

Repeal The Baldwin County Lodging Tax District in Orange Beach

800 words

Rauf Bolden, Orange Beach

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Does the City of Orange Beach really need to pay the "Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)" approximately \$4 Million per year to promote tourism in Orange Beach?

The CVB was founded in the early 90s with the formation of the Baldwin County Lodging Tax District (https://baldwincountyal.gov/docs/default-source/sales-and-use-tax/baldwin-county-lodging-tax-district.pdf?sfvrsn=f47e660b_6), but in today's Internet Era the District's promotional objective has arguably less value than it did 27 years ago. Perhaps re-examining Orange Beach's tourism goals with an amendment, sharing a small portion of the CVB's riches with the residents, providing paid tolls for locals is a possibility.

The CVB has limited latitude. "The bureau shall conduct programs, including but not limited to, programs of information and publicity designed to attract conventions and tourists to the area (Section 45-2-243.21)," according to a report on the Justia US Law web site (<https://law.justia.com/codes/alabama/2018/title-45/chapter-2/article-24/part-4/division-2/section-45-2-243.21/>).

In order to modify the original legal structure of the CVB, Mayor Tony Kennon must be seen to be cooperative for this to work, meaning the Orange Beach City Council must petition the State of Alabama Legislature, asking for a modification to the Baldwin County Lodging Tax District so a portion of the District's funds can be re-purposed to pay for locals' tolls on the Foley Beach Express.

I fear direct community payback is not what Kennon espouses to do as evidenced by his refusal to repeal the four-mil property tax (<http://altoday.com/archives/29304-rauf-bolden-proposing-property-tax-cuts-in-orange-beach>). He may be more prone to use another method of distributing the District's monies, perhaps subsidizing youth-sports programs.

The CVB's money is not wasted, meaning every cent is spent promoting tourism. They have a beautiful website with tons of useful information for tourists.

"Gulf Shores and Orange Beach have spectacular accommodations and rentals, award-winning restaurants, and amazing events. Our paradise is brimming with Southern hospitality, featuring one-of-a-kind attractions like championship golf, nature trails, water sports, and amusement parks (like the well-known Waterville USA)," according to a report on the CVB's website (<https://www.gulfshores.com/>).

How can citizens plan to change the restrictions of the Baldwin County Lodging Tax District, enabling each registered voter in Orange Beach to have their toll-by-plate paid for by the CVB? It seems difficult, but there is a way.

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"Re-writing or in any way changing the Tax District, would involve the Legislature repealing, amending etc., local act #93-706. The first step in the process would be to get the local delegation behind it," wrote Hugh R. Evans III, General Counsel, Office of Secretary of State, State of Alabama in an email.

The key issue starts at the local level with Orange Beach's Mayor Tony Kennon. He is the only one who can start the ball rolling. If he does not like the idea of allocating a portion of the District's funds to pay for local citizens' tolls on the Beach Express, the legislative process to repeal will never get off the ground.

"It would be great if there were a way for locals to get free tolls from the CVB," said Carol Belmonte a resident of Orange Beach.

"They (CVB) can do what they want, but locals are already getting a discount from the Foley Beach Express," said John Davis a resident of Bear Point.

Some will argue to leave things as they are because the "Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)" is doing a great job because we need their promotional expertise with 677 new condos coming online (<https://obawebsite.com/oba-news/2019/orange-beach-council-considering-677-new-housing-units>).

I requested a comment from the CVB, but they did not reply.

A city takes about 100 years to evolve, establishing its identity (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944360902777031>). I want Orange Beach to establish its identity, making the island a more compassionate place to live by sharing its wealth directly with the residents.

ENDS.

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Disclosure: The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the author. I have no business relationship with any company whose stock is mentioned in this article.