

Mayor's Report to the Citizens – March 24, 2016

Spring is here and the community is in bloom – what a wonderful sight to see the flowering plants ablaze in all the colors of the rainbow. Our Town is beautiful this time of year but no matter the time of year, when I talk with folks who come to Perdido Beach for the first time I hear the same comment – “what a beautiful place”. And I agree. We're so fortunate to live here, to enjoy the peace and tranquility afforded to us by nature's bountiful gifts.

There are so many things for which to be thankful but we must not take them for granted – we must work together to preserve and protect what we so abundantly share. I'm pleased and appreciative that the Town Council has recognized the need and has approved a matching grant to complete a storm water management plan for the community. In the same way that families and individuals make plans to manage their personal resources, it's essential that towns and cities make plans for the management of resources under their charge. This step will provide the foundation for improvements to the drainage system that will benefit all who live here in the present time as well as generations to come.

As much as it feels great to talk about the ways in which there is agreement, and there are many, we also need to be aware of differences. Can we work through the differences for the benefit of all? I believe we can. For many years our community has faced differences when it comes to water accesses (streets that end at the waters' edge and streets that intersect Bay Street which runs parallel to Perdido Bay). Without getting into the “weeds” of “why” and “why not”, it's important for you to know that a council advisory committee has been appointed and is meeting every month to discuss possible solutions to some of the differences and to offer recommendations to the Town Council. Your input is important in this process so please take note of their meetings which are posted on the meeting calendar of the website and at Town Hall. Please make plans to attend – watch for notice on the Town sign. It's called “Ad Hoc Committee Escambia Ave”.

Another Town issue is law enforcement. As was the situation before incorporation in 2009, the Town receives its law enforcement from the Baldwin County Sheriff Department. Recently the Baldwin County Commission informed me and the Town Council that the Town must provide its own enforcement – one option being to contract with the Sheriff Department at the cost of \$54,000.00 covering the period from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017 with likely increases in the future. With the Town's present income, the Council is well able to provide needed services to the citizens, including day to day operations, salary for clerk and town attorney, road maintenance, mowing of the roadsides, maintenance of town hall and a modest emergency fund. It would be a stretch, if not impossible, to add a \$54,000.00 expense to the annual budget. The discussion is ongoing and will come before the council again at the April 11th Council Meeting. My research and information from the League of Municipalities finds no Alabama law that supports the insistence by the County Commission that the law requires municipalities to provide their own law enforcement. Contract with the Sheriff Department is by choice, it is not mandatory. (Other municipalities in Baldwin County have *chosen* to use that option). A large share of the funding for the Sheriff Department comes from your and my tax dollars. Therefore, our citizens already pay for law enforcement under Alabama law. Are there advantages to having such a contract? Perhaps, but do they justify such an expense? Are there other options? I believe there are. Your input is important – please attend the Council Meeting on April 11th to express your ideas.

Note: The Town receives approximately \$45,000.00 from property taxes each year, paid by the Town's property owners. The same property owners pay approximately \$56,000 each year in property taxes to the Baldwin County General Fund, excluding additional taxes for roads and bridges, fire, health and schools. The Sheriff Department is funded from the Baldwin County General Budget. None of the funds designated for the Sheriff Department or fees from violations in the Town would come to the Town to help offset the cost of a contract. The cost of a contract would be in addition to taxes we already pay to Baldwin County.

I would be amiss not to mention another issue. The Town will celebrate its seventh anniversary on June 10th. It's probably not appropriate to say we're a "new town" but certainly is appropriate to say we're a "young town". Still having growing pains, we might admit. Again, a difference of opinions concerning water accesses comes into play. Out of those differences has come a concerted effort to dissolve the Town, including participation by some members of the Town Council, and possibly supported by the Baldwin County Commission and State Legislators. So, as a young town, we face a cross road and a potential battle involving money, power and influence. The decision is up to you, the citizens of the Town. Returning to Baldwin County Jurisdiction would mean we open ourselves up to any kind of development that is allowed under Baldwin County regulations, including all sorts of businesses, multi-family housing and condos, all of which are not allowed under Town regulations. Judging from pre-incorporation days, regular mowing of roadsides could go away as could regular maintenance of our streets. (Remember what the roadsides and streets were like before incorporation and compare that with today). All of the assets of the Town would become County property, including funds and real estate – your money and your property. Also, you should be aware that Commissioner Dorsey is on the record saying he supports doing away with public water accesses (stated at the Town of Perdido Beach Council Meeting on March 14th). For those who hold the same position, that might be incentive to dissolve the town. For those of us who believe our rights and traditions matter, it might be incentive to resist.

I would have no argument with our citizens in whatever the majority decides to do, even though I would not sign a petition to dissolve the Town. I would, however, have a huge argument with the Legislators if they acted on their own to take away our right to govern ourselves. You deserve to know about the effort. The majority of you chose to be a Town – it should be the majority who chooses to continue, or not to continue, as a Town. Too often, the loud voices of the minority have pushed aside and ignored the majority. Please don't allow that to happen again – make sure your voices are heard.

Last of all, the upcoming town election for council and mayor is August 23rd. Those considering a run for mayor or for one of 5 council positions may qualify for candidacy July 5th through July 19th. Information on qualifying is available at Town Hall. I will vigorously support folks who have demonstrated their intent to represent the best interests of the citizens but have no plans to run this time around. Thank you so much for your support and encouragement during the past seven years. Good luck if you decide to give it a try.

Always In Your Service, Patsy