

Legislative session a win for George County

By: Royce Armstrong

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This year's legislative session was a good one for George County, thanks to local legislators. "This is the third year in a row that George County has done very well in the legislative session", said Economic Development Director Ken Flanagan.

The five projects Flanagan points to are: 1) Old Highway 63 North, 2) Grain Elevator Road/River Road, 3) Barton-Basin Multi-Purpose Facility, 4) Agricola Multi-Purpose Facility, and 5) an East Wilkerson Ferry Road Project.

Two of the five grants are Gulf Coast Restore Act Funds and three are Mississippi Legislative Community Project funds. The total amount of money awarded to the county for these five projects is \$5.7 million. Specifically, the projects are as follows:

FY 2023 GULF COAST RESTORATION FUNDS REQUEST

Old Hwy 63 North- Agriculture and Agri-Tourism Accelerator

GCRF Grant (80%) \$1,599,372; County Matching (20%) \$ 399,843

This project covers approximately 3.5 miles on Old Highway 63 North in George County which has been impacted by unanticipated growth in commercial agriculture, Agri-Tourism, and population growth. This project has two goals:

1) repair/reinforce the road's foundation along with an asphalt overlay and shoulder widening with limestone gravel; 2) install new safety features to better prevent accidents between large agricultural trucks, private vehicles, and pedestrians, including: lane striping, center lane reflectors, sharp curve signage, and speed limit signs.

All construction will be performed within the existing County right-of-way. The project does not require any complex environmental permitting outside the right-of-way. There are no known issues that might delay construction once funding is approved. This project could go out for construction bids using a competitive bid process in full compliance with all local, state, and federal procurement regulations within one year of funding approval.

FY 2023 GULF COAST RESTORATION FUNDS REQUEST

Title: Grain Elevator/River Road- Rural Corridor Project

Funding Request: GCRF Grant (80%) \$1,599,906; County Matching (20%) \$ 399,977.00

Project Description:

This project will repair heavy hauling road base failures, road shoulder widening/repairs, and resurface 7.2 miles of Grain Elevator/River Road in George County experiencing a tremendous increase in traffic demands from commercial and population growth. This demand has transformed Grain Elevator Road into a rural corridor connecting Hwy. 26 and Hwy. 63. Design plans call for 1.25 asphalt overlay along with significant safety improvements, including: two-sets of bridge guard rails, road shoulders, lane striping, sharp curve signage, and speed limit signs.

All construction will be performed within the existing County right-of-way. The project does not require any complex environmental permitting outside the right-of-way. There are no known issues that might delay construction once funding is approved. This project could go out for construction bids using a competitive bid process in full compliance with all local, state, and federal procurement regulations within one year of funding approval.

FY 2023 MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATIVE COMMUNITY PROJECT REQUEST

Title: Barton-Basin Multi-Purpose Facility

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Funding Request: State Appropriation for \$1,800,000

Project Description:

District 3 is requesting state funding for the development of a Multi-Purpose & Emergency Service Facility on Highway 63 in south George County. It has become clear; George County does not have an adequately sized facility to service residents in the southern part of the County for emergency supply distributions or community drive-thru programs.

Based on pre-engineering and early design work, the Barton-Basin Multi-Purpose Facility could be completed within 12 months of the funds being allocated. This 5,000 sq. ft. facility would be added to the County's Emergency Action Plan and used as a "Staging Point" before a hurricane or as a "Point-of-Distribution" immediately following a severe storm or emergency event.

FY 2023 MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATIVE COMMUNITY PROJECT REQUEST

Title: Agricola Multi-Purpose Facility

Funding Request: State Appropriation for \$400,000

Project Description:

Construction and building material inflation in 2022 pushed the overall cost for the Agricola Facility over budget before engineering and designed could even be completed. The County immediate began re-designing the project to lower cost but still could not keep pace with increasing prices. The County is request additional construction funds to be paired with 2022 State funds to complete this needed project.

FY 2023 MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATIVE COMMUNITY PROJECT REQUEST

Title: East Wilkerson Ferry Road Proposal

Funding Request: State Appropriation for \$300,000

Project Description:

East Wilkerson Ferry Road provides direct access for residents and guests to the scenic Pascagoula River for boating, fishing, and hiking through Mississippi Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Park (MDWFP) facilities. This roadway was originally part of Hwy. 26 but now is a County roadway. East Wilkerson Ferry Road still joins to a major "rural road corridor" in George County connecting current MS Highway 26 and MS Highway 63.

The first stage will repair, level, and resurface 3.1 miles of the East Wilkerson Ferry Road into MDWFP property. The second stage will convert and upgrade 1.4 miles of a semi-compacted dirt road to a fully paved two-lane roadway with safety signage. "This was a tremendous third year in a row as funding goes," Flanagan said. "I think the Board is very pleased with our legislative effort, both in the work that we did to get to this point and with what our delegates did."