

11. PUBLIC AWARENESS FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX

As you're aware, the question regarding the food and beverage tax will be on the ballot for Southampton County voters on November 3 (please see sample ballot attached). Notwithstanding local news coverage at the time the decision was made to place the matter on the ballot, many Southampton County voters are uninformed about this issue.

Section 24.2-687 of the Code of Virginia authorizes localities to distribute certain information on referendum elections. Among other things, the county has the authority to prepare and print an explanation (of not more than 500 words) for the referendum question which may be published in the local paper and distributed to voters at the polling places on election day.

In addition, a county may disseminate neutral materials concerning the referendum (i.e., direct mail) but the materials cannot advocate the passage or defeat of the referendum question. The cost of producing and mailing an informational "flyer" to roughly 12,000 registered voters is approximately \$5,500.

As we discussed in April, based on an estimate by our Commissioner of the Revenue, a 4% meals tax in Southampton County would likely generate between \$150,000 and \$160,000 annually, the equivalent of 1.1¢ on the real estate tax rate.

I am open to your direction in how aggressive you wish to be with regard to public awareness.

MOTION REQUIRED:

If the Board is so inclined, a motion is required directing the County Administrator how to proceed with public awareness of the upcoming referendum election.