

We Need a Trauma Center in Orange Beach

1100 words

Rauf Bolden, Orange Beach

August 30, 2018

We Need a Trauma Center in Orange Beach

It is hard to miss the distinct sound of disappointment.

A stand-alone trauma center is not even in the planning stages, only bridges and roads, according to Orange Beach Mayor Tony Kennon's 2017 Town-Hall Presentation, being available on the city's web site

(<http://www.orangebeachal.gov/sites/default/files/pdfs/townhall.pdf>).

Prioritizing infrastructure over the urgency for healthcare is financially driven. Roads move people, pushing development forward, putting heads in vacation-rental beds, and generating huge revenues for the city. Whereas health-care facilities support families, tending the critically ill, generating an enormous sense of well being for the local community.

This asymmetry in choices nurses the for-profit model, nested in an outdoor community where swimming, fishing and boating accidents happen, simultaneously developing contact-sports programs at the new Middle School/High School, located within a community of medically dependent retired residents is the mosaic we must plan for. Arguing for a 24/7 stand-alone trauma center with a helicopter pad on site over the need for another bridge makes sense to local families, because we should care for the people who live in Orange Beach first.

Getting comfortable with the idea of driving 17 miles (29 minutes) to the nearest trauma center in Foley is misguided. We shouldn't have to do that.

Our public debate is marinated in despair, finding no answer for the critically injured, needing immediate state-of-the-art care in Orange Beach.

"South Baldwin Regional Medical Center [in Foley] is your community healthcare provider," according to a report on the hospital's website. The Medical Center has an average review rating of 2.5 out of 5.0 from 128 reviewers, according to a report by Google.

South Baldwin is the only facility in the area providing emergency-care-for-veterans, according to Larry Belmonte a Marine Corps veteran.

We deserve better, understanding Orange Beach has Walk-In Clinics, being open during the day, supported by local Fire EMTs (Emergency-Medical Technicians) at night. The ambulance service is Med-Star, coming 17 miles from Foley, returning the patient 17 miles north to the trauma center.

"I was about to lose consciousness when the helicopter landed so there are a few blanks. I had 2 stents immediately (last night) and had one more this morning. Thank goodness I didn't have to have a bypass. I can tell you I am going to start doing some things on my bucket list when I'm cleared. Life is so short & there's a lot less road ahead of us than there is behind us... life, love & happiness is what should matter for all of us... I'm so

We Need a Trauma Center in Orange Beach

grateful to be here," said Melba Morgan a resident of Green Cove Springs, Florida, having survived because her community provided state-of-the-art healthcare.

Retired Hospital Administrator John D. Davis explained what is needed to start the conversation about a trauma center. "Certificate of Need (Alabama State Health Planning and Development Agency), resurrecting the Gulf Coast Health Care Authority, allowing the authority to issue bonds, studying the financial-feasibility, and determining realistic alternatives (Plan B)," estimating five beds are enough for a local trauma center in Orange Beach.

Healthcare facilities are expensive, priced on a per-bed basis, "around \$1.5 million per bed to build," according to a report by Quora.

"Whether as a patient or visitor, we've all been in a hospital and had ideas about what would have made our hospital experience exceptional. Thinking about what I would want to see as a patient coming in for surgery helps determine everything from signage to the design of the hospital rooms," according to a report by Becker's Hospital Review.

To make this dream a reality we need local support. Orange Beach has a government of Mayor and City Council, being clear who is the junior partner. It is the Mayor who sets the agenda for the media and the government.

Mayor Tony Kennon has dug his heels in, being clear about Council's priority for an ALDOT (Alabama Department of Transportation) Bridge west of the Foley Beach Express, and the Wolf Bay Bridge by Doc's over anything else. Still 1538+ members of the Facebook Group: "End The #Bridge2Nowhere"

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/155706324781200/about/>), are in opposition to the proposed span west of the Beach Express, thinking the State's money could be better spent.

The Mayor responded to this opposition. "i have been following with much interest the comments on this site [Facebook]. my suggestion is that everyone who is in disagreement with this bridge, in favor of the bridge, in favor of the road thru the park , those who r against the road thru the park and everyone who wishes to blow up the bridges so no one else can make it across the canal now that u have ur piece of the island, load up and come to a council meeting so that u can get the facts, the real truth and stop being educated into further ignorance by following this site. i welcome all of u. in the end we may agree to disagree but at least u have the true facts to base ur decision on. let me know of a date and i will make sure we accommodate the request. my cell is 251 747 8282," said Mayor Tony Kennon in a Facebook post (End The #Bridge2Nowhere, June 18, 2018).

His writing speaks volumes. Changing the Mayor's mind, allocating funds for a local trauma center is not going to happen, perhaps he has simply lost touch with the needs of constituent families.

Besides the political headwinds, other factors mount a convincing argument against a trauma center, including issues with Medicare and Medicaid patients, budgeting for "cuts to Medicare reimbursements, around \$112 billion in the ensuing years," according to a report from the Congressional Budget Office.

Several exceptions to the make-it-pay model used to exist in Orange Beach, like the Sportsplex, Recreation Center, Aquatic Center, Tennis Center, Art Center, Golf Center and Senior Center, being maintained for the greater good of the community. Taking this now extinct precedent, and running with it is the only way to open a dialogue with City Hall.

We Need a Trauma Center in Orange Beach

"The right to decide" is a simple and seductive slogan, applying it to a Referendum for a 24/7 stand-alone trauma center, or the Wolf Bay Bridge next to Doc's, illustrating the debate.

Letting the residents of Orange Beach have a vote before spending tens-of-millions in taxpayer dollars, being allowed to choose whether to put the health of the community first or tourist evacuations first is an opportunity-of-choice residents would appreciate from their local leaders.

ENDS.