



TYBEE ISLAND

GEORGIA

December 23, 2024

Happy Holidays Tybee Island!

This is the first in a regular City Manager's Update to the residents, workers and visitors of Tybee Island. I will strive to post these weekly, but you know how things go sometimes.

In this column I'll share regular Department stats and other odds and ends. If you've got a question, email me at bret.bell@cityoftybee.gov, and if appropriate I'll post the answer in this Update.

A reminder that City offices will be closed Dec. 24 and 25, and then Dec. 31 and Jan. 1. Good luck to all the Polar Bear Plungers next week!

I've been spending time over the past week looking back at the past year and looking ahead to 2025, as I'm sure you have. In the new year, I will increasingly become focused on the impacts of sea level rise, including high tide flooding, which we saw quite a bit of this fall.

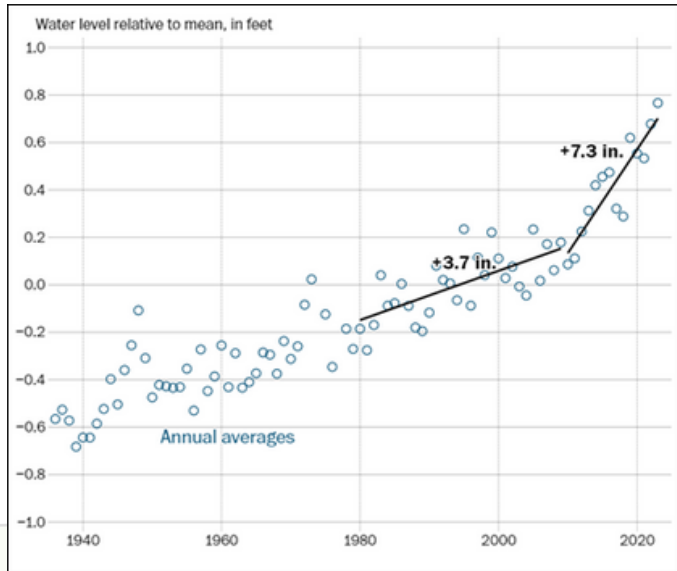
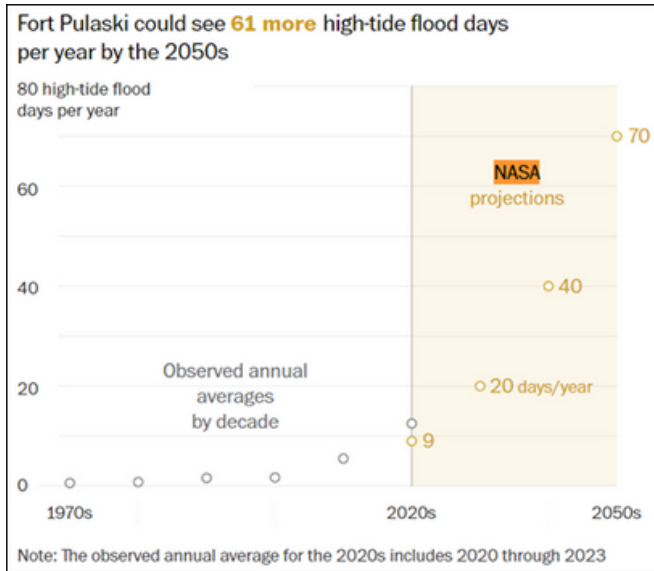
During the Georgia House Disaster Mitigation and Resilience Study Committee Meeting I attended in November, a Department of Natural Resources official presented new projections, including estimates that the Ft. Pulaski tide gauge will experience 70 high tide flood days per year by 2050 – a 700 percent increase over current levels.

The Ft. Pulaski tide gauge and the impacts to Tybee Island are the focus of a very well-reported article in this weekend's Washington Post headlined: "Why Seas are Surging: What one tide gauge reveals about America's climate future."

Among the sobering statistics in the article:

- Average sea levels at the Ft. Pulaski gauge rose 7.3 inches between 2010 and 2023. In the previous 30 years, the sea level rose 3.7 inches.
- Sea levels are not rising in a uniform rate across the globe. Levels has risen faster in our area than almost any other place on earth in recent decades.
- Along the coast between Florida and North Carolina the average sea level rise increase has been 4.4 inches since 2010 – a more rapid increase than almost any region in America. Three factors have combined to account for this change:
 1. Melting ice in the polar caps accounts for 1.1 inches of the 4.4-inch rise. Counterintuitively, coastlines farthest from the ice sheets are hit hardest by melting ice sheets.
 2. Sinking land accounts for 0.6 inches of the 4.4-inch rise. The biggest factor in sinking land is over-pumping of underground aquifers, a major issue in the Coastal Empire. A new study came out earlier this year that predicts the growing role that land subsidence is expected to play in exacerbating the impact of sea level rise, as reported in the journal Nature: [Disappearing cities on US coasts](#) | [Nature](#)
 3. Warming oceans and changing currents have added 3.1 inches of the 4.4-inch sea level rise. [Only the U.S. Southeast has experienced faster sea level rise than scientists predicted.](#) In the Northeast, waters are rising in line with previous projections. Scientists suspect a major factor is the warming impact of the Gulf Stream, which hugs the coast until Cape Hatteras, where it veers off into the Atlantic.

*Note: A fourth factor, called the “inverted barometer effect,” has reduced sea levels on the Southeast Atlantic Coast by 0.4 inches.



Meeting With Orange Crush Festival Applicants

Team Tybee met at the Public Safety Building last week with Steven Smalls, who submitted an application to hold an event called Orange Crush Festival on Easter Weekend 2025.

It was a cordial meeting, and we had a good exchange of information. While the application was lacking some critical details, it was the first time that would-be organizers of this event have submitted a complete application package. Mr. Smalls is proposing a three-day festival with two stages on the beach flanking either side of the pier. His application proposes music, games, yoga, art, cooking classes and cultural events.

As always, first on City Government’s mind is ensuring the safety of our citizens, workers and visitors. Chief Hayes is scheduling a follow up meeting in early January with Mr. Smalls to talk in-depth about a public safety plan and review public safety costs.

We have reached out to our local and regional law enforcement partners requesting assistance, as we did last year.

New Fire Chief Begins

I’m pleased to announce that Justin McMillian became Tybee’s new Fire Chief on Dec. 23. Mr. McMillian has been a fire professional for almost 30 years, including service as the Chief of the Atoka, Tenn.; and Moss Point, Miss., fire departments.

Mr. McMillian has spent a lot of time digging into the issues impacting Tybee Fire, including parking himself at the Fire Station for a few days during his interview visit earlier this month. He was the top choice of the Search Committee (comprising myself, Assistant City Manager Owens, Chief Hayes and Chief Waterfield), and received by far the most support during a straw pole of our firefighters. The comprehensive and collaborative search process organized by our HR Director Jaime Spear ensured the team got a good sense of the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. All three finalists were very strong. Mr. McMillian stood out for his demeanor, knowledge of our issues, presentation skills, and deep experience leading departments of similar size and development stage as Tybee Fire.

I am confident he is the right Chief to continue the progress of Acting Chiefs Waterfield and Socks and bring a new level of professionalism to the still-young Tybee Island Fire Rescue.



We'll be having a Meet the Chief Open House at the Fire Station in the near future. Stay tuned for details.

The Week with Police

Accidents:

This Week: 1 accidents, 0 injuries
 YTD: 102 accidents, 18 injuries
 2023 YTD: 131 accidents, 16 injuries

Calls For Service:

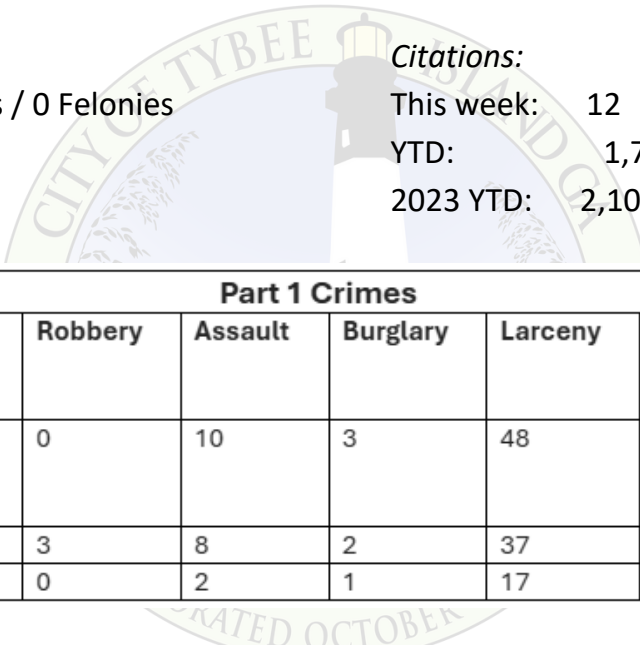
This week: 239
 YTD: 14,177
 2023 YTD: 15,138

Arrests:

This Week: 7 total -- 4 DUIs / 0 Felonies
 YTD: 493 total
 2023 YTD: 574 total

Citations:

This week: 12
 YTD: 1,755
 2023 YTD: 2,107



Part 1 Crimes									
	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Burglary	Larceny	Arson	Motor Vehicle Theft	Total Part 1
2024 (thru Dec.)	0	3	0	10	3	48	0	0	64
2023	0	0	3	8	2	37	0	0	50
2022	0	0	0	2	1	17	2	1	23

YTD DUI Residency Report

	Total	Chatham County																											
		Tybee	Savannah/Unincorp.	Port Pooler	Garden Wentworth	Thunderbolt City			GA	TN	NC	SC	TX	IN	IL	WV	AR	DC	FL	CO	MD	NM	VA	OH	CT	MA	AZ	CA	WI
	217	19	86	3	1	1	1	51	4	6	13	3	3	3	1	2	1	6	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
DUI - Marijuana or Controlled Substance	1		1																										
DUI	2		1						1																				
DUI - Alcohol Less Safe	128	13	51	1	0	1		27	2	5	6	1	2	2	1	2	1	4	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1			
DUI - Drugs Less Safe	19		7				1	5	1		3							1									1		
DUI - Combo Less Safe	22	2	10	2				7		1																			
DUI - Alcohol .08 or more (21+)	33	1	14		1			9			4	2	1	1															
DUI Drugs/Alcohol	1																											1	
DUI - Under Age 21 .02% or More	4		2					1																				1	
DUI - Child Endangerment	7	3						2										1					1						

Daily Information:

- Officers enjoyed the annual Shop with a Cop sponsored by Ronald McDonald House on Dec. 16.
- All officers and communications officers are currently undergoing our annual CJIS Security Policy Awareness Training, which allows them to run people and vehicles through the GCIC terminal.
- Sgt. Sims and Lt. White taught at the Savannah Tech Police Academy last week. Both completed the senior instructor process and received their senior instructor certification from POST.
- Communications Officer Katherine (Katie) Beatty won Civilian of the Year for 2024. This was voted on by all employees from the police department. Katie does an amazing job in the 911 center and has taken on many roles in her short time of employment.
- Officer Michael Bensman won Officer of the Year for 2024. This was voted on by all employees from the police department. Officer Bensman stepped up to the plate and is our new K9 handler. He is doing a great job with his new partner, Officer Tosca!
- Sgt. Sims was awarded a certificate for most DUIs. At the time of the award, Sgt. Sims had 59 DUI arrests.
- A collection bin for The Front Porch to collect gently new or used school uniforms, jackets, and school supplies during the holidays was placed in the lobby of the police department. These items are greatly needed at The Front Porch.
- TIPD is also collecting Toys for Tots for the USMC in the lobby of the police department. The donated toys will be delivered to the Tybee American Legion at a later date.

This Week at Community Development

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) is our housing raising grant program funded by FEMA using Hurricane Irma funds. We recently closed out grant 4294-0004 City of Tybee Island Elevation Project, our first house raising grant for the elevation of 12 substantially damaged properties. The City received the final reimbursement of \$177,342.34 this month. Thank you to Finance (Danielle and Jen!) for running the money part of the grant.

Our second FEMA HMGP grant, 4338-0004 City of Tybee Island Elevation Project, is larger and split into two batches. Batch 1 is wrapping up while we are waiting to commence Batch 2, which is mostly historic structures. When the City applied for the grants, we were (are) under the Hurricane Irma funds, and construction costs were based on 2017 numbers. GEMA and FEMA reached out about transferring Batch 2 houses to Hurricane Helene funding. The big plus is the out-of-pocket costs for the homeowners will be significantly reduced as construction costs would be based on 2024/2025 construction cost estimates. The Community Development Director with the grant manager will be sending e-mails out, followed by phone calls, to the property owners to get their feedback as there could be a two-to-three-month delay in transferring all the projects to Hurricane Helene funding.

Sustainability: The Community Development Director and the City Marshal were chosen to attend (all expenses paid) the Electrify The South Collaborative conference in Orlando on February 6 -7, 2025. The goal is to build Tybee's capacity to access federal transportation electrification funding. Electrify the South is part of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE).

Sustainability Plan: Staff has begun internal meetings regarding the steps necessary to create a Sustainability Plan for the City of Tybee Island. Staff is talking with other municipalities regarding their sustainability goals and reviewing their sustainability plans.

Permitting Activity

November 2024 Building Permits: 64

- New Residential Construction: 0
- New Swimming Pool: 0
- Other permits (fence, electrical, sign, tree removal, etc.): 64

Year to Date Building Permits: 574

- New Residential Construction: 11
- New Swimming Pool: 16
- Other permits (fence, electrical, sign, tree removal, etc.): 510

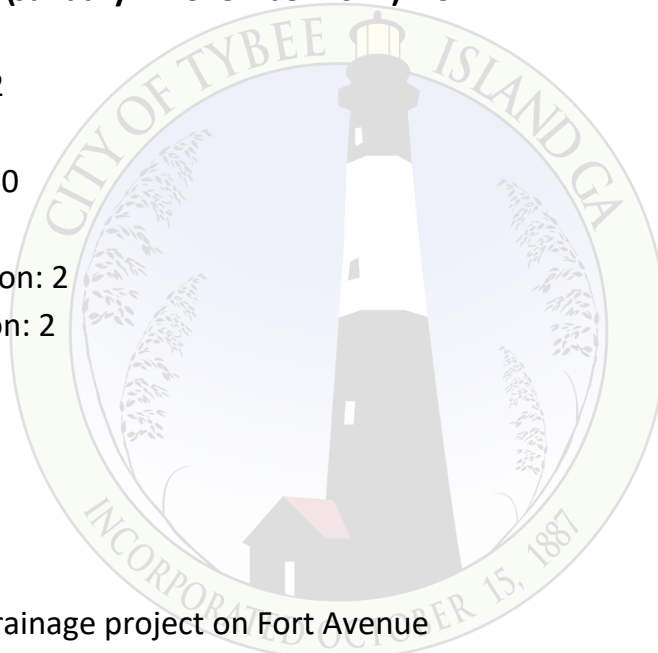
Planning and Zoning Activity (January – November 2024): 19

- Site Plan: 7
- Site Plan with Variance: 2
- Variance: 0
- Administrative Variance: 0
- Special Review: 2
- Subdivision/Recombination: 2
- Administrative Subdivision: 2
- Map Amendment: 1
- Text Amendment: 2
- Tree Appeal: 1

The Week In Infrastructure

Public Works

- Crew finished up small drainage project on Fort Avenue
 - Installed approximately 30 feet of storm sewer
 - Installed 2 catch basins (Road was closed during these installations)
 - Installation impeded by large number of existing underground utilities and tree roots in project limits
 - Graded and installed seed and hay
 - Fort Avenue is fully open to traffic
- Performed various miscellaneous work orders
- Cleaned outfalls at Inlet Avenue and Alley 3
- Picked up beach trash twice this week
- Performed miscellaneous work orders
- Repaired minor electrical issues on Christmas lights
- Removed Visit Tybee sign on County pier
- Removed lean-to at County Pier
- Started demolition for new office in DPW shop



Landscaping and Parks Crew

- Picked up street trash twice this week
- Blew Tybrisa Street and parks
- Cleaned up North Beach garden area
- Trimmed Palm trees on streets east of Butler Avenue
- Trimmed Palm trees on Polk Street
- Cleaned City owned facilities
- Cut back brush behind first Chu's
- Trimmed and clean out Blue Heron Trail

Recycling/Dump

- Picked up and emptied recycling trailers from Memorial Park and Polk Street
- Baled cardboard
- Picked up litter on Bay Street
- Picked up recycling from South Annex Building
- Called in trash containers and yard waste containers in DPW Yard
- Assisted residents in unloading trash, yard debris, and recycling brought to DPW yard

Fleet

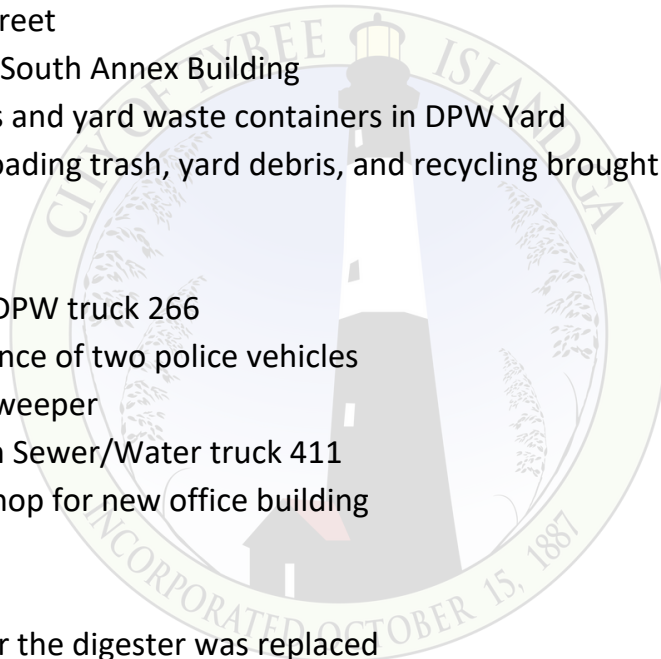
- Changed out battery on DPW truck 266
- Performed tire maintenance of two police vehicles
- Replaced driveshaft on sweeper
- Installed new hubcaps on Sewer/Water truck 411
- Cleaned and organized shop for new office building

Water and Sewer

- A/C unit for blower #1 for the digester was replaced
- Repaired flow valve on digester #2
- Interviewed for WWTP Operator position
- Back-up battery installed on the UV system
- Replaced fire hydrant in front of DPW shop
- Distributed leak reports to several homeowners
- Performed general maintenance at the lift stations and wells

Sanitary Sewer Project on Van Horne Avenue

- Contractor installed approximately 120 feet of sanitary sewer
- Installed two (2) manholes
- Completed sanitary sewer installation on Van Horn Avenue
- Back-filled and graveled sewer trench
- Graded Van Horn Avenue to allow for road re-opening



Around the Campground This Week

- 38 Arrivals, 264 site nights, 37% Occupancy rate
- Jayme Koch, Clerk, returned to work after maternity leave and we are glad to have her back.
- Replaced damaged shower drain in upper bathhouse.
- Repaired roof gutter on office front that was not draining properly.
- 7 guests attended smore's social around the campfire.
- Notified guests and distributed detour maps to avoid any complaints about the road closure on Fort Ave during storm drain installation.

Municipal Court Action

Court was held Dec. 17.

- Spanish Interpreter and GSP Docket
- Special Bond hearing
- 59 cases/112 citations
 - 12 Bond Forfeiture
 - 23 Bound over to State/Superior Court
 - 2 Dismissed
 - 20 Guilty as Charged
 - 5 Merged
 - 5 Nolo Contendre
 - 13 Nolle Prosequi
 - 6 Pre Trial Diversion
 - 4 Retired from Docket
 - 3 Warnings
 - 19 Failure to Appear



HR Update

On Dec. 31 we bid farewell to Pete Ryerson, Head of Parking Enforcement, after more than two decades on the job. Pete's easy demeanor, skills of diplomacy, and strong work ethic have served the island well in an operation that gets a good amount of grief. It's an extremely important job, as parking is the island's biggest source of revenue, helping to fund beach upkeep and keep the City's property tax rate low.

If you see Pete out there on the street over the next week, please give him a gentle pat on the back for a job well done.



That's it for this week folks. Until the next Update, please continue to enjoy living in Paradise.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Bret Bell'.

Bret Bell, City Manager