

Good afternoon,

Thank you for allowing us to attend and present facts to you concerning Salado.

I am Melanie Kirchmeier, current Chair of the Salado Chamber of Commerce/Tourism Bureau. My family has owned a business in Salado since 1973. We love Salado and have a long history in Bell County.

IH 35 construction is coming to an end in Salado. Thank you. We have beautiful, long exits, wonderful brick paver underpasses, and six lanes through our Village. The number of wrecks has significantly decreased over the past few months for which we are very grateful.

Over the past five years, Salado has seen a decrease of over 31% in our Hotel Occupancy Tax. This is significant since Salado's main economic resource is tourism. While Georgetown has increased their HOT dollars by 121% and Temple has increased their HOT dollars by 28%, Salado has DECREASED by 31%. This decrease cut Salado's tourism advertising dollars to attract "heads in beds" by one third.

Not only has our Hotel Occupancy Tax decreased by 31%, Salado has seen only a 6.88% increase in our Sales Tax. Again the surrounding cities have seen significant growth in Sales Tax. Belton has seen a 42.47% increase in Sales Tax while Georgetown has seen a 44.02 % increase in Sales Tax. This means while the overall Texas economy has been robust, Salado has been hampered by visitors not being able to find Main Street easily because of the prolonged IH35 construction.

As one business owner who keeps detailed records states, "We have experienced a 20% dip in sales revenue since July 2012 directly related to construction from regular guests that travel to our destination from Waco, Troy, Temple and Belton. Our once very regular guests are not willing to trek through the construction, in fear for their life, unannounced closures and wrecks that create multiple hour delays. This is first hand testimony from many regular guests".

The decrease in Hotel Occupancy Tax and Sales Tax is a direct reflection of the decrease of income of our business owners. Multiple businesses are struggling because regular customers have altered their habits by visiting other towns for dining, shopping, and entertainment which have easier access from IH35. The Salado Chamber of Commerce/Tourism and Salado businesses will need to entice old customers to try Salado again and see the change in ingress/egress to our Village.

This takes money. The businesses are drained trying to survive. The Salado Chamber of Commerce/Tourism had their budget cut by 1/3 over the past five years. As the old song goes "We will survive", however, we need help.

Thank you,

Melanie