

## **From the Mayor's Desk - 1/10/25:**

Happy Friday and Happy New Year. Here's to a better and brighter 2025 for all of us!!

First off, the initial attempt at collecting outstanding violations of remittance of hotel occupancy taxes (HOT) kicked off in December, and there were plenty of issues with the data quality used. As a result, plenty of folks were contacted in error about violations. As I said previously when talking about cleaning up any outstanding hotel taxes...mistakes happen. For those who were contacted in error about violations and worked with City Hall to produce proof of prior payment, please accept my apologies. Our intention is to find those in violation, not to ask those in full compliance to prove it. We will work to refine the data and the software system we have in place to make this work properly. Strike one! Again, I appreciate your patience as we work through issues to get to a system and solution that works.

### Public Works:

A letter was sent to Freeport this week in response to their 90 Day Notice we received in November. They will need to review our proposal to pay our outstanding debt and approve the proposal through Freeport City Council. If that proposal is not approved by Feb 14<sup>th</sup>, then "Freeport will cease to supply drinking water to Surfside on Friday, February 14, 2025". Conversely, if they approve, then we will continue receiving water from Freeport and make payments as agreed.

Our proposal is tied tightly to the fact that we have a very large outstanding balance of accounts payable still from hurricane Beryl. Some relief comes when FEMA, TDEM, and TCEQ release our Category A disaster relief funds, but that amount has been whittled down closer to \$500,000. We are still awaiting final grant approval from those agencies on that emergency relief fund, which has delayed out much further than expected. After that relief grant, the balance of Freeport water bill will be paid over time. We have significantly reduced water intake from the Freeport source and will apply additional payments monthly until that balance is made whole.

The next question, what if they vote to cease supply? As I said, Erick and Public Works have already significantly reduced water intake from Freeport and we can continue without that additional source in the short term. However, the peak tourism and overnight guests from short term rentals in our summer season will create a massive increase in water usage which will need to be addressed. We don't want to shut off the Freeport source and force a plan, rather to maintain what we have and work on a real strategy to improve water supply and distribution quality, with the intent to eventually be self-sufficient.

### Human Resources:

We are actively recruiting a full-time Chief of Police. In December, council had approved the use of the Texas Police Chiefs Association to assist with our recruiting efforts. The position is open for

applicants until Jan 31<sup>st</sup>, then we will vet candidates with the help of TPCA and begin interviews with hiring targeted for the month of February.

A full time EMS Director position will be posted very soon. We prefer and have required a Paramedic for this position and it will be a full time position working on site for the Village of Surfside Beach. The intention is to de-couple the Police Department and EMS department in the future (based on council approval), and this position will be the Director of the EMS department.

Seasonal Beach staff hiring will begin next week. We will have open positions for Booth Attendants, General Beach Labor, and Beach Clean-up. The hourly pay will be \$13/hr with a \$500 bonus if you stay on to work the full season. Successful screening of a drug test is required for hire in these roles, fyi.

***Please contact Janet if you have any interest in these positions.***

#### Building:

Some updates on a commercial project ongoing, specifically the meat market/grocery on Ft. Velasco. Work continues on this building renovation, and the owners are targeting an opening in mid-March, with expectations to be fully operational for the summer. Great news to have some new options on the island.

There have been requests made from investors to City Hall looking to gain knowledge about what Surfside residents would like to see built and operating on the corner across from Circle K at the stop light. As opposed to telling these investors what we believe should be brought into our village in that retail space, I invite you to start some chatter of your own on social media to help them “hear” what the community wants and needs. This will probably be the only time I ask people to post on Facebook as a result of this letter...I hope that I don’t regret that! But seriously, be constructive and share your thoughts to help with our economic development. I personally want to see a fresh seafood restaurant brought back.

#### Beach & Parks:

Beach passes are on sale at City Hall for \$15 until January 31<sup>st</sup>. This is a half price season pass that is only available as an Early Bird special for the month of January. Show a valid driver’s license to purchase.

Again, seasonal positions will be available for applications soon. We will be offering a \$500 bonus this year to all seasonal employees that work the full season.

#### Other Items of Interest:

The Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) for Village of Surfside was increased from 4% to 5% beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, as approved by council. This tax is levied for all occupants of short term hotels and rentals (i.e. Airbnb) that are less than 30 days. If you own or operate a short term rental property,

you are required to remit 5% Hotel Tax to the Village of Surfside starting January 1<sup>st</sup>, which will be collected at the end of the quarter ending March 31<sup>st</sup>, and due on April 20<sup>th</sup>.

The move to 5%, as approved by council, was made due to a new TX Tax Code 351.105 allowing coastal communities like Surfside Beach at 5% HOT to use HOT income for beach patrol, marine water safety, and park law enforcement. We spend a significant amount of resources and money providing these beach services and having the ability to pay for a large portion of it from HOT income is very beneficial to the village. It allows us in the near future to better fund our General & System Fund expenditures, of which include road repairs, water, sewer, etc. Thank your council members who helped to make this change to benefit citizens of Surfside.

Stay warm and dry and as always, I hope to see you around the island this weekend!

Thanks,

Zach