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Charleston County's Mark Clark tax referendum found few pockets of support. Here's where.

BY DAVID SLADE DSLADAE@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

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Interstate 526, the Mark Clark Expressway, ends at U.S. Highway 17 in West Ashley. A Charleston County half-cent sales tax referendum was aimed at extending the road across Johns Island, but voters overwhelmingly rejected it.

FILE/GRACE BEAHM ALFORD/STAFF

The Mark Clark Extension has long been promoted as the best chance to relieve traffic on Johns Island. But the referendum to fund that road failed to win a single precinct on the island.

It wasn't an isolated rejection.

Voters countywide sent the Charleston County sales tax referendum down in [a crushing defeat](#), with more than 61 percent opposed.

In many areas — Johns Island, James Island, Mount Pleasant, Seabrook Island, the Charleston peninsula and others — the referendum didn't pass in even one precinct.

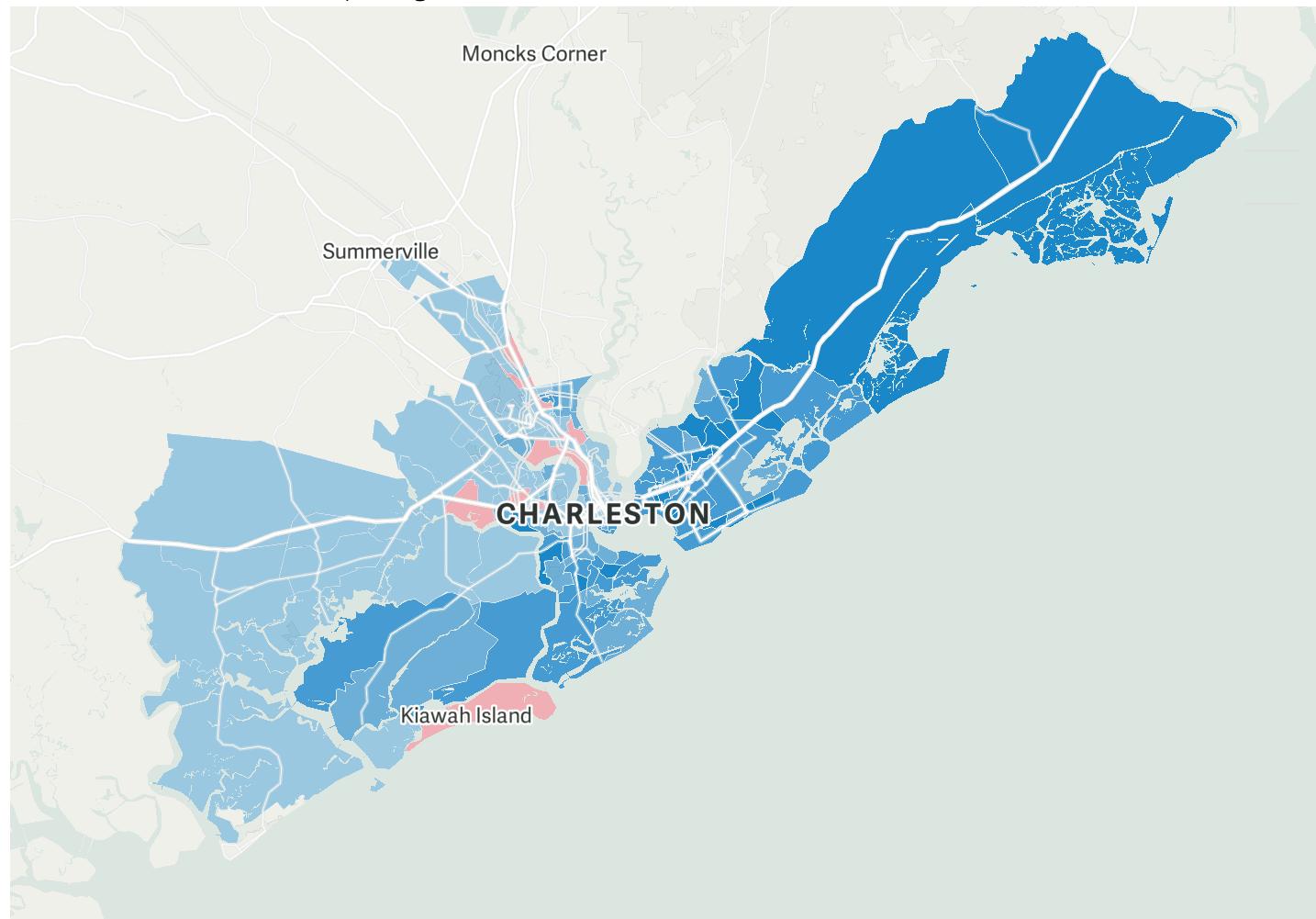
Opponents say that should be the end of [the Mark Clark Extension](#), which would carry Interstate 526 from West Ashley to Johns and James islands as a lower-speed parkway.

HOW CHARLESTON COUNTY VOTED ON THE MARK CLARK TAX

Asked to vote yes or no on a half-percent sales tax to raise \$5.4 billion, primarily to fund the Mark Clark Extension road project, Charleston County voters overwhelmingly voted no. Just 11 of 182 voting precincts supported the referendum.

Hover or click on a precinct to learn more.

All votes: No Yes Reporting issues



5 mi

TOTAL VOTES EARLY VOTES ELECTION DAY VOTES

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SOURCE: S.C. ELECTION COMMISSION | [BRANDON LOCKETT](#) | THE POST AND COURIER

"The reality is, it was a 526 referendum," said John Zlogar, a cofounder of Rational Roads for Johns Island.

He called the results "just astounding" and said he had hoped the referendum might fail by one or two percentage points, not more than 21.

Past coverage

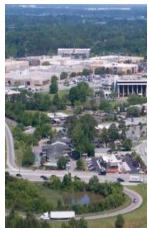
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- [Charleston County's Mark Clark tax referendum found few pockets of support. Here's where.](#)
- [A crushing loss for Charleston County's Mark Clark penny tax referendum leaves road in doubt](#)
- [Mark Clark extension could damage historic Charleston sites. How are they being protected?](#)

County Councilman Larry Kobrovsky, who opposed the referendum, said after results were tallied that voters made clear their opposition.

"They said 'no' and 'hell no,' " he said.

Some [supporters](#) believe that voters weren't rejecting the road at all, but the proposed sales tax to raise \$5.4 billion. The referendum [was designed to fund the Mark Clark Extension](#), but was crafted to avoid any mention of that specific road project.

"My perception is, this was about voting down another tax," said County Councilman Joe Boykin, a Johns Island resident who supports the road plan. "It just means we need back up and find another way to fund it."



NEWS

A crushing loss for Charleston County's Mark Clark penny tax referendum leaves road in doubt

BY DAVID SLADE DLSLADE@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

Charleston County voters supported two previous transportation sales tax referenda, together adding one percent to the county's sales tax rate. The referendum on the Nov. 5 ballot would have continued one of the half-percent taxes for up to 25 more years, when an existing one expires in 2027.

While the referendum question didn't mention the Mark Clark Extension, it was the only priority project listed in the referendum ordinance and would have consumed the largest share of the money raised.

"One thing that was clear to me last night is that we could do a better job of communicating," said Councilwoman Jenny Honeycutt, who supports the Mark Clark Extension and lives on James Island.

"I would have thought that the people who stood to gain the most would have supported it," she said, referring to residents of Johns and James islands.

Business and real estate groups supported the referendum, along with elected officials from the county, Charleston and North Charleston.



NEWS

With Mark Clark funding at stake, officials argue pros and cons of sales tax referendum

BY DAVID SLADE DLSLADE@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

Charleston County needs more than \$1.8 billion for its share of [the \\$2.33 billion project](#). The state's contribution to the Mark Clark has been capped at \$420 million.

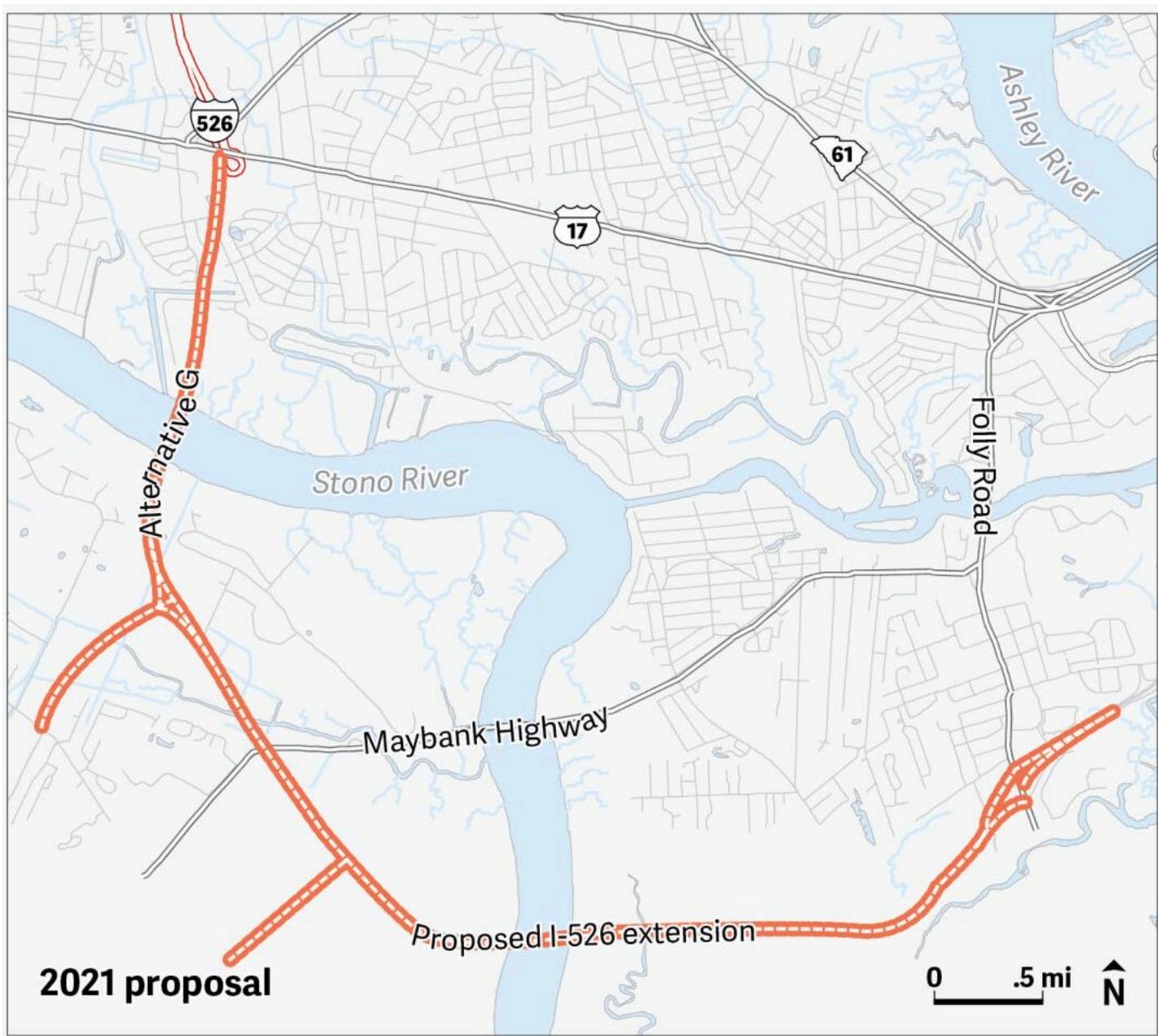
"We're contractually bound to do this, so we'll have to find a way to finance it," Boykin said. "It's not going away."

Council Chairman Herb Sass said the referendum results surprised him.

"I thought we had a really good program," he said. "I had an awful lot of people tell me they were voting for it."

In Mount Pleasant, where Sass lives, the referendum failed by a more than two-to-one margin, a difference of more than 20,000 votes.

Opponents have long argued that residents would be better served if the county pursued less costly improvements to roads and intersections.



THE MARK CLARK EXTENSION: The proposed road would connect the end of Interstate 526 in West Ashley to Johns Island and then the James Island connector. (SOURCE: ESRI)

FILE/BRANDON LOCKETT/STAFF

People on both sides of the issue expect the county to come back in two years with another tax referendum to put before voters. The potential sales tax money would also support green space preservation and mass transit.

"We look forward to working with citizens and Charleston County to come together to decide what road projects should be prioritized to create a better referendum in 2026," said The Coastal Conservation League, "one that prioritizes the completion of effective traffic

solutions, restores the Greenbelt program's purchasing power, supports public transit, considers flooding on our roadways, and promotes pedestrian safety."

The League has long been a vocal opponent of the Mark Clark plan, and took the county to court over the ballot question — a fight the county won.



NEWS

Judge rules Charleston County's tax referendum to fund Mark Clark Extension can go forward

BY DAVID SLADE DSSLADE@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

The League had argued that the referendum question was misleading because it didn't mention the Mark Clark Extension or inform voters how the money would be spent, among other things.

Boykin said he has talked to people who voted against the referendum because it didn't mention the Mark Clark.

Even on Kiawah Island, seen as a main beneficiary of the proposed highway extension, the referendum barely passed with just under 51 percent of the vote.

The remaining 10 voting precincts where the referendum received more "yes" than "no" votes were in West Ashley (four), North Charleston (five), and in Charleston's Neck Area.

County voters have rejected tax referenda in the past, but not by such huge margins.

Four years ago — during the height of the COVID pandemic in the fall of 2020 — voters rejected the county's plan for a modest property tax increase to fund affordable housing efforts. That referendum won 90 of 182 precincts and only lost by 3,466 votes in an election where 199,468 were cast.

The Mark Clark tax referendum lost by 47,456 votes, according to the Nov. 5 results that remain unofficial until certified.

MORE INFORMATION

Supporters of Mark Clark extension don't believe referendum failure was a road rejection. It was the tax.

Permitting paused for Mark Clark as state asks: How will Charleston County pay the bill?

Charleston County urges state to get \$2.3B Mark Clark Extension 'shovel ready'

Top 10 news stories of 2024 from the Charleston area

DAVID SLADE

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