

Cancelling Beach Road Beautification in Orange Beach

900 words

Rauf Bolden, Orange Beach

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The Perdido Beach Boulevard Beautification Project on Hwy 182 fell off a cliff.

"The City of Orange Beach was notified by the Alabama Department of Transportation [ALDOT] that it is not pursuing the phase 3 portion of the Perdido Beach Boulevard Median Improvement Project at this time. With the current two phases built and constructed between Romar Beach and State Highway 161, the Department of Transportation would like to monitor traffic volumes and movements in the area east of the State Highway 161 intersection to determine whether additional improvements are needed," according to a report in the City's Newsletter (4/5/19).

Mayor Tony Kennon traveled to Montgomery, accompanied by a delegation of around 50 supporters on April 10th, ostensibly celebrating "Orange Beach Day" with the State Legislature (<https://mailchi.mp/cityoforangebeach/city-of-orange-beach-526173>), but we found no official press releases, or cable news coverage of the event (<https://news.google.com/search?q=alabama%20legislature%20orange%20beach%20day&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US%3Aen>).

Was this just a smokescreen for something else?

Theoretically representatives from the Kennon Delegation had an opportunity to lobby against Senator Chris Elliott's Bill SB23 [<https://legiscan.com/AL/bill/SB23/2019>], proposing voting rights for people living in the Police and Planning Jurisdiction (PJ), but domiciled outside the city limits. The PJ residents must pay business licenses, sales taxes, and lodging taxes in Orange Beach, but have no voting rights in municipal elections. Senator Elliott argues this is wrong.

Therefore, the delegation may have brought their own agenda. Perhaps being a *de facto* demonstration, supporting the City Council's Resolution (<https://orangebeach.novusagenda.com/agendapublic/CoverSheet.aspx?ItemID=13880&MeetingID=1016>), keeping PJ residents off the voting rolls, and simultaneously opening up back channel negotiations for re-initiating Mayor Kennon's Beach Beautification Project.

The shock of the state's decision regarding the Beach Boulevard Project (Hwy 182) is obvious, having promised citizens four phases of construction, including beautifully landscaped medians from the Gulf State Park to the Florida line. Now the state is withdrawing funding after two rounds, assuming City Council is not happy with an unfinished beautification project down the middle of Hwy 182.

"The phase East of Public Beach is being postponed. It does not heavy on-off traffic because the commence along this area is spread out and or there is lower demand exit and enter the roadway.

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Plus, the obvious redevelopment of Canal Road West of Hwy 161 will be enough intrusion into traffic flow the sanity of locals and visitors will be challenged," said John Davis a resident of Orange Beach in an email.

What do locals think about the beautification project?

"I feel it was money wasted and has caused much confusion for tourists as well as locals. The flow of traffic was much better before," said Jerry Shields, a resident of Orange Beach.

"Don't see that it helped any traffic problems. I avoid business that requires me to go back the way I came. Unless you live here and understand how it works, the road has become dangerous. Bike lane in the center of traffic, what's up with that?" said Sherrie Reas, a resident in Orange Beach's Police and Planning Jurisdiction.

"As annoying as the median structures are, I think they may actually be safer than having people make endless left hand turns across several lanes of traffic," said Alice Davidson, a resident of Orange Beach.

"I really don't have a strong opinion. I just think the whole city needs to become more pedestrian oriented," said Lucy Hazebrook, a resident of Orange Beach.

"Too few locals and visitors realize how dangerous that short area of Beach Hwy was before this project. It is the commercial zone of the city, single North-South road within the city, and a through road Interstate 10 to West Pensacola," said John Davis a resident of Orange Beach in an email.

"I really don't like U-turns and the bike lane is crazy for the bikes [cyclists]. I wish it would go back the way it was," said Pam Atkinson a resident of Bear Point in Orange Beach.

The fundamental hurdle requires Mayor Kennon to take ownership of this disaster. City Council needs to hold public meetings, supplying residents with the email addresses and telephone contacts of the state officials responsible for pulling the plug on the promised median beautification, allowing residents to voice their opinions.

I understand Mayor Kennon has been distracted by the new school. Letting residents in on what happened on the Beach Road will help the healing process, perhaps generating support for alternatives. Some will argue the city has already taken physical possession of Canal Road (Hwy 180) east of Hwy 161, frankly wondering what is causing the delay to promised infrastructure projects when Orange Beach has the cash to pay for them (\$40 Million).

Mayor Kennon must get over his embarrassment, having been kicked to the curb by ALDOT over the Beach Road Project. Only then will the city be able to heal, moving forward, independently undertaking infrastructure projects Orange Beach can afford.

ENDS.

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Disclosure: I wrote this article myself, and it expresses my own opinions. I am not receiving compensation for it. I have no business relationship with any company whose stock is mentioned in this article.