



MEDIA RELEASE

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919 N Broad Street • Brooksville, FL 34601

School board seeks legal action against county

Brooksville – Today, at the 10 AM special meeting, the Hernando School Board voted to approve initiating a lawsuit against the Hernando Board of County Commission (BOCC) in regard to the Referendum for the Surtax Ballot. Last week, the BOCC rejected the school district's request to place the renewal of the half-cent sales tax on the 2022 ballot.

Although the current half-cent sales tax will not expire until 2025, the county's rapid growth has placed greater urgency on the school district's need to prepare for that growth. Recently, the county approved 11,000 new housing units, bringing an estimated 3,700 new students to district schools. As a result, the school district is asking for the renewal of the half-cent sales tax to be placed on the 2022 ballot to ensure scheduled school projects such as roof and HVAC replacement will have the funding to be completed on time.

"We must be proactive," Superintendent John Stratton said. "Waiting until 2024 to go before the voters will put us behind schedule in preparing for growth, causing over-crowded schools. Several of our schools are close to or at capacity now."

It is important to note that placing the renewal on the 2022 ballot does not mean there is an additional sales tax. Instead, 2022 voters will have the opportunity to approve the renewal of the tax to start in January 2026, after the current half-cent sales tax sunsets.

The school district will present a plan for growth and a list of capital needs to the voters. Should voters approve the renewal in 2022, the school district would be assured that large projects currently in the 5 year work plan would go uninterrupted and, when needed, the district could bond against sales tax funds to build a new school. "We will certainly need to build schools to accommodate growth and, without adequate impact fees, the sales tax is the next best way to do that. There is no other revenue stream available to build schools. It takes at least three years to build a school and those 3,700 students will be here well before then," the superintendent said.

In comments before the BOCC, Gregg Laskoski, Chairman of the Half-Cent Sales Tax Accountability, encouraged the BOCC to be a partner with the school district in developing a plan of "cooperative and managed growth." While the BOCC believes they have the authority to block the district's request, he asked, "Is that the right thing to do? I trust the voters, and I hope you do the same."

"I did not hear a logical reason to object to our request," Superintendent Stratton said. "In fact, the Commissioners complimented our fiscal integrity with our half-cent funds. However, we can not kick the can down the road when it comes to having appropriate facilities for our students. That is not in the best interest of our community."