



Mayor's Message – October 2023

We survived! After a sweltering summer, all are stepping outdoors into what feels like a 'cool front' (though still in the low 90s!). October is arriving and we can settle into another beautiful season of autumn in HSBay. Forecasters are calling for a rainy season – with potential mild flooding...but we are umbrella ready (with a lake eager to take on the water!). Fun to see the walkers back out, golf/ tennis /pickleball resuming in full, and neighbors sharing backyard socials. Love this community and our city staff who support us.

City News

- What a great turnout at the **annual Town Hall**. The city employees felt valued and were proud to display their work (and awards) and to answer questions from citizens. It was an afternoon of mutual appreciation. Documents provided at the event are available at: <https://www.horseshoe-bay-tx.gov/902/Town-Hall-Meeting>
- As we end another fiscal year, **the 23-24 budget was approved**. Public hearings were held to ensure all citizens had an opportunity for input about the proposed plan for their tax dollars in the coming year (with a 5-year forecast in all departments). **Each department was fully funded with staff and equipment to meet the daily and emergency needs** of the community. The five-year forecasts were put in place to guide the work for the future.

Once the upgrade to the West Fire Station is completed next year, **no new external facility needs are anticipated in the coming years by the Chiefs of police, fire or ESD ambulance**. Any eventual new service needs would be based upon new development not likely to be completed or populated for over 5+ years. Any new areas annexed into our city would join in paying city taxes and/or impact fees to offset those needs.

The ETJ properties on our city border are already serviced (without paying city taxes) by our fire department (through county designation) and our police support all major incidents until county officials can get on site – so our resources are already expended there. County tax dollars pay for these services, though most current ETJ properties are agriculture exempt and pay minimal county taxes. Once annexed, these ETJ areas would then pay city taxes like all HSBay residents for this fire/police support. **Current residents will continue to be fully serviced and can have faith in our exceptional first responders' preparation now and in the future.**

The final tax rate to support the budget remains the lowest in the region (with the exception of Fredericksburg slightly and Bee Cave...both of which draw from large commercial sales tax through vineyards, retail, Galleria, etc.). The council has committed to a steady tax rate (lowered, when possible; a bit this year) to meet the needs of the city. (Note: **the city taxes represent only 14% of the tax bill for citizens in HSBay**, with the county, ESD/ambulance, and school districts comprising the remaining 86% of the taxes).

Nearly 80% of the city budget is focused on staff, and all but 12% is for **direct field employees** (police, fire, utility, public works).

- The end of the fiscal year brought a **review of the Long-Range Plan/LRP** (posted/updated annually on the city website). In 2019, a citizen committee began the process of closing out the 2015 LRP and reaching out to the citizens for future planning needs. **A city-wide survey was conducted with over a thousand responses**, along with interviews with stakeholders (POAs, businesses, industry partners, civic organizations), as well as staff projected needs for the coming five years. The result of this year-long effort was a document of recommended priorities: *Community Ideals and Values, Growth Management, Protecting our Environment, Internet Access, Recreational and Community Amenities, and Leadership in Local and Regional Collaboration.*

The document was translated to action items which became a part of the annual budget process to ensure the goals of the citizens were met. With all of the current LRP goals met (or on-going) the city will once again call for citizen participation in a **new LRP committee in 2024**. This will allow for the planning and preparation for the coming five years, using the forecasts from the city staff and new resident surveys/interviews to hear citizen priorities.

- **One of the 2019 LRP goals (II.A.) was to develop civic pride and a staff professional work environment through a city center.** This was not a council driven recommendation, but a result of the old-fashioned process of asking citizens what they felt was needed – and respecting the majority. A study began in 2019 to find the most cost effective, while forward-planning, means of accomplishing this goal. This included examining the current facility for expansion needs of overcrowded conditions, but this proved unfeasible due to building age, land-locked site, drainage challenges, parking, and community access needs. Locating a low-cost alternate site was a year-long pursuit.

With the donation of property on Hwy 2147 near much of the business areas – and the long-term \$1 lease by LCRA for 4 acres of adjacent parking/community use, the plan then moved forward to build a city center for immediate needs. **The existing city hall facility can continue to be used for high traffic departments** such as development services, public works, and some utility. The new facility will house all administrative offices, utility service, spaces for citizen committees, municipal court, and city council. Community events/workshops can be supported...indoors and outdoors.

An architect search committee (with citizen representation) worked to engage a qualified firm to shape the most cost-efficient facility. **The plans for this facility have been shared with the community over the last two years** at Town Halls, multiple council meetings, through written communications, and as a part of the annual budget process – to ensure the city was respecting citizen perspectives. **To help keep costs lower**, the city will internally provide the work for water/wastewater connections – and the city's own 20-year veteran landscape architect, Sandra Nash, will assist in designing cost-efficient, drought tolerant external landscaping plans. This will include using the LCRA space for walking paths/demonstration gardens, local artist sculptural work - as well as free overflow parking during city events/celebrations. **In 2022, the citizens of the community voted to fund the building** of the city hall/center. Those funds have been held in an interest-bearing account, monitoring construction costs and scrubbing the plans for efficient use of space/ funds. This will provide a place of pride borne from honoring citizen voices with fiscal efficacy.

On October 24th, this resident-supported LRP goal will be honored with a ground-breaking for the city center. The anticipated completion is spring 2025, but the 2024 Christmas Holiday celebration/tree lighting will be held on-site next year to bring the community together in the joy of the season, addressing the final goal of the 2019 Long-Range Plan.

Community

- A town hall brochure from the municipal court created some confusion about golf cart use. The court information is intended to remind us all that golf cart driving on Hwy 2147 has state requirements for licensure/registration (as it is a state road with a speed limit of over 35 mph). All the internal roads of our city are POA or city owned with speed limits below this threshold. . The city has no golf cart license/registration requirements in place. It is legal to cross Hwy 2147 (directly), but not drive along it. The municipal court has seen some violations (mostly during high tourist weekends) and wanted to take advantage of the Town Hall with their brochure as a reminder for safety and general legal compliance.
- Additionally, the city staff and council are aware of a letter sent to some residents regarding the upcoming election. None of the council/staff received the letter. When a friend notified the Mayor Pro Tem of the letter, she immediately called and issued an apology to the campaign as this was obviously a misguided effort by a supposed supporter. As Mayor, I share accountability as the letter used some of my own words (mostly from the FAQ) which were expressed publicly to clear up unintentional misinformation shared about city government. The letter repeated them with a tone of disrespect never intended – or deserved. This does not reflect how our city staff or citizens engage. We have now identified the sender who was volunteering in what was meant to be a simple mail-out of the FAQs to those unable to attend the Town Hall. I have shared my personal disappointment with the letter author who inserted this letter into her stack of mailouts. Not all FAQ mailouts had an inserted letter. No mailouts used tax payer dollars.
- On October 19th neighbors are welcome to enjoy the ‘Stargazing Night’ at the Nature Park at 7 pm, a brief workshop followed by independent viewing. Astronomers with telescopes will be onsite. Parking is limited so please carpool, walk, or use a golf cart if possible. Paths in the park are gravel so wear appropriate footwear and bring a small flashlight. Go to the city website front page calendar for details of all events/meetings in the coming month.

As we settle into the “chill” of cooler evenings, many of our snowbirds have returned and the full vibrancy of life in our city is emerging (thrilled to have the church choir return so our voices can be drowned out!). Take a moment each day and note how differently so much of the world lives. Join me in being thankful and share the trust I have in our wonderful city staff and volunteers/elected citizens who have our back daily as we look around and consider how blessed we all are to live in this safe, beautiful place we call home.

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