



## Half-Cent Sales Tax Frequently Asked Questions

### **When does the current half-cent sales tax expire?**

- It expires in 2025. It passed in 2015 for 10 years with the approval of 62% of the voters.

### **Why not wait until the general election in 2024 to place it on the ballot?**

- Waiting until 2024 will increase costs for interest rates and construction materials. The district must plan ahead for the growth that is coming. The county has already approved 11,000 new homes and more are in planning stages. By asking the voters in 2022, the district has the flexibility to receive bonds at lower interest and build schools or additions when needed, rather than failing to meet the needs of growth. The district cannot bond against an upcoming election in 2024. It can only bond against an approved renewal.

### **Why not just build as the money comes in rather than bond and borrow?**

- The pace of growth is faster than the pace of dollars coming in. We can't start and stop the flow of projects to match the pace of students coming to our schools. The county has approved new developments with very low impact fees so the money is necessary to provide appropriate learning and services for all students. The sales tax is the next best option that doesn't over-burden property owners.

### **Why can't you just live within your means?**

- This is a renewal, not a new tax. Our students, teachers and staff deserve to work in places where the air conditioners work, the roofs don't leak, the classrooms are updated for current academic needs including arts and athletic facilities that are competitive with neighboring schools. This helps with recruiting teachers and staff to work here.

### **If the election is in 2024, it's still a year before the half-cent expires and 2022 is three years before it expires. Why do you need so much time?**

- The state requires a 5-year facility plan. If the district doesn't know whether the voters approved the renewal until 2024, it will be guess-work on what can be done in the years beyond 2025. Buildings take many years to finance, design and build. If we wait until 2024, we'll be behind the growth curve, resulting in over-crowded classrooms and buses.

### **How much money does the half-penny generate?**

- It averages about \$13 million annually.

### **Where does the money go?**

- It only goes to facility projects, such as air conditioner replacements, renovations, new roofs and additional classrooms to accommodate growth. It cannot be spent on things like salaries or programs.

### **How do we know the money was spent as promised?**

- A Citizens Oversight Committee reviews all expenditures, along with traditional audits and the school board and shares their review with public at school board meetings and posted on the district website.

### **Why was it needed?**

- In 2008, the state reduced its contribution to capital projects and it was never restored. The only way to make up for that is through a voter-approved local sales tax.

### **Do we have to share that money?**

- No, every penny collected in Hernando County stays in Hernando County.

### **How much is paid for by visitors and tourists?**

- About 30% is paid by non-residents.

### **How much does a half-cent sales tax cost the average consumer?**

- About \$2-3 a month. A family of four with a median income of \$56,000 will spend about \$6 a month. It cost about a dime for every \$20 you spend. Sales over \$10,000 are exempt from the tax, as is food and medicine.

### **Do charter schools get any of this money?**

- Charter schools receive a proportionate share, based upon student enrollment, as prescribed by state statutes.

### **How do improved school buildings contribute to student achievement?**

- The research is clear. Quality school buildings contribute to higher student achievement. Flexible settings support project-based work. They perform better when noise is reduced and there's plenty of ventilation of clean, cool air. Finally, when students feel safe they are better able to focus on learning. (Center for Evaluation and Education Analysis)

### **Why not use money from the Florida Lottery instead?**

- The lottery provides just a tiny portion of Hernando's operating budget and it's not allowed to be used on school building maintenance or construction. The state mandates where it goes, mostly to Bright Futures scholarships and higher education.

### **Why should residents who don't have children in schools support this renewal?**

- Good schools help everyone. They boost economic development when businesses know their families are well supported. They boost property values when it has good, modern schools. They boost community pride as schools are also used for community events. Everyone received community support when they were in school, so everyone should support their schools now. It is a community-wide responsibility.

