



Bexar County Commissioners Court

San Antonio, Texas 78205-3036

210.335.2555

210.335.2926/fax

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 13, 2016

Contact: Laura Jesse

210.335.0073/o

210.787.9038/m

Commissioners Court adopts budget with tax rate decrease

Commissioners Court on Tuesday adopted the fiscal year 2016-17 budget with a decrease to the County's property tax rate and an increase to the County's livable wage. Combined with the existing senior citizen tax freeze and \$50,000 veterans homestead exemption, the adopted tax rate of \$.30895 represents a savings of \$120.2 million for taxpayers in the new fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

"This has been a tough budget in which we've had to make some hard decisions," County Judge Nelson Wolff said. "But, I think we've made some progress in bringing our healthcare costs in line, and we've been able to create efficiencies in county operations that will benefit taxpayers in the years ahead."

The \$1.828 billion budget includes a \$496 million general fund and \$814.6 million for road, flood control and capital projects. The general fund balance of \$65 million helps the County maintain its triple-A bond rating, which has allowed the County to achieve savings by refunding \$360 million in outstanding bonds. The refunding resulted in a savings of a little more than \$40 million in debt service payments.

Funding for new capital projects includes \$22 million for a new County Mental Health Clinic with the Center for Health Care Services; a total of \$17.3 million for systems replacement, maintenance and other improvements at the Adult Detention Center; and \$2.5 million for county park improvements and renovations. New funding for road projects includes \$3 million for Grosenbacher Road, \$3 million for the second phase of road improvements in the Candlewood subdivision, and \$750,000 to design road improvements for the Highland Oaks subdivision.

"I'm thankful we have started a resolution for the road conditions in Highland Oaks," Commissioner Sergio "Chico" Rodriguez. "Even though these are private roads, this is a matter of public safety for the residents and particularly the children."

The budget includes an increase to the County's livable wage to \$13.75 per hour and adjusts other wages for compression; all other employees will receive a 2 percent cost of living allowance. Commissioners Court and County budget staff worked to address the rising cost of employee health insurance by increasing the premiums and adding a \$100 monthly surcharge for employees whose spouses have access to other insurance plans through their employers, but opt to use the County's insurance.

"This budget was constrained in many ways by the exploding cost of health insurance for our employees, and for the past few years the County has been absorbing that cost," Precinct 2 Commissioner Paul Elizondo. "Everyone involved in its crafting is to be commended for stepping up and providing a fiscally sound work product."

The Court also voted to bring the Constables' and Justices of the Peace budgets in line with a reduction in workloads due to past changes in state law and redistricting of the precincts. The adopted budget re-authorizes 15 deputy constable positions and 7 clerk positions across three precincts for six months into the new fiscal year, or until the positions are vacated. Three part-time Justice of the Peace positions will be eliminated at the end of their elected terms.

"I'm very pleased that my colleagues agreed to fund Constable offices only for those things the state constitution and state statute mandates, and that we focus our enforcement funding through the Sheriff's office," Precinct 3 Commissioner Kevin Wolff said. "Over the last four years this court has funded 100 new positions for law enforcement in the Sheriff's office and the building of the first two substations in order to decrease response time and overall service to our community. This is a far better efficient use of taxpayers' dollars dedicated to law enforcement."

In a budget work session on Monday, Commissioners Court directed staff to work with the University of Incarnate Word to negotiate funding of \$1.5 million for a clinical skills lab at the university's College of Osteopathic Medicine, which is being built at Brooks City Base.

"Perhaps the greatest legacy vote the Court gave was in unanimous support of the medical school training clinic," Precinct 4 Commissioner Tommy Calvert said. "The money the court approved will have a \$1.5 billion impact over the next 10 years and create a second medical center on the Southeast Side."

In an effort to further a redesign of the Children's Court started in the current fiscal year by Judge Peter Sakai, Commissioners Court voted to increase funding for the Children's Court and Family Drug Court to provide more services to families involved with Child Protective Services with the goal of reunifying as many families as possible.

###