

# Call for Purchasing a Public Beach in Orange Beach

1000 words

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Buying beachfront property for the greater good of Orange Beach residents is not in sync with local government's views of spending money without a verifiable return-on-investment. A gated beach with ample parking and bathroom facilities for the residents is obviously frivolous compared to Council's aggressive investment criteria, but it does meet the criteria of local voters, caring very much to have a place in the sun for their families to enjoy.

It is as if elected officials are undervaluing their electoral alliances. They are not seeing the happiness they could generate with the local voters through this simple act of community good, giving residents something constituent families can actually touch besides a bridge.

The problem of providing public access to beaches baffles policy experts across the country.

"An increase in the population of coastal counties and popularity of coastal beaches as tourism destinations create difficulties for management agencies responsible for providing public beach access," according to a report in Science Direct (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0964569108001142>).

Orange Beach has three public beaches, owned and maintained by the State of Alabama, according to a report by Gulf Shores & Alabama Tourism (<https://www.gulfshores.com/blog/2010/09/24/quick-list-of-public-beaches-on-the-alabama-gulf-coast/#sm.000vdoh1e18dvd59xkt1m504hdnry>).

The city does not own a beach, compared to Gulf Shores with expansive public beach, being large enough to hold the Hangout Music Festival.

Mayor Tony Kennon heralds the natural beauty of our privately owned beaches, but is loathe to endorse the purchase of dedicated-beach access for local residents, having kept a controlling hand on the treasury for the past decade.

"While you [tourists] are here, you will come to understand what we mean by this ['Life is better here'] as you soak in the spectacular beauty of our sunrises, sunsets and enjoy walking along our sandy white beaches [property of hotels or condos]," wrote Mayor Tony Kennon on the city's web site (<http://www.orangebeachal.gov/office-mayor/welcome>).

Imagine a gated beach with membership card access, scanning in like we do at the Recreation Center. Even planning a presentation of this idea is made difficult, because Orange Beach does not have a finance committee that is open to the public, allowing citizens to sign-up, submitting spending ideas to the Mayor for consideration during his budget process. Suggesting government and residents have a shared political consciousness is mistaken; coordinated planning is easier said than done.

Some argue beaches should not be owned at all.

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"Beach access is a universal right and necessary for the public's enjoyment of the beach," according to a report on Beachapedia ([http://www.beachapedia.org/Beach\\_Access](http://www.beachapedia.org/Beach_Access)).

"The public should be afforded full and fair access to beaches, which are public trust resources, by minimizing the possibility of impediment; including development, subdivision or land use zoning change; or deterring obstacles, including gates, fences, hired security, misleading signage, rock walls, shrubbery or other blockades, being placed upon public rights of way to beach access," according to a report on the environmental website Surfrider (<https://www.surfrider.org/programs/entry/beach-access>).

Orange Beach has a responsibility to its citizens for safety, and protection, certainly providing beach access does not fall under these parameters. The idea of providing beach access for future generations to enjoy is nice since Orange Beach can afford it, but it does not fall under the umbrella of public safety.

That is the problem, convincing Mayor Kennon that an important element in life is sharing with your neighbors, increasing the quality of life for the residents, foregoing running the city like a business, because the city is a tax-free entity as it is.

If the \$50 million Orange Beach has in reserves were taxed it would only be \$25 million, so use \$25 million to better the quality of life for the people who live here by purchasing a stretch of beach for residents to use.

I have heard employees say, it is easier to get the truth out of the White House than it is to get lunch money out of Mayor Tony Kennon.

Our mayor's fiscal policies are rewriting the laws of political frugality, but unlike conservatives who are constantly conscience of their cheering base, our mayor is greeted with cautious, measured skepticism from the opposition and shrugged shoulders from those on the fence.

Admittedly our mayor's supporters stand shoulder-to-shoulder with his brand of fiscal conservatism, concerning a beach for residents.

"I want to know the cost before making any decision," said Bill Jeffries, Planning Commissioner, and 12 resident of Orange Beach.

"Not needed [beach access]! I'm working toward another bridge for Orange Beach," said Alan McElroy, retired businessman, and long time resident.

"Cut out the dang foolishness and build a boat launch at the pass. We already have three beaches, owned by the State," purred Cecil Young, Board-of-Adjustment member, and lifetime resident of Orange Beach.

Arguing a double standard exists, because of the beach mouse habitat that ostensibly blocked the proposed boat launch near the pass Cecil Young added, "It didn't worry them about the beach mouse when they built the condos, so why should they worry about it when they're building a boat ramp?"

Obviously the choir does not lack voices, singing for disbursement of the same pot of money.

Residents who get up and go to work in the morning feel trapped in a cut-throat economy of food service jobs and stagnant wages, wanting to have a sanctuary, experiencing a little sun, having a few laughs by going to an uncrowded beach with their families. Once done a residents' beach is forever.

ENDS.