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FUNDING WAVELAND'S FUTURE

A More Strategic Approach to Infrastructure, Coastal Funding & Coleman Avenue Revitalization

One of the biggest challenges facing Waveland is finding the money necessary to complete our major projects. Drainage, water and sewer, streets, coastal protection, waterfront improvements and community development can cost millions of dollars. For a city our size, we simply cannot pay for all of these needs through our municipal budget alone. **State and federal funding partnerships are essential to Waveland's future.**

Over the last several months, I have taken a deeper look at Waveland's experience with two of our most important coastal funding sources—**Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) and the Tidelands Trust Fund (Tidelands)**—including what we have received, what has gone unfunded, what other communities are doing successfully, and what we can learn from those results.

That research has now led me to another funding opportunity that I believe deserves Waveland's attention: the **Mississippi Main Street Revitalization Grant Program (MMSRGP)**.

Taken together, these three programs demonstrate why Waveland needs to move from simply applying for grants as opportunities arise to maintaining a **year-round, rolling five-year Infrastructure and Funding Plan**.

What GOMESA Has Taught Us

Waveland has demonstrated that we **can successfully compete for major infrastructure funding**.

One of our most significant successes has been the **Center City Infrastructure Improvements Project**. Waveland requested \$4 million for the first project and received the entire \$4 million. We continued that approach with Phase II, and Phase III has now been submitted for additional funding.

That also demonstrates something residents don't always see: **nearly every major project the City undertakes is years in the making. Progress requires patience, persistence and resilience—and a commitment to keep pushing forward until the job is done.**

But we have also had applications that were unsuccessful.

Waveland requested **\$9 million for Citywide Drainage Improvements covering 11 watersheds**, including major drainage-channel improvements and culvert replacements. That request received no funding. We also had unsuccessful GOMESA requests for portions of our Infill Area Infrastructure program.

That does not mean these were bad or unnecessary projects.

It means **need alone does not guarantee funding.**

We are competing against other cities, counties, utility authorities and eligible organizations for a limited amount of money.

What I believe we should do differently

One of the clearest lessons from studying successful projects is the value of **phasing large requests.**

Rather than returning with a single \$9 million drainage request covering all 11 watersheds, I believe we should evaluate and rank those watersheds based upon repetitive flooding, homes and roads affected, hurricane and tropical-storm exposure, coastal impact, engineering readiness and other measurable factors.

We could then identify the strongest two or three watersheds for a **Phase I drainage project**, pursue perhaps \$2.5–\$3.5 million, complete that work, demonstrate its benefit and move systematically into subsequent phases.

The need doesn't change. The way we present and pursue the funding does.

What Tidelands Has Taught Us

Tidelands serves a different purpose. It supports eligible projects involving conservation, preservation, public access and improvements associated with Mississippi's public-trust tidelands.

Waveland has actually been fairly successful in obtaining Tidelands appropriations.

Recent awards have supported **Beach Boulevard amenities and pavilions, marina planning and design, and Coleman Avenue Waterfront Improvements**, including \$250,000 for Coleman Avenue in FY25 and another \$300,000 in FY27.

Our history with Tidelands, however, teaches another lesson.

Some projects have not proceeded exactly as originally planned, resulting in funds being reallocated to projects capable of moving forward. There is nothing inherently wrong with doing that when circumstances change. Preserving Waveland's funding and putting it toward another eligible project may be far preferable to losing the opportunity altogether.

But our objective should be greater than simply receiving an appropriation.

Our goal should be to turn an appropriation into a completed project that benefits the public.

For that reason, I believe Waveland should develop a **comprehensive Beachfront and Public Access Master Plan**. Rather than approaching pavilions, beach access, Coleman Avenue, the Lighthouse and other waterfront improvements as unrelated projects, we should determine what we ultimately want our waterfront to become and build toward that vision in logical, fundable phases.

A New Opportunity: Mississippi Main Street Revitalization

The research identified another funding source that I believe Waveland should begin pursuing aggressively: the **Mississippi Main Street Revitalization Grant Program**.

This is particularly important because it can potentially fund projects that don't fit neatly within GOMESA or Tidelands.

The program provides competitive grants of **up to \$500,000 per community** for eligible downtown revitalization projects. Current guidance expressly includes local governmental entities among eligible applicants. Communities with populations under 10,000 receive a reduced matching requirement: 10% on the first \$100,000 and 20% on amounts exceeding \$100,000.

That means Waveland appears to have access to another significant source of outside funding that we have not fully utilized.

And Mississippi is making substantial investments through this program.

In 2026, approximately **\$9.82 million was appropriated for 26 downtown revitalization projects** across Mississippi. Winning projects include downtown revitalization, historic-building restoration, Town Green and public-art improvements, wayfinding, streetscapes, public spaces, retail recruitment, riverfront revitalization, lighting, safety and visitor facilities.

Several of those projects bear a remarkable resemblance to things Waveland could do on Coleman Avenue.

Cleveland received **\$120,000 for Town Green and Public Art**. Columbus received **\$380,000 for Downtown Wayfinding and Streetscape Improvements**. Hernando received **\$180,000 for Streetscapes, Public Space Improvements and Retail Recruitment**. Moss Point and Pascagoula each received **\$500,000 for major revitalization projects**. Laurel received **\$500,000 for its Downtown Brickyard Revitalization Project**.

The lesson is important:

Main Street funding is not limited to restoring old buildings. It is being used to create the public spaces, identity, accessibility and activity necessary to make downtown business districts successful.

Why Coleman Avenue?

This may be one of the strongest opportunities identified through this research.

Waveland's own comprehensive plan already calls for us to:

“Regenerate Coleman Avenue as the heart of the City of Waveland.”

The plan envisions Coleman Avenue as the City's center of activity, incorporating restaurants, retail businesses, public buildings and a Town Green serving as the location for community festivals and events.

We therefore don't need to invent a new vision simply because grant money is available.

We already have the vision. We need a funding strategy capable of accomplishing it.

Coleman Avenue Business District Revitalization Plan

I believe we should establish a comprehensive Coleman Avenue Business District Revitalization Plan built around four major components.

Priority	Project	Purpose
CREATE	Town Green Amphitheater & Public Gathering Space	Create regular activity and events that bring residents and visitors into the business district
IDENTIFY	Coleman Avenue Gateway at Beach Boulevard	Establish a large, recognizable Coleman Avenue entrance and identity for the district
ACCESS	Bourgeois Street Municipal Parking	Acquire and develop property to provide convenient public parking for businesses and events
CONNECT	Incubator Building Community Center	Renovate the building into a multipurpose community center available to the entire City

These aren't four unrelated projects.

They are four pieces of one economic-development strategy.

The Amphitheater: Creating an Economic Anchor

I envision a permanent covered amphitheater/stage and public gathering area at the Town Green.

Its purpose would extend far beyond holding concerts.

Regular concerts, festivals, markets, patriotic celebrations, children's activities and community events create **foot traffic**. Foot traffic creates customers for restaurants and businesses. Successful businesses attract additional businesses and private investment.

The State's Main Street investments expressly recognize the connection between vibrant downtowns, economic development and quality of life.

The amphitheater should therefore be presented as an **economic-development anchor for the Coleman Avenue Business District**, not simply an entertainment amenity.

The Coleman Avenue Gateway

At Beach Boulevard, I would like to see a substantial architectural **Coleman Avenue – Waveland, Mississippi** gateway identifying the entrance to the business district.

A recognizable gateway creates a sense of arrival and gives Coleman Avenue an identity that can be used in tourism, festivals, marketing and business recruitment.

It says:

This is Coleman Avenue. This is Waveland. And this is our downtown.

Municipal Parking on Bourgeois Street

Successful revitalization creates another challenge: **where do people park?**

I would like the City to investigate acquiring an appropriate parcel on Bourgeois Street and developing it into attractive, well-lit, ADA-accessible municipal parking with landscaping and pedestrian connections to Coleman Avenue.

We should address parking **before** it becomes an obstacle to growth rather than waiting until after the district is fully developed.

The Incubator Building: A Community Center for All of Waveland

I would also like to see the Incubator building renovated into a true **Waveland Community Center available to the entire City**.

The facility currently has an occupant. Once that lease is over, the building could provide flexible space for youth and senior activities, civic organizations, veterans, nonprofit groups, educational programs, community meetings and small events.

I would also preserve an economic-development component by providing space for small-business workshops, entrepreneur training, workforce programs and business-development assistance.

It would be a place that serves **community and economic development at the same time**.

One Vision—Several Funding Sources

Perhaps the most important lesson from all of this research is that **we should stop trying to make every project fit whichever grant happens to be available**.

Instead, we should match each project to the funding source designed to support it.

GOMESA should be pursued for qualifying coastal protection, hurricane resilience and infrastructure.

Tidelands should support appropriate beachfront, waterfront and public-access improvements.

Main Street Revitalization should be considered for downtown economic development, public gathering spaces, streetscapes, parking, wayfinding, historic/community facilities and Coleman Avenue revitalization.

Other state and federal programs should then be layered in where appropriate.

That gives us a much larger funding toolbox.

My Recommendation: A Rolling Five-Year Infrastructure & Funding Plan

I believe Waveland should establish a **rolling five-year Infrastructure and Funding Plan**.

Every major project would be identified and ranked according to:

Need • urgency • cost • public benefit • economic impact • engineering readiness • grant eligibility • available match • funding source

The City would maintain a pipeline of **grant-ready projects**, with engineering, estimates, maps, photographs, supporting data and other documentation assembled before funding opportunities open.

The plan would be updated every year.

Completed projects would come off. Priorities could change as circumstances change. New projects would be added. Another year would be added to the end.

That means Waveland would **always have five years of priorities and funding opportunities in front of us**, regardless of election cycles.

And our major initiatives would be treated as programs rather than isolated projects:

Drainage — phased program

Center City — phased program

Beachfront/Public Access — phased program

Coleman Avenue Business District — phased program

Each successful award would become another piece of an established long-term plan rather than another stand-alone project.

The Bottom Line

The research does **not** tell me that Waveland has been unsuccessful in obtaining outside funding.

It tells me something much more useful:

We have demonstrated that we can compete. Now we need to become more deliberate about how we compete.

We cannot control how much money Congress, the Legislature or a state agency makes available. We cannot control how many other cities, counties and organizations compete against us.

What we can control is our preparation.

I want Waveland to enter every funding cycle with our priorities already established, our projects properly scoped, engineering underway where appropriate, costs documented, supporting evidence assembled and a clear explanation of why investing those dollars in Waveland is a good investment.

And once we receive an award, I want us prepared to move that project from **funding** → **engineering** → **construction** → **completion** as efficiently as possible.

This isn't about chasing grants.

It is about having a vision, building a plan, preparing our projects, pursuing the right funding, learning from every success and every failure, and steadily moving Waveland forward.
