocations. We have shown clearly that this offer would lead to devastating tax increases for the vast majority of county residents.

Even the ACCG, the association for county governments in Georgia, acknowledged earlier this year that, "typical LOST percentages only change by 2-3% every ten years" for that very reason.


It is time that we put down our egos, erase away the hard lines we have drawn in the sand and come together to renew our LOST agreement. We are raising more sales tax revenues than ever before—nearly 40% of which comes from visitors, not residents. Our tax digests are growing as well. There is no need to see differently about an allocation that has not changed more than a few percentage points over the last 40 years of revitalization, growth, and greater prosperity.

The cities of this county stand ready to sign a renewed LOST agreement that will continue those positive trends and keep taxes low for all residents for the next 10 years. Let's sign an agreement now that reflects an allocation of 23% for Chatham County and 77% to be divided among the eight municipalities.

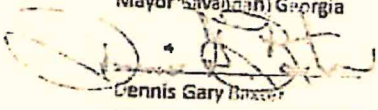
Let's listen to the wisdom of our residents. Let's meet their demand of us get this straightforward agreement done. Our residents cannot afford it if we do not, and neither can we.

Sincerely,

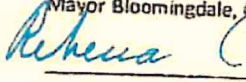
Mayors of All Cities in Chatham County



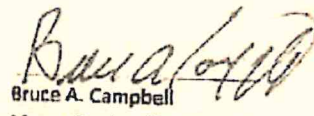
Van R. Johnson
Mayor Savannah, Georgia



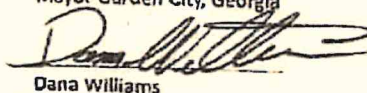
Dennis Gary Buxner
Mayor Bloomingdale, Georgia




Rebecca Benton
Mayor Pooler, Georgia



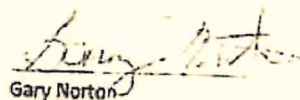
Bruce A. Campbell
Mayor Garden City, Georgia



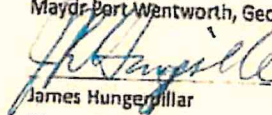
Dana Williams
Mayor Thunderbolt, Georgia



Shirley Sessions
Mayor Tybee Island Georgia



Gary Norton
Mayor Port Wentworth, Georgia



James Hungerpillar
Mayor Vernonburg, Georgia