

My last, From the Mayor's desk – 5/1/26

Happy Friday!

Election Day is tomorrow in Surfside beach, and as a result Marsha Hines will be Mayor elect very soon (thanks for stepping up Marsha!).

So, this will be my last edition of the weekly "From the Mayor's Desk". Not much of an update this week, rather more of a glimpse into the rear view mirror from my perspective.

First and foremost, I hope that these weekly updates have been helpful. My goal was to pass along the information that I learned, including what had occurred in each department, each and every week. Providing updates on key projects, addressing concerns publicly (like seaweed plans!), and really just sharing the gift of local government knowledge with transparency, openly. I've had several folks personally thank me for the weekly updates, and I really appreciated those kind words...It meant a lot to me! The answer to one question that I had received...no, I don't use AI like ChatGPT to write these, it's always 100% Zach!

As I reflect back on my one year of elected service as Mayor, plus the additional seven months before that when Council voted me into the interim role, it has been a 19 month whirlwind. Back on October 8th, 2024 when I was sworn in as Mayor, we were just a few months post Beryl, our financial balance in key General & System Funds were barely treading water monthly, plus we owed outstanding invoices over \$700,000. We had lost a Police Chief, and were about to lose our Finance Director and EMS Director a few months into my appointment as Mayor. There are only a few folks at City Hall along with my wife, Stephanie, who really know exactly how much that I had to overcome as interim Mayor in that first few months. It was all consuming for me, daily, weekly, and monthly. Luckily I received unbelievable grace and understanding from my employer, Dow, who essentially allowed me to work at City Hall daily and do my best to balance the responsibilities with Dow and the Village of Surfside Beach. It was incredibly challenging but in my 7 months as interim Mayor we made significant progress in all areas. If anyone ever saw my office whiteboard it was littered with various improvement items that all got crossed off by the time I was done as interim Mayor. I focused a lot on getting the best people into City Hall, and working with HR to create modern day employee policies for clarity. We improved our benefits package and wage structure to compete with our neighboring municipalities. We utilized professional Agencies & Associations to recruit talent. In time, we made it a better place to work than it had been before. I am very proud to say that we now have a professional staff in place everywhere, that have built professional processes, in full conjunction with TML, TCEQ and other governing entities. We recently had an employee, Breana, get a promotion to work in Sweeney (because she is awesome!) and the flood of highly qualified applicants to replace her has been overwhelming. Surfside Beach is legitimate, professional, and in a position to really move forward successfully. Of this, I am most proud of my last 19 months as Mayor. The people working for the Village of Surfside Beach are awesome and deserve our collective support and thanks.

Last April, when I volunteered to run for the 1 year term as Mayor, I had my wife post a letter on my behalf to Facebook, as I'm not on social media. Looking back at that letter, I had outlined 3 things that I believed were unfinished after my first 7 months as interim Mayor. They were 1) A fully fortified City Hall staff, including a new Finance Director, EMS Director, and City Administrator. 2) Moving closer to construction on our 2 major grant projects, the GLO Groins & Beach Nourishment project and the HGAC/GLO Sewer Replacement project. 3) Collection of the Beryl FEMA money owed to us by the Federal Government, and securing a funds reserves for future storms to avoid financial ruin. I'm a big fan of setting goals and measuring against them...so, how did I do in the last year since that FB post? Let's see, 1) We have the most professional and competent staff at City Hall that has ever been assembled. The City Secretary had run the show at City Hall for a decade previously, and whomever was elected Mayor had great power and influence if they so desired it. Over the last 12 months we have graduated past that old structure into a legitimate municipality with solid and competent department leadership and a professional City Administrator. 2) The Groins & Beach Nourishment project broke ground this month and is scheduled for full construction starting in October/November. This one took a lot of my personal effort working with the GLO, TxDOT, and Coast & Harbor Engineering to finally get it to the construction phase. The HGAC/GLO sewer replacement project finally went under contract a few months ago, which was the milestone that kicked off the project work. Currently this is in engineering design with Lynn Engineering and we are working in conjunction with GrantWorks. Not as far along as Groins, but I was able to free it from the GLO "red tape" and get it under contract. I do want to thank Senator Joan Huffman's office for reaching out to me and helping us with the GLO. 3) The FEMA reimbursement money from Beryl has been most challenging. Janet has done a great job here and I can't take credit for anything but supporting her where I could. FEMA changed their personnel working with Surfside six times, and each time the new rep required us to start from the beginning with every reimbursement submission. In addition, FEMA was shut down for 76 days as well! The Federal Government really working at the 'speed of smell' in their support of Surfside. We have collected \$500,947 to date, have \$517,164 approved but not yet paid due to their shutdown, and have \$606,863 still to be approved by FEMA and then paid. This is exactly why financial reserves are so critical as this disaster relief process is extremely slow. Today, we have built significant reserves for future hurricane disaster cleanup efforts. Currently those reserves are \$2.46 million and gaining interest daily.

Another item that didn't make my top 3 list a year ago were the long standing TCEQ violations. I'm proud to say that I worked to free up significant funds that allowed us to budget for repairs on all of our water ground storage tanks, pressurized tank, and elevated water tower. These TCEQ violations will finally be resolved and closed out later this year. Thanks to Christie for helping to review financial changes with TML allowing the funding, and to Erick for working with me for over a year on this plan to finally be clear of TCEQ violations.

In closing, I want to thank everyone for your support. It really does take a Village!

If you told me back on October 8th, 2024 what I was in store for, I honestly may not have accepted the nomination by Council. Now, looking back on where we've come in the last 19 months, I'm very pleased and proud to have been a part of the improvements, and more importantly, to have met and worked with a great team at City Hall.

You are the best!!

Lots of action this weekend... grab some delicious BBQ at the VFD fundraiser Saturday, check out the Treaty of Velasco Celebration on Saturday, take in some live music Saturday evening at the Surfside Beach Waterfront Stage, the new Salty Pelican opens its doors on Friday, and there will be music and fun at several local establishments all weekend long. I love Surfside!! Don't forget to be kind to one another and have a great weekend everyone.

Adios,

Zach (or "Zayor Mack" to some of you)