Dear Surfside Neighbor,

I’m writing you today as the former Mayor of Surfside and a 23-year resident of our Town. I know many of you do not have time to stay current with what’s *really* happening in Town, and with our Mayor and Commission - beyond the happy talk you read in the Gazette, but I’ve decided to change that. I want to start a regular conversation with residents, because our Town needs to hear from you, not just those who would turn Surfside into Sunny Isles!

When I left office in 2010, Mayor Daniel Dietch and his group took power promising to make our Town better, instead, they’ve made our Town *bigger, denser* and *more crowded*, and all in pursuit of more tourists and more tax revenue.

Things had become so bad that a neighborhood group had to be formed to fight one of the more outrageous proposals, a P3, (*you may have seen the “Surfside MUST NOT be sold” signs).* That scheme involved giving our Town Hall, Police Station and all the priceless land nearby to a developer for *99 years* to build a huge commercial development. Initially, *every* elected official showed inexcusable judgement and was persuaded by this clever developer to put our future into *his* hands, for nearly one hundred years, which if the deal had gone bad at ANY point, could have bankrupted our Town, left us with a demolished Town Hall, decades of litigation and *no* Town Hall, *no* Police Station or *any* of all the other operations in our Town Center – and that wasn’t the worst of it. Fortunately, thanks to a large and passionate group of residents – we stopped it.[[1]](#footnote-1)

But there’s more. The Daniel Dietch Commission threw out our tough zoning code, passed a new one, and has allowed to be built, or has in the pipeline, projects that could have *never* been built under the original zoning code - we’ve all seen the results. (Don’t get me wrong, we should support the *right* kind of new projects, which compliment Surfside’s inimitable lifestyle, but emphatically reject those that don’t.)

How could all this happen given that our Charter, approved by 92% of Surfsiders, explicitly forbade buildings that this Commission regularly approves? Because elected officials; simply ignored the law, are developer friendly, are led by a conflicted Mayor whose employer benefits from Gov’t contracts and has a Commission that didn’t say NO to those who would exploit our small-town way of life - for profit.

Instead of catering to developers, tourists, political pals, pie in the sky ideas evidenced by this Mayor’s silly marketing slogan “Uptown Beachtown”, I believe Surfside should focus on basics; sustainability, improving residents quality of life, investing in our neglected parks and kids programs, flooding problems, neglected beaches & walkways, diversifying & energizing the business district, adding police patrols, more fiscal prudence, and fewer fishy expenditures, like $52K studies, $70K tourist shuttles & $50K donations doled out to win political points. Simply put, more emphasis on us, less on commercial special interests and their power over our elected officials.

In March we have an election and a chance to change the direction of our Town. We need to band together so our voices can be heard. I’m asking you to get involved (a little or a lot), stay connected and save Surfside from further exploitation. I’m here to answer your questions and get *your* word out. With a little effort, I think we can make a big difference!

Join our email updates at [www.savesurfside.com](http://www.savesurfside.com), email me at [charles@burkettcompanies.com](mailto:charles@burkettcompanies.com), tweet to @savesurfside or like us at Save Surfside on Facebook.

We’ve fought this battle before, and won. We can do it again.

Charles W. Burkett

1. Commissioners Paul & Karukin changed their vote early on, Gielchinsky & Cohen voted to approve the 99-year lease, Mayor Dietch waited until the last minute and under severe pressure, with hundreds of angry residents in the Commission chamber protesting against the project, changed his vote to a no. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)