



# TYBEE ISLAND

## GEORGIA

February 3, 2025

Greetings Mayor and Council!

Apologies for the delayed Update. Weekend computer problems!

It was a productive several days in Atlanta last week for the Georgia Municipal Association's Cities United Summit, followed a few days later by Savannah-Chatham Day.

I spent about 12 hours in class during the GMA Summit learning about downtown development – strategies, funding mechanisms and grant opportunities. We are blessed to have a vibrant retail sector and an active downtown (some public leaders in my class have dealt for decades with chronic blight, vacancy and disinvestment on their Main Streets). Our streetscape improvements on Tybrisa have added to that vibrancy, as have the addition of fun bike racks, new benches and a fabulous mural.

Some private properties in our business district, however, have not kept up. With the potential of Butler Avenue improvements around the corner, I plan to begin engaging downtown business owners (and Council) about buying into a shared vision for our downtown. I do think Tybee needs to lean in to our historic assets and funky beach vibe and discourage some of the junkier aspects, including cluttered sidewalks, loud signage and façades constructed with poor-quality materials. More immediately, this spring we do plan on implementing new wayfinding signage and a new scheme for the tree beds on Tybrisa. I believe the South End Business District has the potential to become one of America's great small-town downtowns.

### Legislative Update

Our Legislative Lobbyist Tom Gehl arranged for meetings with most member of the Chatham Legislative Delegation to discuss Tybee's Agenda. They were good, candid discussions.

Sen. Watson plans to introduce legislation this week to create a Tybee Public Facilities Authority. This could be a useful tool as we address our facility needs in coming years, including financing a new Fire Station.

While we received general support for a Municipal Option Sales Tax referendum from our delegation, we did experience opposition from Rep. Jesse Petrea, who generally takes anti-tax stances and believes we are forgoing significant future revenue with our STR Ordinance. We are preparing additional data for Rep. Petrea on estimated utility rate increases to highlight the need for alternative financing of infrastructure improvements. Because Rep. Petrea represents Tybee Island, passage will be challenging without his support.

Once we have completed supporting information, it would be helpful for Council members to help in the lobbying efforts.

Tom Gehl's January legislative activities report is attached.

During some downtime in Atlanta, I toured the City of Decatur's innovative workforce housing program, visited the Drew Charter School/YMCA facility in the East Lake Purpose Built Community (which most Council members toured last year), and met with Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Rabon to discuss Tybee's various shore issues. I also met with the County Manager and Assistant County Manager in Atlanta to again stress the importance and potential timing of the requested \$2 million contribution from the County to fully fund the federal beach renourishment. The plan is for the County to work the allocation into its FY26 Capital Improvement Program, which will be considered in June.

#### North End Dune Project

Last week I met with Tom Gillespie of GHD, which has provided coastal advisory and engineering services for Tybee in recent years, to discuss steps needed to move forward with the North End dune construction project later this year. As you know, this dune system has experienced some of the worst erosion on our beach, and is located outside the federally authorized renourishment area. The heavy scarping is caused by a combination of shipping channel deepening, jetty construction, storm action and ship wake. Later this month the Army Corps of Engineers will begin the next phase of the Ship Wake Study by placing sensors on North Beach to measure wakes, currents and uprush. Last month we were successful in lobbying the federal government to include the Channel Impact Study into the 2024 Water Resources Development Act.

The long-term goal of these efforts is to include physical improvements to help protect the North End from storms and wave action into the next Savannah Harbor Expansion Program (SHEP) deepening project. In the short-term, we must add sand to the North End dunes, which is estimated at about \$500,000. We've restored the dune system three times over the past 20 years under SPA permit #320, which is still active and will allow Tybee to nourish the dunes with up to 20,000 cubic yards of beach quality sand.

GHD last week sent me a proposal to conduct design and construction phase support of the dune remediation project. I will review and place a contract in front of City Council if appropriate. The meeting with GHD was facilitated by Alan Robertson of AWR Consulting. His January Status Report is attached.



## Orange Crush Festival Conditional Letter of Approval

Last week I sent a Conditional Letter of Approval to Steven Smalls, who submitted an application to hold an Orange Crush Festival on Tybee on Easter Weekend. The Letter is attached. The following are the major points of the letter:

- One day event to be held on April 19, 2025, from 9am to 8pm.
- No event activity (to include set-up) will occur prior to dawn on Saturday, April 19.
- All event activity will conclude (to include break-down and clean-up) no later than 10pm on Saturday, April 19.
- The approved event beach area will be north of the Tybee Island Pier & Pavilion located between the City's 15th Street and 15th ½ Street dune crossovers.
- City Public Beach Access Dune Crossovers must remain open and unobstructed at all times.
- The City has confirmed approval of single stage on the beach area north of the Tybee Pier and Pavilion with a Letter of Permission (LOP) from Georgia Department of Natural Resources authorizing the temporary event activity and structure(s). Limited Sponsorship and VIP tents would be included in the City's approval of the single stage north of the Pier, pending site map approval and LOP from the GA DNR. The applicant must begin the LOP request process at least 45 days prior to the start of event activity and have an LOP issued no sooner or later than 14 days prior to the start of the event activity.
- The private event security hired by the event organizer will include 20 sworn off-duty officers from outside jurisdictions to work designated event areas within the special event location. At least 20 different Officer Key (Okey) Numbers and the name of the corresponding officer that has been hired as the private security for this event must be provided to the City Special Events Staff no later than March 1, 2025.
- The applicant will need to provide details of their ambulance service including, but not limited to, proof of current EMS licensure, at least two staff and their staffing levels to include one qualified EMT, vehicle capabilities, and communication plans no later than March 19, 2025.
- The applicant shall be responsible for providing additional trash and waste receptacles to accommodate for the additional event attendees at all times. They must also be responsible for emptying all trash and waste receptacles in the event area at all times.
- The applicant shall clean the entire event space immediately following the event. A pre and post event evaluation of the entire event space will be performed to determine any necessary clean-up or repair costs. If any charges are incurred a report and invoice will be provided to the applicant by the City within 30 days of the event.
- The applicant understands that he/she or their organization may be billed for cleanup costs incurred by the City if cleanup is not performed adequately, and/or future applications for a Special Event Permit may be denied.
- All event promotions shall reflect these conditional requirements.
- Provide a certificate of insurance demonstrating adequate liability coverage for the event with a policy limit of no less than \$1,000,000.00 naming the City of Tybee Island as an additional insured and certificate holder by March 19, 2025.

## **Fire Department Shift Change**

Chief McMillian has been working with me, HR and Finance on a proposed schedule transition that would move our firefighters from the current 24 hours on/48 hours off, to 48 hours on / 96 hours off. We believe it will be a benefit to both the department and City in the following ways:

**Employee Satisfaction:** During a recent survey, nine of 11 firefighters who participated expressed their preference for the 48/96 schedule. This shift gives our personnel more time off to spend with family, pursue personal interests, and recover from the rigors of the job. It's a schedule that fosters better work-life balance, which we know contributes to greater job satisfaction and retention.

**Alignment with Third-Party Study Recommendations:** Last year's Fire Assessment recommended a 48/96 schedule to improve both efficiency and employee morale.

**Budget Neutrality:** Moving to a 48/96 schedule would add an average of 88 more hours worked per employee each year. To counterbalance that, we're introducing quarterly Kelly days – unpaid days off that reduce the total hours worked each year. These Kelly days will result in a net reduction of hours per year for each employee, ultimately making the schedule change budget-neutral.

**Increased Rest and Recovery:** Firefighting can be incredibly physically and mentally demanding, and the extended 96 hours off between shifts gives our personnel ample time to recover, reducing burnout and enhancing overall performance.

**Improved Operational Flexibility:** A 48/96 schedule will allow better consistency in our staffing levels and response times. Our department will be able to plan more effectively and ensure that we always have the right number of personnel available to respond to emergencies, without overburdening anyone. With more consecutive days off for the employees we should see a reduction in the amount of vacation and sick leave taken. This should reduce our overtime usage, which has been running at unsustainable levels.

The goal is to improve the well-being of our personnel and the efficiency of the department. The change will also make us much more attractive to prospective firefighter applicants. The plan is to implement in the next 1-2 months after working with our vendor to modify our payroll system.

## **UGA Students to Study Local Homestead Exemptions**

Good news: The City has been selected as a partner in the Georgia Municipal Association Local Government Practicum, which pairs University of Georgia graduate students with local governments to tackle a specific data-focused challenge over the course of a semester.

Tybee will be paired with a group of five UGA Master of Public Administration students, most of whom are Korean nationals participating in UGA's Global Leadership and Development Program.

Using Chatham County Board of Assessors records, short-term rental permit information from the City, and mailing addresses on record, the students and their professor will create a database of properties that are potentially misapplying homestead exemptions, which would warrant further investigation by the City. Homestead exemptions can only be claimed on owner-occupied homes, and abuse sometimes is found in communities with high property values and a large number of second and vacation homes.

Credit goes to Councilwoman Williams, who forwarded an article about the City of Philadelphia recovering about \$11.4 million last year after a citizen uncovered improperly claimed homestead exemptions throughout the City. Kathryn asked whether we could do a similar analysis here.

We had a kickoff meeting with the group last week, and are reviewing a Memorandum of Understanding. The project would last from mid-February to May. There is no cost to Tybee Island.

### **Recycling Grant**

Cheers once again to the Community Development Team for landing a nearly \$250,000 no-match grant to make improvements to Tybee's Recycling and Waste Diversion Program. The grant application is attached for those seeking more details.

Enhanced recycling is one part of a larger Sustainability Plan under development by Team Tybee. Over the past few months we've met with companies that would install solar on City facilities, install EV charging station infrastructure on the south end of the island, and switch out light-duty vehicles in our fleet to EVs. We're also revamping our procurement policies to require the purchase of sustainable products and reduce our use of single-use plastics. Our plan is to present to City Council in March or April.

### **LMIG Grant**

While we're on the subject of free money, cheers to City Engineer Pete Gulbranson for successfully applying to the State for Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG) funding for road paving projects. Tybee was informed last week that we will receive \$57,208 in funding. We will work that money into the FY 26 Budget.

A reminder that the only paving rehab project we will complete this fiscal year is in the Captain's View subdivision. The section of Van Horne torn up for the sewer line replacement will also be repaved.

### **Visit Tybee 2024 Results and 2025 Business Plan**

Joe Marinelli last week sent over the Visit Savannah/Visit Tybee 2024 year-end results and scorecard (attached) as well as the flip-book to their 2025 Business Plan and Budget, linked here: [Visit Savannah and Visit Tybee Island - 2025 Visit Savannah Business Plan](#)

I am reviewing and will be scheduling a discussion with Joe in the near future.

## Communications & Outreach Department This Week

- Supported STR/Business Spring Break Meeting with Public Safety Departments
- Finalized planning for first Tyb.TV filming at Tybee Island Marine Science Center
- Rebranded Tyb.TV Digital Streaming Channel
- Participated in Accessibility Upgrades for Government Websites webinar training
- Held follow up meeting with CLG Grant Project Consultants on completion of Phase 1
- Participated in strategic meeting for MS Annual Planning Meeting with facilitator
- Working with Code Compliance and Finance on continual implementation of new automated processes program for city website
- Coordinated with Fire Chief on logistics of annual Fire Subscription Service letters
- Completed February print and digital newsletters for community distribution
- Began planning for Tybee Island Designated Driver Campaign

## Facilities/Special Events:

- Coordinated with Critz Run 2025 Event
- Facility showing at the Guard House for prospective rental
- Continued coordination with City Leadership on upcoming spring break event
- Set department meeting for upcoming special event inquiries

## Main Street/HPC:

- Filming with WTOC for Restaurant Week 2025
- Face to face outreach with businesses
- Coordinated with facilitator for Main Street annual planning meeting
- Took lead on continued beautification of Tybrisa Street landscaping clean up

## Facility Rentals/Permits Issued:

- Beach Permits- 1
- Cafeteria and Room 6 Reservations- 3
- Guard House- 0
- Memorial Park Pavilions- 1

## Tybee in the News:

- WTOC
- <https://www.wtoc.com/video/2025/01/14/community-helps-pay-medical-bills-tybee-island-restaurants-mascot-marley/>
- <https://www.wtoc.com/video/2025/01/16/woman-arrested-allegedly-shooting-ex-boyfriends-home-tybee-island/>
- <https://www.wtoc.com/video/2025/01/22/interview-tybee-island-mayor-brian-west-discusses-weather-impacts/>
- <https://www.wtoc.com/video/2025/01/26/tybee-post-theater-hosts-shorebird-event/>
- <https://www.wtoc.com/2025/01/29/richmond-hill-family-participates-critz-tybee-run-fest-child-with-disabilities/>

## WJCL

- <https://www.wjcl.com/article/tybee-island-snow-beach/63510476>
- <https://www.wjcl.com/article/tybee-island-oyster-shell-bagging/63460781>

**February Upcoming Events:**

- Feb 5, 6:30pm A Conversation with City Council- Old School Cafeteria
- Feb 17, All Day President’s Day - City Hall Closure
- Feb 17, 4pm Turtle Friendly Business Program Launch- Marine Science Center
- Feb 17-28, Tybee Island Restaurant Week - Tybee Businesses
- Feb 20-22, Tybee Spring Shorebird Festival - Marine Science Center
- Feb 22, 8am Tybee Island City Wide Yard Sale- Maps @ Shoppes at 1207

**The Week with Police**

**Accidents:**

This Week: 0 accidents, 0 injuries  
 YTD: 4 accidents, 1 injury  
 2024 YTD: 2 accidents, 1 injury  
 2024 TOTAL: 104 accidents, 18 injuries

**Calls For Service:**

This week: 153  
 YTD: 724  
 2024 YTD: 1,026  
 2024 TOTAL: 14,588

**Arrests:**

This Week: 9 total -- 7 DUIs / 1 Felony  
 YTD: 28 arrests  
 2024 YTD: 35 arrests  
 2024 TOTAL: 504 arrests

**Citations:**

This week: 26  
 YTD: 71  
 2024 YTD: 94  
 2024 TOTAL: 1,792

Part 1 Crimes									
	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Burglary	Larceny	Arson	Motor Vehicle Theft	Total Part 1
2025	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
2024	0	3	0	10	3	51	0	0	67
2023	0	0	3	8	2	37	0	0	50
2022	0	0	0	2	1	17	2	1	23

**Daily Information:**

- 01/27: The Tybee Island Police Department hosted the first spring break meeting with business and STR owners.
- 01/28: Chief Hayes held a meeting with local and state law enforcement agencies about our upcoming spring break event.
- 01/28: Lt. White began Taser training with officers.
- 01/28: AC Whitley met with Axon to get our drone pilots set up with Axon Air.
- 01/28: Officers trained for certification and recertification in CPR. Next class is scheduled for 02/11.
- 01/29: AC met with Verizon to discuss their services and what they can provide for the city during large events.
- 01/29: Erin Martinez and Amberly Warren met with the Clerk of Council to discuss the ORR process.

**Upcoming Events:**

- 02/10: Operation Starlight Volunteer meeting at 5:30 pm in the courtroom. This meeting is for suggestions, ideas, and prospective volunteers.
- 02/13-14: Crowd Control Training for all patrol officers in Savannah with the Savannah Police Department mobile field force.
- 03/14: Road Safety checkpoint 5pm-9pm U.S. 80 at Chimney Creek.

\*\*\*\* On January 25, 2025, K9 Tosca and Officer Bensman assisted Ofc. Huber during a traffic stop. During the stop, K9 Tosca alerted on the vehicle and located the following items:

- 5 bags of suspected marijuana
- 8 jars of suspected marijuana
- 37 suspected THC vape cartridges
- 2 jars of THC ghee butter
- 1 container of 1000mg THC syrup
- 1 suspected Dab syringe.

There were 2 electric THC vapes that were destroyed due to the GBI being unable to accept them. The suspected marijuana weighed in at approximately 83 grams of green leafy substance.

### This Week at the Fire Department

Calls for service: 13

- Fire calls, 0
- Medical calls, 9
- Manpower/lift assist, 2
- Rescues, 2

### Of Note:

1. We received a call on 01/26/2025 for a person stuck in an elevator. The report narrative follows: ENG1 responded to a call for a person stuck in an elevator. Upon arrival, we encountered the victim's husband who pointed us to the elevator they were stuck in. ENG1 personnel attempted to open the door with the elevator key, but were unable to make contact with the victim. A maintenance man for the building showed up on scene and reset the elevator. Victim was successfully removed from the elevator, and appeared to be in normal operating order. Victim had no injuries or complaints. ENG1 personnel informed the appropriate party of the elevator malfunction, and ENG1 personnel went back in service.
2. A pug dog was brought to the fire station on Jan. 25 in respiratory distress. We administered oxygen and a breathing treatment and the pup improved. The owner was thankful and said she would contact an emergency vet if the dog got any worse.
3. Chief McMillian, Pete Gulbranson, Bret Bell, Alan Robertson and Deb Barreiro of the DNR met on the beach this week to discuss beach safety and erosion. This follows a meeting two weeks ago to discuss future mitigation efforts to increase beach safety at some of our more dangerous areas. Lots of great ideas were generated and the Chief will be making some recommendations to council soon. There is a second meeting that will be planned to include some civilian stakeholders to garner their feedback.
4. Two part-time and one full-time personnel were given their physical agility tests at the fire department this week and all passed. We are looking forward to bringing them on board soon.
5. Advertisements are currently going live for Lifeguard recruitment for the 2025 season!
6. New Standard Operating Guidelines at the Fire Department are being formulated, and are expected to be completed in the next month.

## Infrastructure Update

- Finished small drainage project on Jones
- Installed white rock at MRS site
- Graded Solomon Avenue
- Prepped for Critz Run
  - Setting barricades
  - Setting traffic control
  - Swept all streets
- Picked up litter on beach and streets
- Continued to construct office at DPW
- Cleaned City-owned facilities
- Repaired Memorial Park and Jaycee Park sunshades after storm
- Installed no-dumping signs at end of streets east of Butler Avenue
- Cut back brush on US 80
- Picked up and emptied recycling trailers from Memorial Park and Polk Street
- Baled cardboard
- 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
- Picked up roll-offs for pilot recycling program

## Fleet

- Fixed switching mechanism on 268
- Repaired A/C on PD 187
- Repaired generators
- Replaced hydraulic line on DPW 265 (Trash Truck)
- Performed oil change on PD196 and 199
- Performed office work developing list of vehicles and equipment for GIRMA

## Water and Sewer

- General maintenance on all three wells
  - General maintenance on all 12 lift stations
  - Completed winter storm preparations at the WWTP
  - Resolved SCADA issue at lift station #9
  - Replaced guide rails at lift station #8
  - Draining clarifier #1 for inspection
  - Repaired 8-inch water main break on Miller Avenue
  - Repaired miscellaneous electrical issues at the WWTP
  - Removed pontoon aerator #4 for structural issues
  - New WWTP Operator started this week
  - Traveled to Rincon to inspect and observe chlorine analyzers that we may purchase
- Took foot showers off line for storm and put them back on line this week

## Sanitary Sewer Project on Van Horne Avenue

- Contractor will be cleaning up the site and meeting with his subcontractor on paving of Van Horne.

## Around the Campground

- Weathered the winter storm well, guests complimented our quick response and snow removal.
- Replaced Water Heater in Cabin 106.
- Contractor identified three leaks in the pool and made repairs.
- Guests made signs to cheer on the Critz runners as they pass the campground.



Bret Bell, City Manager

