



## MAYOR's MESSAGE – Summary of Storm Impact

Last week was certainly a challenge for everyone. This follows a year unlike most of us have ever experienced. I am so very proud of the grace, patience, and spirit of helping others that emerged through it all. We all heard of and felt the prayers extended for the safety of all.

To help us understand our experience, **here is a summary of the week.** It began with the record level frigid temperatures combined with precipitation which led to a statewide challenge to keep the electric power grid from collapsing. This in turn led to power apportionment via rolling outages and the “blinking” outages we experienced. These outages led to loss of heat for homes, burst pipes/damaged equipment and loss of water for our entire community for several days. **This was a Valentine none of us could have ever imagined!**



There is some **federal/State level support potential** for individual damages – including deductibles on insurance. City website- <https://www.horseshoe-bay-tx.gov/731/Winter-Storm-2021-Recovery-Information> OR <https://arcg.is/uOrOb> or [www.tdem.texas.gov/warm](http://www.tdem.texas.gov/warm) to complete a survey that will demonstrate need in Llano County – and make individual applications for damage reimbursement potentially available.

### Power Outages

Pedernales Electric Cooperative/PEC provides our electrical distribution from the statewide ERCOT grid. They are apportioned/allowed to distribute under the ERCOT orders just as other regional cooperatives – as it is crucial to keep a balance between supply and demand across the state....especially for crucial structures such as hospitals, energy plants, etc. and to prevent the overall grid from collapsing. Due to the weather, the statewide demand for power exploded and ERCOT was forced to order rolling outages to avoid the collapse of the grid.


We had no control over getting more power on our own (PEC is our provider) – though we joined in continuous zoom meetings/calls with State officials to underscore our needs. Despite our requests for additional power, none was provided – in fairness because there wasn't any extra power to provide. All areas across Central Texas were making the same request...with much more severe housing and emergency care centers in need than here. Hospitals in Austin were running without power/water at times. With Texas being on its own independent energy system (legislatively), there was no option to reach out to other States for extra energy sources.

**Still – additional energy would not have helped us in Horseshoe Bay.** According to PEC, our system was not ‘offloading’ to other areas as some cooperatives were doing. We operate off transformers supplied in our community with maximum set levels. We quickly reached our limit of energy availability and we were shut off...then on within minutes as usage dropped and then back off – cycled over and over (“blinked”). This was the result of our maximizing our one transformer. This one transformer can manage a typical winter in our area, but we have had a 2<sup>nd</sup> transformer to ensure safety in extremes and allow for growth in our area. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> transformer, however, is under repair/replacement by PEC (an 8+ month process). The City was not made aware this transformer was taken down – and **PEC leadership will come before the City Council in March for in-depth review.** With this 2<sup>nd</sup> transformer, we would likely have been able to manage the significant drain of increased demand. But timing could not predict

this extraordinary storm when they began the replacement process. The same could happen during a major heat wave in the summer....so they will work to replace as fast as possible across the seasons. Once our 2<sup>nd</sup> transformer is replaced, we should be well positioned to manage any excessive energy needs. They indicate the new, larger 2<sup>nd</sup> transformer should be in by June 1<sup>st</sup>. While other communities were without power for twice as long as us, that doesn't help relieve the memory of no heat– but does explain our “blinking” cycles. **A Q&A from PEC in response to our questions is on the city website.**

## **Loss of Water**

The combination of the weather and power outages led to a failure for our water plants to produce enough water supply to maintain the pressure and capacity in the distribution system. This occurred primarily due to the electrical shortages in operations and freezing precipitation that caused broken pipes throughout the community. Diesel fuel for our generators chilled, resulting in loss of generator power which was critical to maintain the water pumps. This resulted in our utility team having to manually restart operations. With continuous pipe breaks, the water would drain out again and forward steps were taken back a bit each time.

 Our first priority was to get the water tanks refilled as quickly as possible. The distribution system consists of 120 miles of pipe and delivers three-five million gallons of water per day. The utility team of 23 traveled over dangerous roads to get to the plant so they could work day and night to get things back into production. They responded to nearly 200 leaks, multiple sewage breaks, and continued to seek out ways to thaw frozen blocks in the lines, literally manually pumping at stations outside to get pressure. Thankfully, within 2 to 3 days most of our community had water flowing – though a boil notice was essential until safety testing was completed. Staff toured the community throughout the night Sunday to identify any irrigation systems that might be on (with people out of town). These meters were immediately turned off until residents could reset systems. **PLEASE turn off irrigation systems until March 1.**

Our fire/police/public works departments provided support all while conducting their regular duties, just as the utility team does when the FD or PD is in fire/emergency crisis. Trees removed from roads, water delivered to those in dire need, stalled vehicles, grocery delivery for elderly/lone homeowners, emergency medical supplies secured, EMS calls, Fire alarms (over 50...many due to electrical tripping), roadway cleared (8 miles up Thanksgiving Mountain) for crucial movement, families relocated to neighbors/family for safety, essential medications delivered, and the **rescue of a Yodeler!** (really – we have her in full yodeling action on video. At least this added some brightness to the overall gloom for sure!) Over 1000 hours of overtime hours were cumulatively served by staff for 24/7 commitment to support.

Our Fire Chief organized a **water distribution at Quail Point**, fighting hard to obtain water in a closed access environment. He and his team ran this personally for three days to ensure availability and distribute over 39,000 bottles of water to citizens and neighboring communities. **Full appreciation to all who helped with this effort.**

## In Closing

As a City, we do our best to be prepared...we check systems frequently, replace parts on schedule, test/retest equipment and lines, and train up staff. All of our plants/equipment have passed inspection and have been successful at “normal” below freezing levels for Texas. We were ready for the worst. Then the worst of the worst arrives and slams us along with the whole region – **a tsunami event**. All those plans of collaboratively helping out neighboring communities are overshadowed as each is fighting their own challenge to care for their citizens. Power returned on Thursday. As late as Sunday, we were still unable to assist neighbors in Oakridge and Cottonwood Shores with water until we met the needs for our residents. As soon as possible we reached out to support them.

We worked to communicate as best as possible sending out daily (or twice daily) updates of status. I use a network of POA presidents, Action Group leaders, etc. who have email/phone contacts to distribute information. We use our CIVIC READY (though we still don’t have even half the residents signed up for it – **PLEASE do this**) – or used our utility phone contacts (though over 30% of these are inaccurate as people have dropped landline numbers and not updated our files). We are so THANKFUL to the POA and other leaders who helped get information out. While we couldn’t give the “good news that all is healed”, we could at least provide some clarity as it emerged. Finally, the water was restored to almost all by Saturday.

We saw the best in our community as stories of neighbors looking out for each other and volunteer efforts abounded (or were offered, but were discouraged to keep them off roads). **A special appreciation to the HSBay Resort who provided meal for our Utility Team of 25.**

## Moving Forward

We are now back to normal – though after a year with a 400 acre fire, pandemic/protocols, vaccine/testing processing, and storm of the century, ‘normal’ may never be the same. Still...with 60+ degree days ahead, power and water supplies restored, and communication networks back in place, we can breathe in and once again engage our daily life. It may be that soon we can laugh a little (those who conveniently saw their vodka bottles as extra water sources!)....and take pride in our ability to positively bear whatever comes our way.

**We will be hosting a Community Town Hall in late March or April** with spacing to allow for direct seating and discussions. We will share the results of our Long Range Plan, but also use this as an opportunity to offer clear information, seek suggestions/hear concerns about city operations. I am so proud of the work of our staff...but we know we can always work to get better, drawing upon the talents of our residents alongside our staff.

For now – I hope you all are realizing that we are a tough group who may actually have done our Pioneer forefathers proud this past week. Grouching was limited as most I heard from just wanted information and were appreciative and supportive (thank you!). Compared to the stories I am hearing from across central Texas, we fared well.....and can continue to feel the blessing of living in this wonderful city with great neighbors and friends. No place like it.

*ee* Cynthia Clinesmith, Mayor; [www.horseshoe-bay-tx.gov](http://www.horseshoe-bay-tx.gov)