

House Poised to Spend Millions More on Pork Projects

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

~~File: 587~~ House this week could pass a revised version of the fiscal 2022 state budget, which includes \$1.8 billion in “new” state funding.

But the total \$32.1 billion budget version passed last week by the House Ways and Means Committee doesn’t authorize any refunds to state taxpayers.

Budget writers, however, designated millions for pet projects in the fiscal year that starts July 1.

Included, for example, is \$23.2 million in nonrecurring surplus money that would allow the S.C. Department of Natural Resources to buy, according to media reports, a 23-acre parcel on James Island. That works out to be \$1 million per acre, though there aren’t any finalized plans on how DNR would use the property – currently the site of a Catholic convent.

The Ways and Means budget version also appropriates \$8.3 million in surplus funds through the state Department of Commerce for the “Gallo Economic Development Project.” Winemaker giant Gallo plans to construct a \$400 million distribution and bottling facility in Chester County, according to media reports.

Lawmakers earlier this year passed a law – with Gov. Henry McMaster’s support – granting a special exemption that would allow Gallo to open three wine-tasting sites in the state, which critics contend would give the California-based corporation an unfair competitive advantage.

An internal House budget document said the state would “avoid bonding” for the project with the \$8 million-plus appropriation.

Other pricey line items funded with nonrecurring surplus dollars in the Ways and Means version include:

- \$19 million through the state Arts Commission for a proposed convention center in downtown Greenville. The Nerve in recent years [reported](#) about House and Senate budget earmarks for the project.
- \$7.3 million, plus another \$200,000 in recurring dollars, through the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (SCPRT) for building improvement projects at the Governor’s Mansion complex in Columbia. The Nerve in 2019 reported that SCPRT was [secretive](#) about renters of one of the publicly maintained buildings at the complex.
- \$5 million through the Arts Commission for Sumter Opera House renovations. The Nerve in recent years [reported](#) about House and Senate earmarks for the project.
- \$5 million through SCPRT for unspecified “infrastructure” projects in downtown Spartanburg.

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- \$2 million through SCPRT for the South Carolina Aquarium in Charleston.
 - \$1.5 million through SCPRT for the Charleston Visitors Center.
 - \$1.46 million through the S.C. Department of Archives and History for the "Sestercentennial Commission," created, as The Nerve previously [reported](#), to observe the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina.
 - \$1 million through SCPRT for the Florence County Civic Center.
 - \$1 million through SCPRT for the Lexington County Convention Center.

House budget writers also gave SCPRT an additional collective \$20 million for "destination specific" marketing and tourism advertising, plus another \$1.1 million to the South Carolina Association of Tourism Regions.

One of the single-biggest appropriations out of nonrecurring surplus funds is \$200 million through the state Ports Authority for planned rail yard and barge projects connected to the newly opened Leatherman Terminal – named after longtime Senate Finance Committee chairman Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence – at the Port of Charleston.

The Nerve in April [revealed](#) concerns raised by state Sen. Sandy Senn, R-Charleston, about Leatherman's proposal to fund those projects with \$550 million in taxpayer-backed bonds.

The full House initially passed its fiscal 2022 budget version on March 24; the Senate approved its state spending plan on April 29. The House Ways and Means Committee, chaired by Rep. Murrell Smith, R-Sumter, decided to draft another version based on a rosier state revenue forecast released after the initial House version was approved.

The Ways and Means' latest budget version is \$1 billion more than the full House's spending plan adopted in March.

The 124-member House could send its revised budget by Friday to the 46-member Senate. Any differences between the chambers' plans likely would be worked out in a joint conference committee. McMaster will consider whether to issue any vetoes after receiving a final legislative version.

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