Vehicle Tax Relief — With a Price Tag

While South Carolina’s real property taxes are comparatively low, our vehicles are taxed at one of the highest rates in the nation. In the November 7 general election and referendum, South Carolina voters will have an opportunity to lower their car taxes. A favorable vote will initiate a constitutional amendment gradually lowering the current 10.50% assessment ratio on personal vehicles to 6%, resulting in more than a 40% decrease in personal vehicle taxes. The downside is that a decrease in vehicle tax revenues will likely be made up by a subsequent increase in real property taxes, fees or reduced services.

In June 1999, the General Assembly enacted Act 130, which proposed a new class of personal property including personal cars and pickup trucks. The new classification will be assessed at a 9.75% rate in its first year and will be gradually reduced by .75% per year until the assessment ratio equals 6% in its sixth year and thereafter. Other forms of personal property such as commercial vehicles, boats and aircraft will continue to be assessed at a rate of 10.50%.

For the changes to take effect, a constitutional amendment must be approved by voters. The ballot question will read as follows:

"Must Section 1(8), Article X of the Constitution of this State relating to assessment ratio on 'all other personal property,' be amended so as to establish a separate class of property consisting of personal motor vehicles which must be titled by a state or federal agency, limited to passenger motor vehicles and pickup trucks, as defined by law, which must be assessed for property tax at the rate of nine and seventy-five hundredths percent of fair market value declining in equal annual reductions over six years to a permanent rate of six percent; and to define property tax year as property tax years beginning after 2001 or such earlier tax years as the General Assembly may provide by law? [YES] [NO]

The constitutional amendment is expected to be approved in November and sent to the General Assembly in January for ratification. The lower assessments could take effect as early as tax year 2002. By the sixth year, the reduction could result in budget shortfalls for some jurisdictions. For nearly (Tax continued on page 4)

In Memory of Mary McCann

Appalachian COG staff member Mary McCann passed away unexpectedly August 31, 2000. A native of Chicago, Illinois, Mary came to work with the Council of Governments in 1977. She served as Program Coordinator in the COG's Aging Program, and was known throughout South Carolina's aging program network for her cheerfulness, kindness, and generosity. Mary was a loyal employee and friend to all of us. She will truly be missed by all who knew her.

Activities of the Pendleton District Workforce Investment

Since becoming a part of the Appalachian Council of Governments July 1, the Workforce Investment Board and staff have been very busy. On August 15, 2000, we received a letter stating that the conditional certification previously granted by the state had been removed and the Pendleton District Workforce Investment Board is a fully certified (WIB continued on page 4)
Pickens County Developing First Industrial Park

Pickens County is developing a 331-acre industrial park along U.S. Highway 123 between Easley and Clemson. The Pickens County Industrial Park, designed to accommodate light industrial development, will be the first publicly owned park in the county. The estimated cost to develop the park is $6.6 million.

The Appalachian Council of Governments’ Grant Services staff assisted Pickens County with the submission of applications to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for a total of $500,000 to assist with the construction of roads, curbs and gutters, and storm drainage facilities within the park.

In the past, Pickens County has been hampered in its efforts to attract new industry by the lack of adequate infrastructure. However, with ACOG’s assistance, the Eighteen Mile Creek Sewer Project is nearing completion after a decade of planning, securing funding, designing, and construction. Now with a new 1 million GPD wastewater treatment plant nearby, the Pickens County Industrial Park will provide attractive sites with all necessary infrastructure in place.

The driving force behind the establishment and development of the Park is Pickens County Council and the Economic Development Alliance of Pickens County, which will also be responsible for marketing the Park to business and industry. The Alliance is a public-private partnership supported by Pickens County Council, businesses, utilities, existing industry, seven cities, and four chambers of commerce. The Director of the Alliance anticipates that the Park will attract seven new businesses over the first three years, resulting in

ACOG Hires New Planner

The Appalachian Council of Governments recently hired Dan Wagner to fill the Community and Regional Planner position vacated by Cheryl Dean. Dan’s planning emphasis will be in the field of transportation planning. For the past three years, Dan has worked as a transportation planner for the City of Charleston and the Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (which is the former SCE&G transit system). Starting as an intern with the city’s Transit Division and then later elevated to the position of Transportation Planner, Dan began his career by assisting in the formation of CARTA and the subsequent transition from the city to CARTA.

Upon the formation of CARTA, Dan helped to conduct and implement a major route and major change in the hours of operation for the transit system. These were the first significant system upgrades in over 40 years. Last year, CARTA’s ridership was 3.75 million boardings. With the route changes that took effect in July 2000, there are now 23 routes that serve 8 area jurisdictions.

In 1995, Dan graduated from Newberry College with a B.A. in International Government and Commerce and Political Science. In 1997, Dan received a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Charleston (a joint University of South Carolina and University of Charleston program). Originally from Newberry, Dan is happy to return to the Upstate and looks forward to working with the staff at the

Governor Hodges Unveils “SilverCard” Prescription Drug Initiative

Governor Jim Hodges announced the SilverCard prescription drug initiative for South Carolina seniors. The $20 million prescription drug initiative was proposed in his State of the State Address.

“I’m proud that we have delivered on our promise to our seniors,” Hodges said. “From day one, seniors with SilverCard will receive a discount on their prescription drugs.”

To qualify for SilverCard benefits, seniors must be 65 years old and have resided in South Carolina for the past six months. SilverCard will benefit those seniors who have no other prescription drug insurance. The exact amount of co-payments and deductibles will be determined by the State Budget and Control Board once the enrollment period is closed.

The State Budget and Control Board is accepting SilverCard applications from seniors who meet an income requirement of $14,612 or less for a single senior, or $19,678 or less for a married couple. Priority will be given to single seniors making $12,525 or less and married couples making

(Prescription Drugs continued on page 3)
More Tax Relief — Swapping An Optional Sales Tax for A Property Tax

On November 7, South Carolina voters will be able to vote for a President and amend the South Carolina Constitution to allow counties to replace personal property taxes with a new kind of local sales tax. Voter approval of a constitutional amendment will allow a local referendum to enact a sales tax of up to 2% which will be earmarked to eliminate or reduce personal property taxes on vehicles, motorcycles, boats, boat motors, and aircraft.

The ballot question will read as follows:

"Must Section 3, Article X of the Constitution of this State, relating to property tax exemptions, be amended so as to allow the governing body of a county by ordinance to impose a sales and use tax in order to exempt all or a portion of the value of private passenger motor vehicles, motorcycles, general aviation aircraft, boats, and boat motors from property taxes levied in the county and to allow this exemption or its subsequent rescission, only pursuant to a referendum held in the county in the manner that the General Assembly provides by law? [YES] [NO]"

The amendment provides another opportunity for county residents to enact a local sales tax to generate alternative funds for property tax relief. The tax would be imposed by referendum, and could be repealed by referendum. The tax could be imposed in increments as small as one-tenth of one percent on the condition that all of the proceeds be applied to personal property tax relief. County referenda would be conducted only during general elections and if the tax were approved, would be applied beginning July of the following year.

Counties with heavy tourism or interstate traffic would likely benefit the most by being able to shift much of the tax burden to non-residents. A possible drawback to the tax would be that counties planning to raise revenue for transportation projects, capital projects, or other special projects would have a tougher time selling the taxpayers on adopting additional sales tax measures.

The details of the proposed sales tax can be found in Section 99 of the FY 2001 Budget Provisions. Contact Joe

SilverCard Fact Sheet

What: SilverCard, the South Carolina Seniors’ Prescription Drug Program.

Who Qualifies:
- Must be 65 or older
- Have lived in South Carolina for the past six months
- Have no other prescription drug insurance
- Have an income of $14,612 or less if you are single, or $19,678 or less if you are married. If you are on Medicaid, you already have prescription coverage and you are not eligible for the SilverCard (see note below for further explanation)

How to Apply: Applications will be available at local pharmacies, Councils on Aging, doctors’ offices, libraries, and local legislative delegation offices. Starting October 16, seniors may call 1-877-239-5277 for enrollment information. Applications will be accepted for all seniors starting October 16 through December 1, 2000. After December 1, additional seniors may apply once they reach their 65th birthday, meet the six-month residency requirement, or suffer a drop in income below the eligible threshold.

Qualifying seniors will be able to start using SilverCard at participating

When to Apply: Applications will be accepted starting October 16 through December 1. After that date, you may apply within 31 days of a qualifying event: turning 65, a drop in income to the levels required to get a SilverCard, or meeting the six-month residency requirement. Seniors who also lose their prescription coverage involuntarily may also apply.

When it Starts: Eligible seniors will be able to start using the SilverCard at participating pharmacies beginning January 1.

How It Will Work: With the SilverCard, eligible senior citizens will receive discounts on prescription medications up to the annual deductible, and make a co-payment for each prescription after this deductible is met.

Note: The Budget and Control Board’s Office of Insurance Services will determine the co-payments and deductible based upon how many sign up. These details will be included in plan litera-

(Prescription Drugs continued from page 2)

$16,875 or less. However all seniors that meet the higher income threshold are encouraged to apply.

SilverCard applications will be available at local pharmacies, Councils on Aging, doctors’ offices, libraries, and local legislative delegation offices. Starting October 16, seniors may call 1-877-239-5277 for enrollment information. Applications will be accepted for all seniors starting October 16 through December 1, 2000. After December 1, additional seniors may apply once they reach their 65th birthday, meet the six-month residency requirement, or suffer a drop in income below the eligible threshold.

Qualifying seniors will be able to start using SilverCard at participating
Multi-Modal Plan for South Carolina

As part of the latest ISTEA legislation, the S.C. Department of Transportation (SCDOT) is required to develop a Statewide Multi-modal Transportation Plan. Multi-modal plans examine an array of transportation needs and what systems are required to meet those needs. Issues considered range from pedestrian and biking facility needs to rail and freight needs, as well as roads and mass transit systems.

SCDOT has taken the opportunity to partner with the Councils of Governments throughout the state to examine their long-term transportation issues.

Development of the state plan will be spearheaded by each COG as they formulate regional plans. Each Council of Governments will examine projected transportation needs of residents and visitors, for business and pleasure, while also taking into account issues such as safety, land use and the environment. They will then inventory the current capacity of existing systems and their ability to meet those needs. From this study they will identify deficiencies in existing transportation systems and provide this information to the SCDOT. SCDOT will then incorporate all regional plans into one comprehensive statewide plan for South Carolina.

The ACOG will be surveying existing transportation systems and collecting data for assessing future needs through the end of this year. The regional plan will be developed early in 2001 and submitted to the SCDOT by spring of next year. SCDOT will then combine all the regional plans and complete the Statewide Multi-modal Plan by the middle of 2001. For more information on this project, please contact Steve Pelissier or Dan Wagner at ACOG's office.

ADC Approves Four Loans

The Board of Directors of the Appalachian Development Corporation (ADC) met in August and approved four loan requests.

Randolph Technology, Inc., of Townville, South Carolina, requested $150,000 for working capital and equipment. This new minority-owned company recently completed a facility at Townville and has contracts with major industries in the Upstate. The total project is $575,000, and the company expects to hire up to ten additional employees in the next two years.

Southern Fireproofing Company of Greenville County requested a loan of $100,000 for equipment and working capital. The company provides sprayed-on fire retardants for new or remodeled buildings. The total project is over $300,000, with Summit National Bank providing the majority of the financing. The company expects to hire an additional six people in the next two years.

The Cremation Society of South Carolina, a new crematorium and funeral home on Wade Hampton Boulevard in Greenville, requested $100,000. The funds are to be used to complete the renovation of the property and to provide equipment and inventory. The Bank of Travelers Rest is providing over $200,000 in funding. It is expected that the business will hire four to six people in the next two years.

The Board also approved submitting an application to the Small Business Administration for $640,000 for Palmetto State Transportation. Palmetto State Transportation is currently located just off Highway 29 in Greer. Due to increasing traffic and a need for a larger facility, the company is building a new terminal off of White Horse Road in Greenville County. New Commerce Bank is providing the primary financing of $750,000. This request was approved by the ADC Board and submitted to SBA. The SBA has also approved the

(Tax continued from page 1)

all jurisdictions, the 43% decrease in personal vehicle taxes will reduce annual revenue growth that many governments rely upon to stave off annual tax millage increases.

Act 130 and the subsequent constitutional amendment will further alter South Carolina’s already complicated classified tax assessment system. Local governments will be pressed to make up revenue losses by raising other taxes or fees, and the lower assessments will produce more of a tax “shift,” than tax “relief.” In any case, with the passage of the amendment, local government budget writers must be ready to rely a lot less

(WIB continued from page 1)

board. Since the beginning of June, the board and staff have been working on negotiations with the state on the 17 performance goals mandated in the Workforce Investment Act. The board has submitted its proposed performance goals in response to the state’s suggested goals for our area. The negotiation process should be completed soon.

A new Welfare-to-Work Contractor has been granted an award. Henkels & McCoy should have the program up and running by mid-October. They are planning to locate in Anderson.

At its next meeting on September 28, the board has planned a Strategic Planning Session. With the vision and mission statements already complete, the board’s agenda will be set.
Silver Haired Legislature Sets Legislative Priorities

Permanent elimination of the sales tax on food, establishing a Medicare pharmacy discount program, licensing and monitoring adult care facilities, increasing home- and community-based services, and expanding transportation for senior citizens are the five major issues that the South Carolina Silver Haired Legislature will focus on for the next session of the General Assembly.

Meeting at the State House in Columbia on September 12-14 for its second annual legislative session, the 72-member advocacy group debated 17 senior issues before prioritizing the five major issues to be recommended to Governor Hodges, members of the General Assembly, and the Joint Legislative Committee on Aging for action, reports Dr. Gloria Bonali, from Conway, Speaker of the S. C. Silver Haired Legislature.

The five major resolutions adopted by the Silver Haired Legislature for 2001 include:

- Reducing the sales tax on food by 1% per year until it is eliminated permanently on all food stamp eligible products (the 1% sales tax on food passed last May is temporary from January 1 to July 1, 2001);
- Enacting a Medicare Pharmacy Discount program that would require a pharmacy to charge any South Carolina resident on Medicare the same price paid by Medicaid, plus a dispensing fee;
- Strengthening regulations for licensing and monitoring of all adult residential care facilities, including nursing homes and assisted living facilities;
- Expanding the new Health Care Trust Fund to include home- and community-based services such as home-delivered meals, personal care, transportation and relief for caregivers (when the Health Care Trust Fund from tobacco settlement monies was enacted last May, funds were allocated only for prescription drugs ($20 million) and hospitals ($10 million);
- Budgeting $25 million to expand programs for transporting seniors to medical and social service appointments, essential medicine and food shopping.

and educational and social activities.

At the opening session of the three-day meeting, Governor James Hodges proclaimed “Tuesday, September 12,” as “South Carolina Silver Haired Legislature Day” and praised the group for their contributions and achievements during the past year.

Three major senior issues advocated by the Silver Haired Legislature were enacted by the General Assembly and included in the $6 billion state budget passed last May. These included establishment of the Health Care Trust Fund to receive 73 percent of the tobacco monies, enactment of a prescription drug program, and a temporary 1 percent reduction in the sales tax on food sold in grocery stores.

The South Carolina Silver Haired Legislature is made up of elected representatives from each of the state’s 46 counties. Each county has one representative and alternate for every 10,000 seniors that are 60 years of age or older, with a maximum of five representatives for any county. Delegates are elected for a two-year term and organized into ten area caucuses.

“South Carolina’s Silver Haired Legislature brings together the wisdom and experience of older South Carolinians. It is having a tremendous impact on helping identify issues, concerns and solutions for problems facing the state’s rapidly growing older population. We will not stop with presenting the resolutions adopted at our legislative session to Governor Hodges and the General Assembly, but will advocate their enactment through a series of statewide meetings and educational forums,” said Bonali.

Seniors in Missouri formed the first...
InfoMentum Launched

The S.C. Appalachian Economic Development Information System (EDIS) has a new name, new look, and even greater potential. Now known as InfoMentum, a Decision Support System for Upstate South Carolina, it is being marketed to a wider range of clients.

InfoMentum became nationally recognized in June 2000 by receiving an ACCRA award for excellence in business development research at its annual conference in Minneapolis, MN. For five years the system has been helping Upstate economic developers and utility companies recruit new industries into the region and assisting in the expansion efforts of existing industries. InfoMentum has the potential to assist a wider array of clients in the Upstate to promote and develop our region. The system will give developers, banks, real estate companies, market research firms, etc., cutting edge technology and up-to-date statistics in order to make the best decisions and remain ahead of their competition.

To promote InfoMentum, the team will be conducting two demonstrations of the system in the Council of Governments’ Board Room. The first demonstration session will take place October 11th and the second on October 12th. For more information about InfoMentum or to make a reservation for a demonstration, please call a

Calendar of Events

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 30</td>
<td>SETA Fall Training Conference, Beau Rivage, Biloxi, MS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 2</td>
<td>Aging Component Directors Meeting, 2:30 – 4:00 p.m., Council of Governments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 12</td>
<td>Summer School of Gerontology Committee Meeting, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Caring Connections, Inc., Columbia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 13</td>
<td>Regional Aging Advisory Committee Meeting (Tentative), 10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Council of Governments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 18</td>
<td>SE4A Annual Training Conference, Beau Rivage, Biloxi, MS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 25</td>
<td>COG Board of Directors Meeting, 10:30 a.m., Council Board Room.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 31</td>
<td>S. C. Conference on Aging Committee Meeting, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Caring Connections, Inc., Columbia.</td>
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VIEWPOINT

Appalachian Council of Governments
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