

Andrew Dulaney
Mayor

Town of Tunica

Board of Aldermen

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Lee B. Turner
Valerie Hartsfield
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Adam Fullilove
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To: Residents of the Town of Tunica
Fr: Andrew Dulaney
Dt: July 6, 2023
Re: The “State” of the Town

As I finish my second year as Mayor, I wanted to write down some of the ups and downs of the first two years. I have learned that the Town is constantly evolving – it is never the same, one day to the next. Whatever the plan is for the day, it generally changes as various events unfold - be it a tree blowing down, an ice storm, a water leak, sewer pumps failing which cause sewer backups, an Atmos contractor boring through a water line, etc. Without any local news media, it can be difficult to get information out and keep everyone updated on what the Town is doing. We have put several things in place to increase awareness of our various *events* (Veterans Day Program, Memorial Day Program, etc.) – these efforts are working as we have had record attendance at most of our programs. Getting the word out on the other efforts being made to address Town issues has been more challenging. Hopefully, this letter will provide important updates and information to everyone.

First, I appreciate the work of the prior mayors and administrations. As I understand, each administration/mayor faces a different set of circumstances and challenges. Chuck Cariker has been an invaluable source of information and assistance for me. When Chuck left office, he left the Town in good financial condition and with a bright future. He always makes himself available to provide any information or assistance that will help us. Thank you, Chuck.

Second, I appreciate the hard work and dedication of the Board of Aldermen – Lee Turner, Valerie Hartsfield, Rebecca Fyfe, Adam Fullilove and Dan Pierce. For four of the five Board members, this is their first time to hold public office. With a new mayor and new Board, we have literally been learning together. The Board is attentive and has worked hard to understand how the Town works - how the various departments are structured and how the budget process works. There is certain required training and all Board members completed this ahead of schedule. Again, I appreciate and commend their dedication and service to our Town.

Challenges:

Employee(s): The Board of Aldermen and I have faced numerous challenges with employees and hiring individuals. First and foremost, two town employees passed away during our first year in office. We remember Mr. Wesley Lewis and Mr. Kelvin Cook, and their contributions to the Town. Adjusting during Mr. Cook's illness and hiring a new Director of Public Works following his death took time. This was a significant setback for the Town. Not only did the Aldermen and I rely on Mr. Cook for his leadership and direction, but many residents would contact him directly. He would address their issue without any of us ever knowing there was an issue! Mr. Cook simply knew what to do and when. The loss of these two employees was significant and a real setback for the Town. Additionally, Trentiss Gordon, a longtime employee with 25 years of service to the Town of Tunica, retired. The loss of his knowledge and skills was a setback.

Hiring and retaining an adequate number of police officers has been a challenge. Simply put, individuals looking at career opportunities today are not going into law enforcement. Additionally, the various law enforcement agencies and departments in DeSoto County have more resources than we do and pay more. More recently, Kevin Hatton, our Chief of Police, retired. This has us looking for a new Chief.

Equipment: Much of the Town's equipment is older. Of the six patrol cars, two were 2010 models and four were 2012 models. Our fairly new garbage truck has been having continuing and persistent problems. Our "knuckle boom" truck (which picks up debris on the side of the road) is about 12 years old and has had significant issues recently, taking it out of service for long periods of time. The mini excavator was older and could not handle all of the jobs that we had and have.

Revenue: A significant part of the Town's budget comes from gaming revenue (close to 70%). While we had an initial increase in gaming revenues, this was short-lived. For the current fiscal year, we budgeted for gaming revenue to be lower than last year. It is lower – unfortunately by more than we budgeted.

Infrastructure: The Town has various issues with its infrastructure. Many of our waterlines are quite old and we continually face water leaks on the oldest stretches of our waterlines. Our lagoon has operational issues at times which need to be addressed. Of course, several of the roads in Town, particularly in the northern end of Town need attention. Addressing these issues is expensive and as well as time-consuming. The Town does not have enough local funds to address these major capital projects. So, we have worked diligently to secure grant funding. All grants are slightly different. I will outline the *general* process for a grant:

The grant process can easily take 6 to 12 months. First, we must identify a grant program and develop a very specific project which will qualify based on the eligibility guidelines. All grants are different, and each project has to be tailored to the particular grant guidelines. Once a grant program and project are identified we have to engage an engineering firm to develop the preliminary engineering report and a cost estimate. Additionally, we have to gather all supporting documentation. Next, we generally are required to hold public hearings on the grant application and obtain public input. After this, the application can be filed. Once filed, it can take months

before we know if we have received the grant. Once the grant is received, we are required to go through a selection process to hire an engineer. Once the engineer is selected, we go through a process to actually sign an engineering contract. The engineer then develops plans and specifications. Once the plans and specifications are developed, we generally have to get them approved by the funding agency. The project is then publicly bid. Once bids are received, they are evaluated and accepted. Getting contracts, insurance and bonds in place is next. With a construction contract in place, a notice to proceed is issued and work will begin. Depending on the type of project, construction time will run from 90 to 270 days – after we get the grant. It can be a frustrating process!

(Some) Successes – [and now the good news!]

Employee(s): *Director of Public Works:* A little over a year ago, we promoted Reggie Griffin to the position of Director of Public Works. Reggie has been with the Town over 20 years. Previously, he worked with our water and sewer department. Since his promotion, Reggie has worked hard, long hours to understand the job and get a good grasp of what it takes. Coordinating and scheduling trash pickup, drainage concerns, grass cutting, leaf and debris collection, park maintenance, holiday decorations (fall, Christmas, spring), handling set up for all the Town events (5 Town programs, River Gate Festival and other events sponsored by Main Street), road signs, speed bumps, street striping/markings and more. He handles equipment issues, works to be sure equipment is serviced and maintained, and coordinates all equipment repairs while also managing his employees with their varied schedules.

Chief of Police: As noted earlier, Kevin Hatton, Chief of Police retired effective May 31, 2023. Chief Hatton advised us towards the end of March that he would be leaving. We appreciate his service and dedication to the Town. The Board developed a job description to use to hire a new Chief of Police. This was advertised widely in the local area as well as with the Mississippi Chief of Police Association. I have been in contact with the Director of the Mississippi Chief's Association. To help with the transition and give the Board time to fully investigate and look for a new Chief, we were fortunate and are appreciative that Richard Veazey, former Chief of Police, was willing to come back part time. Richard is working to address various issues within the department and is doing a great job. I personally am grateful to Richard for his time and expertise which is allowing us time to fully evaluate the best way to continue forward with a professional department.

Infrastructure: In real estate you hear, location, location, and location. For infrastructure projects, it is grant funding, grant funding and grant funding!

Streets: Very little grant funding is available for municipal street repair and paving – especially for small municipalities. Prior to the first legislative session after my taking office, we had a meeting with Cedric Burnett, our state representative. We outlined our funding challenges as well as the condition of many of our streets. We requested \$900,000 of funding from the State. We knew this was a long shot. Based on Cedric's commitment to our project, his diligent work, and his relationships in Jackson with his peers, he was able to secure \$500,000 of state funding for us during the 2022 legislative session. This was incredible! We received the funds in August of last year.

Water: As noted above we have continued and persistent issues with various water lines in Town, particularly in the north end of Town. We applied for and have been awarded \$212,000 of ARPA funds. These funds have been allotted for water line repairs. Towards the end of last year, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) came out with a new grant program – MCWI Program. We were eligible to apply for \$424,000 of additional funding. The funds will be combined with the \$212,000 we already have. After a significant amount of work by J. Robinson and Kate Scott Pennock, we timely filed our application. Unfortunately, we did not get the grant in the initial round of funding. However, MDEQ announced a second round of funding and we tried again. I am pleased to announce that on June 8, 2023, we were advised that our grant was approved for the full \$424,000. The Board held a meeting on June 9, 2023, and accepted the grant. Engineering is already underway and if all goes well, we will start the process to have various water lines in the north end of Town replaced before the end of 2023.

Streets: (back to streets): We held off doing any paving with our 2022 funds for two reasons. First, we wanted to see if we would get the ARPA funding to replace the water lines. The paving needs to come after the water line repair. Second, we hoped to get additional funds. Fortunately, both of these issues are now resolved – favorably for the Town. With the MCWI funds, the water line replacement project is being engineered and will be constructed over the next several months (6 to 9). As soon as it is completed, we will have the paving project lined up and ready to go. During the 2023 legislative session, Cedric Burnett was able to secure an additional \$500,000 for the Town to be used for paving! We are waiting for the official grant agreement and documentation, but the allocation was included in the law and will be paid. This will give us \$1,000,000 of grant funding for paving projects. Hopefully the grant documentation will be forthcoming in several weeks.

Recreation/Quality of Life Projects: Additionally, the Board has expressed its desire to increase and improve our outdoor areas. We have a wonderful River Gate Park. It is great for festivals and other events. We have a wonderful Veterans Park. Our commitment to honoring and remembering our veterans is important and critical to the Town and our country. To expand our recreational opportunities, the Town applied for and has been awarded a federal grant of over \$350,000. These funds will be utilized to construct a sidewalk/walking trail that connects Veterans Park with the tennis courts, and the tennis court with Tunica Elementary. This grant has more regulations than can be imagined. If all goes right, we will start construction in May to July 2024. If you have two hours to spare some time, ask me about the process for these funds! The Board has allocated funds to resurface the tennis courts. There will be one “like” new tennis court and two pickleball courts. This project is funded with local funds. We anticipate construction to begin in August and the project being completed in September (of 2023!).

We have a newly created senior citizen committee. This is just getting developed and organized. If you have any interest in participating in events with other Town of Tunica seniors, please contact us at 662-363-2432 and we will include you on the list.

My experience is that if I write too much, no one will read any of it. With that said, I will stop. If you find this information useful, please let us know. As noted above, keeping everyone updated on what we are doing is difficult. If this type of communication is helpful, I will try to

send something on a regular basis – most likely semi-annually. I appreciate the trust and confidence each of you have placed in me. It is truly an honor to be your Mayor. If you see something that needs attention, please call, text, or email. Or, as most people do, just stop me in the road. If we don't know of the problem, we cannot correct it. So many conversations with me are started, "I don't want to complain, but . . . ". Literally, 90 percent of these are not actual complaints but me being advised of an issue that the Town can address – usually in a day or two.

Again, thank you! Have a great summer.


Andrew Dulaney

[If you would like to receive text messages from the Town concerning important events, text each of the following to 91896: TUNICAALERTS, TUNICAEVENTS, and TUNICAWATER.]

