



# ARANSAS PASS CITY NEWS

Issue 43

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## Update On A Few of the Aransas Pass Projects

Important signs of growth and progress



Construction is underway for the new Harbor Freight store coming to Aransas Pass. Harbor Freight will be an important addition to that shopping center located at a critical entrance to AP. The above pic shows a gutted former Bealls building getting ready for Harbor Freight.



Construction is underway for the new Starbucks. See above picture. Starbucks is a national coffee chain which will attract customers locally as well as regionally.



Construction is underway for the new Motel 6, located next to the Fairfield Inn and at the entrance to the City. All of these businesses decided to move to AP after their research showed significant post-hurricane progress and growth.



## **Newberry Park Is Renovated With More To Come**

Thanks to many citizen suggestions, hard work by the Keep Aransas Pass Beautiful Organization, hard work by the Public Works Department and some good ideas from the Finance Department, Newberry Park, located on Harrison Blvd., a very high traffic road, is renovated. See picture above. Plans are underway for a border fence around the park. This newest City facility has been a long-time-a-comin'. Planning began in May and June of last year with the beginning of the FY2021 Budget talks and was strongly supported by the Mayor and Council. .

Above Photo Courtesy of Jeff Martin

## **American Rescue Act of 2021**

Aransas Pass should financially benefit from this unexpected Federal grant. On March 11th, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 into law. The \$1.9 trillion package is intended to combat the Covid 19 Pandemic, including the public health and economic impacts. Funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is expected to be paid to cities and counties in two installments. The first will be within 60 days after March 11th, 2021. The remaining 50% within the following 12 months. This grant specifically identifies water and sewer projects as approved uses of these funds. At this point, Aransas Pass plans to use at least a portion of these funds for that purpose. Details are being worked out. Your City Council has approved going out to bid for the necessary administrative and engineering planning associated with this grant. The Texas General Land Office will assist with the grant distribution.

## Two Very Deserving Volunteers



Army veteran Fred Mittelsted volunteered to get his lifeguard certificate in order to help the aquatic center when lifeguards were unavailable. Retired RN and Teacher Ginger Mittelsted presented the aquatic center with painted coastal themed murals under the kiddy slide.

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### YOUR CITY COUNCIL

1. Mayor Ram Gomez;
2. Mayor Pro-Tem Jan Moore;
3. Place 1 Carrie Scruggs;
- Place 2 Jason Knight;
- Place 4 Vicki Abrego



## FEMA MEETINGS CONCLUDE

It happened quietly, but it was an historic moment for Aransas Pass. The weekly post-hurricane meetings between the City and FEMA beginning in 2017, are no more. They have ended. Above is a picture from the once bustling meetings taken in early 2019. The purpose of the meetings was to review all of the then current hurricane Harvey recovery and repair projects and FEMA's funding of that work. The water tower came out of these meetings. So did all the hurricane debris removal. Repairs to City Hall, the civic center; roads damaged by debris trucks; the aquatic center repairs. The list goes on. Many millions of dollars in repair and recovery money were injected into the City of Aransas Pass from these meetings and the oversight by the Mayor and Council, Finance Director and City Manager. It was because of these meetings and all the participants that Aransas Pass came out stronger after the Hurricane than before the hurricane. The only expensive project left is repairs to the Conn Brown bulkhead. That work is underway. Ironically, the room in which these historic meetings were held, was the same room which served as a post-hurricane emergency operations center. When that work ended, the FEMA meetings took over.

# Questions From The Community

During the past month the City has been getting some good questions from the community. Some of those questions, with answers, will be presented here.

- 1. Why Are City Property Taxes High:** Aransas Pass taxes are higher than surrounding communities because our property values are significantly lower than those communities. In other words, the lower the property valuation, the higher the tax rate. We've had the lowest property valuation, when compared to Rockport, Port Aransas and Ingleside for many years. It has been suggested we simply tighten our belts and cut taxes. However, we significantly tightened our belts in order to strengthen what had been a dangerously weak budget stretching back many years. But we have reversed that downward slide, but only after many cuts were already made. At the same time we have worked to update our work vehicle fleet; public safety and other departments that have been allowed to decline over the years. Finally, the best way to lower taxes is to build our economic growth. That now is happening so we can reverse years of low property valuations.
- 2. What is happening with Annexation?** The annexation was approved in order to prevent Corpus Christie from annexing too close to our borders causing us to be landlocked. In other words, it was done so the City of Aransas Pass can protect its future. Against all odds, that effort was successful. A large industry was deeply involved with the anti-annexation effort. Currently there is a lawsuit against the City by industry in an effort to overturn the annexation.
- 3. Can We Continue To Develop Conn Brown Harbor?** This question has been asked for years if not for decades. It is a good question. The City Charter includes language that prohibits the sale of any of the properties at Conn Brown Harbor. This creates major challenges for developers who are interested in building a hotel/convention center and/or attractive housing at the harbor. On the other hand, the City currently is meeting with professionals who are looking into ways to develop while honoring the mandates of the charter. In other words, the City would continue to own the land. This approach is quite possible, with an additional plan of leaving a large amount of land for fishing and other recreational and commercial activities. The goal of developing Conn Brown began with the building of new roads; a bike/walking path and paved parking lot. That work will be completed this summer. In sum, the development of Conn Brown is not only underway, but it is making significant progress.
- 4. How Do We Bring in New Businesses to Aransas Pass?** That goal has already started. No amount of coercing or glad handing will force a business to move to Aransas Pass. New retail businesses only move to a location when the population, rooftops, auto traffic and new signs of growth are visible in a community. After being dormant for years, those now are beginning to be present in AP. This became obvious when Harbor Freight, Starbucks, Motel 6, the Multiplex theater decided to open here. Adding to this formula are the additional rooftops with new single family housing, new apartments and the re-opening of apartments closed by Hurricane Harvey. We bring in business, by building our infrastructure. Encouraging housing development, and importantly, offering an amicable community and city leadership that works well together and is business friendly. Nothing turns off business more than an arguing and negative City Council. The Chamber is working with the San Patricio EDC and the City to increase business.
- 5. What is the City doing to Fix Infrastructure?** We are receiving millions of dollars worth of grants to repair and extend some of our City infrastructure, with more coming. We have identified most of the issues and have cost estimates for these projects. We are working toward a Northside water tower.
- 6. What is the Story on the City's debt?** The City inherited a significant amount of debt dating back to 2005. The current administration issued a much smaller amount of debt, that was necessary to update our aging vehicle fleet and keep it from constantly breaking down. But debt can be Ok from the past and present, if properly managed. Since Harvey, the current Mayor and Council have managed the debt without increasing the I&S portion of the property tax rate. The City is current with all bond obligations and does not foresee any difficulties in making future payments.
- 7. How can we have a stronger and stable financial future?** Growth is one way. Attracting new business is another. This results in larger amounts of sales tax for city services. Continue the successful effort at reducing expenditure. And the Mayor and Council's successful effort since Hurricane Harvey of maintaining the city fund Balance of 40%. Working with the Chamber and the EDC to improve growth.
- 8. Is the City's Budget Balanced?** Yes! We are required to have a balanced budget. Also, for the first time since mandated by the Charter, the City has a healthy reserve as well as a strong fund balance.
- 9. What are the revitalizing downtown Plans?** There is an organization in place that is actively working on a revitalization design that will first address lighting and landscaping as a priority. There are plans to use grants and event fundraisers for these efforts.
- 10. Is crime On The Increase?** The better question is: How safe do you feel in our community. In every community survey taken over the past few years, a strong majority of people feel safe in AP. A recent survey showed 64% rated AP as good to excellent for safety. Emergency services under Capt. Lynn Pearce and the Fire Department under Chief Kelley both have made giant strides forward in the past few years.