

Greetings SaveOS email Subscribers and Residents of Ocean Springs,

A little over a year into our new Mayor and Board of Aldermen administration, the use of executive session in an apparent attempt to avoid transparency and accountability remains a big concern in Ocean Springs. The Securix ticketing scheme and questionable arrangements made under the “Public - Private” partnership to apply public funds for construction at 1515 Government Street appear to be an albatross around the neck of Mayor Cox and Aldermen who were part of the Holloway administration. Local independent journalist Brian Rose has very aptly documented apparent lapses in ethics by the previous administration in managing grant funds, as well as apparent efforts by the City Attorney, with support from the Mayor and several Aldermen to preserve those actions (gcwire.com).

Mr. David Harris, the current contract private-practice City Attorney has created an atmosphere of divisiveness among the Aldermen and Mayor with both questionable and false legal advice. Mr. Harris, with no previous experience in City Government was appointed by the Holloway administration before they left office after being dismissed by the electorate on the heels of the Securix controversy and several very unpopular development schemes. In an October 2025 Board of Aldermen Meeting, Mr. Harris falsely stated that the Board was obliged to renew his contract under State law. This claim was later debunked. Newly elected Aldermen Karen Stennis’s motion to terminate Mr. Harris’s contract was seconded by newly elected Alderman Shannon Pfeiffer. The motion failed. Returning Alderman Kevin Wade then led what appeared to be an orchestrated gaslighting of Alderman Pfeiffer for her letter to the State Attorney General wherein she sought a legal opinion on Harris’s claim that the Board was obliged to extend his contract.

On the same night, the Board of Aldermen voted to extend Mr. Harris’s contract, the Aldermen were ushered into a closed door “Executive Session” to discuss “potential litigation”. In that session Mr. Harris pitched hiring a law firm to handle a class action suit in which Ocean Springs would participate. The contract included a clause providing a lucrative contingency “fee” for Mr. Harris paid for by the contracted law firm. The contingency fee arrangement raised immediate concerns with violation of State of Mississippi Code prohibiting officials from use of their position for gaining a financial benefit.

More recently, Mr. Harris could not or would not explain how new terms were added to a proposed agreement previously approved by the Holloway administration that moved ownership of the public funded 1515 Government Street parking garage from the City to the Developer. Brian Rose has written extensively on this matter. The new terms addressed additional insurance and maintenance expenses that were to be paid by the City to the Developer. In his article on the subject, Brian Rose reported that Mr. Harris stated, “Why the language is different has yet to be determined.” State statutes prohibit the falsification or alteration of public records.

Following the last City election, the Directors of SaveOS wrote ([see letter](#)) to Mayor Cox and the Board of Aldermen on the need for Ocean Springs to have an independent, preferably full time City Attorney. The advantages and precedents of this type of arrangement are discussed in the letter as were Mr. Harris’s real and apparent conflicts-of-interest.

SaveOS continues to urge the Mayor and Board of Aldermen to move forward with an open-source search to identify and select a full-time, “unaffiliated” City Attorney without real or even apparent conflicts of interest. Mr. Harris’s contract term expires on or about the end of September, this year.

The Board of Aldermen urgently need to address significant changes made by the administrations under Mayors Dobson and Holloway to the Unified Development Code. These changes were made to favor dense, investment oriented property development favorable for expanding the short term rental market. Those changes threaten the historic residential, family oriented character of the community. The Board, Mayor, and importantly residents need an “unaffiliated” and capable City Attorney, committed to serving the citizens of Ocean Springs and the entire Board, to work through the many needed changes and improvements in the codes and ordinances.

The Directors of SaveOS recently reviewed and updated content on the organization’s website (saveos.org). The updated narrative on SaveOS **Organization** and the updated **Mission Statement** can be found under the “About” heading on the website. These statements communicate what we stand for and our commitment to protect the character and charm of our town for future generations of residents and visitors.

The Directors also reviewed the SaveOS **Platform** (on the website) and confirmed that our stated goals remain relevant. The Platform objectives are listed under Four (4) Focus Areas:

1. Emphasize Quality of Life & Safety
2. Maintain Historic Character & Charm
3. Ocean Springs Is Not for Sale, and
4. Government Working for The People

Please check out the website if you have not recently reviewed our Mission and Platform. We must engage with and hold our elected officials accountable to preserve and protect the character and livability of our city. Please consider attending City meetings and stating the need that the City hire a capable, unaffiliated City Attorney to restore confidence in ethical governance and provide capacity to guide and assist with needed work on our ordinances and codes. This work must be done to protect the character and livability of Ocean Springs.

SaveOS is a nonprofit social welfare organization organized under Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions or gifts to SaveOS are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. SaveOS may engage in advocacy and lobbying consistent with its mission to promote accountable local government.

Thank you for your support and attention.

Mike Illanne, for
The SaveOS Directors