



Section 4

Essay Question # 2

Provide two examples of how the Chamber activated its grassroots network in the last two years and discuss the outcomes of the efforts.

County Sign Ordinance Position

Sign Ordinance for Business Growth: The Chamber was asked to review the County Commission's revisions to the sign ordinance and provide feedback to its business members. Upon review, the Government Affairs Committee, and thus the Board, discovered many aspects that would hinder new business growth, impose additional costs on current business owners, and create an unfair business climate between new and existing businesses due to sign size. As a result, the Chamber publicly opposed the proposed ordinance and the Planning and Zoning Commission postponed approval for further review.

Although the Commission subsequently made a few minor revisions to the ordinance based on input from the Chamber, they did not incorporate many of the recommendations. Due to unresolved major concerns regarding adequate signage size on buildings, entrances, and windows, the Chamber once again publicly opposed the revised version of the proposed ordinance. After additional consideration, the County ultimately agreed with many of the Chamber's recommendations resulting in a win-win for both the County government and the business community. This was well-received by Chamber members, the business community, and especially sign companies. In addition, the Planning Commission saw a significant reduction in variance filings by sign companies. (Please see attached documentation of this six month process.)

Passage of the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax

The Columbia County School District is the #1 economic driver in the county. The school district is the 15th largest in the state, is ranked in the top 10 in the state, and is the largest employer in the county. Columbia County funds from E-SPLOST have been used to build 16 schools in the last 19 years, with renewal of the referendum every five years. However, due to the influx of many new residents, education regarding E-SPLOST was necessary. The Columbia County Board of Education Chair and Superintendent asked the Chamber Board of Directors to support E-SPLOST through the Chamber and the new Chamber PAC. The Chamber Board and PAC Board agreed based upon the above reasons, and due to the plans to build a career academy as the newest high school directly benefiting our business community.

Parallel efforts were made by both the Chamber and the Chamber PAC with the Chamber President, Vice President, and PAC Chairman leading efforts to advance the following Action and Marketing Plan:

The Gov't Affairs Committee, PAC Task Force, and Executive Members of the Chamber and PAC Board were provided the below key talking points with many of them attending the presentations or chamber events.

1. Columbia County Chamber represents nearly 1000 businesses advocates for economic growth in the Greater Augusta region.
2. Chamber Board of Directors and Chamber PAC Board of Directors supports the continuation of the ESPLOST because the school system is the number 1 economic driver in our county.
3. These funds can only be spent on new schools, expansion, or renovation of schools, or land purchases, technology and buses. The cost for twenty buses alone run 1.8 million and the system has over 235 in the fleet.
4. Before ESPLOST in 1997, the Columbia County Board of Education built 15 schools in 41 years, with two high schools carrying a 30 year mortgage.
5. Once ESPLOST passed in 1997, 16 schools have been built in 19 years with basically no mortgage, debit free.
6. E- SPLOST is the fairest tax possible to fund schools because everyone pays including those who visit or shop in Columbia County with payment in proportion to spending.
7. The Chamber and a Chamber PAC request support on the March 19 vote for the continuation of this sales tax and encourage contributions to the PAC to support the promotion of this message. Early voting starts Feb.25th.
8. Yard signs are available at the chamber office.

Action Plan -Things to Do – ESPLOST VOTE

1. Work with Chamber Government Affairs Committee and created a PAC Task Force for seed money, manual labor for signs, connections to various industry groups.
2. Create an educational flyer with a brand to be used for the campaign.
3. Create a PAC donation flyer
4. Raise Funds through task force group –Goal of \$10,000 or higher
5. Order yard signs 18” x 24” – Quantity 250
6. Order 4’x4’x signs – Quantity 50
7. Create a sign distribution plan:
 2 yard signs at every precinct and distributed on March 18th, placed by task force
 4 x 4 – distributed at shopping centers, neighborhoods, etc.
 Yard signs given at presentations, through chamber meetings, and blitz

Marketing Plan

1. Press Release and weekly email blasts
2. Buzz on Biz article – Feb/ March 2019
3. Eleven Presentations were made to: Organization / Date.
 CC Kiwanis Club (Jan.29), CC Rotary Club (Feb.6), Martinez /Evans Rotary Club (March 8)
 CC Republican Party (Jan. 26), CC Coalition for Quality Gov’t (Jan. 24), Builders Assoc. (Feb. 11), Realtors Assoc. (Feb.13), Harlem Merchants Assoc. (March 4), Grovetown Lions Club (March 12)
 Grovetown City Council Meeting – (March 11)
 Columbia County Community Connections (March 19)
4. TV Station – WJBF – Channel 6th on Feb. 20 at noon.
5. TV Station- Thrive on Channel 12 interview
6. Radio station – Interview with Austin Roads (Feb.20)
7. Radio station – Interview with John Patrick – (Feb. 25)
8. Purchase front page ad sticker for newspaper for March 19th Election Day
9. Interview with Joe Hotchkiss in Augusta Chronicle –Sunday’s opinion page Feb. 10th
10. Article in Columbia County News-Times – March 6th –Front page story

11. Plugged the vote at Annual Banquet – State of the Chamber Address and Chamber After Hours
12. Shared numerous times Educational Video created by the CC BOE on our social video
13. Social Media campaign – Ads on PAC FB / Chamber promotion - boosted post.
14. Create a ¼ and a ½ page advertisement for paper and run on March 6th and 13th in Columbia County News Times and Sunday Chronicle on March 10th and 17th
15. Grovetown Sign Blitz on March 6th – visit numerous members and non-members in efforts to distribute political yard signs. This is the newest high growth area.

SUCCESS: VOTE PASSED BY 83.73%. The Chamber and Chamber PAC were recognized by the Columbia County Board of Education Meeting on March 26, 2019. A proclamation was presented along with a plaque in appreciation for leading the effort. A PAC Task Force Appreciation Luncheon was held for the donors and the committee.

(See attached supporting documents)