



Bexar County Commissioners Court

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 31, 2010

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**Proposed County budget for 2010-11
results in tax savings while maintaining service delivery**

Bexar County taxpayers will benefit to the tune of \$12.7 million in tax savings due to previous proactive measures taken by Bexar County Commissioners in response to continued challenging economic conditions. Despite diminishing revenues, the proposed budget for fiscal year 2010-11 maintains the current level of County services. The \$1.329 billion proposed budget calls for the current property tax rate to remain unchanged at .326866 per \$100 valuation.

“We’re thankful to those County officials and departments who made it possible for us to proceed with a balanced budget despite lower revenues,” Commissioner Paul Elizondo said. “They showed great responsibility in helping the Commissioners Court and its budget department hold the line on taxes and expenditures.”

The proposed tax rate is lower than the “effective rate”, which means Bexar County taxpayers will be paying \$12.7 million less in taxes than if the County set a rate that would account for the overall decreased value of property within the county. When combined with prior tax savings coming from the senior homeowner tax freeze and homestead exemptions, the proposed budget reduces the overall county tax burden by \$58 million.

Because approximately 75 percent of the County's general fund comes from property tax revenue, decreasing property appraisals and a sluggish new home construction market constrained the budget. To respond to the crisis and future budget deficits, the Commissioners Court in January 2009 directed the budget office and County departments to reduce expenditures by 3 to 5 percent in the middle of the fiscal year, and an additional 3 to 5 percent decrease in the 2009 fiscal year. The Court's response also included accelerating capital projects to stimulate the local economy and to "double down" on economic development efforts to bring more jobs to Bexar County and San Antonio.

"This is the third phase of the Commissioners Court's plan to react to the global financial crisis, which did have an impact on our local economy and County budget," Budget Officer David Smith said. "We were one of the first local government entities to get in front of the issue and it's because of that rapid response that the crisis has had minimal disruption to County operations."

The proposal, presented to Commissioners Court on Tuesday, includes an additional 5 positions for the Bexar County Sheriff's Office among a net 17 new positions funded through the General Fund.

"I'm excited that the five new positions in the Sheriff's Department are much needed investigators' positions," Commissioner Tommy Adkisson said. "I also look forward to recommending more investigators be added to the 2011-12 budget."

While employees not covered by a collective bargaining agreement will maintain current salary levels, civilian employees will not see an increase in monthly health insurance premiums. To offset the rising cost of health care to the County, Smith recommended an increase in specialist and prescription co-pays.

The budget proposal also includes a total of \$10.2 million for capital road projects, which includes \$5.6 million for existing projects and \$4.6 million for five new projects. A little more than \$620,000 is recommended for funding to be given to 18 outside social service agencies. This figure represents a 20 percent decrease in funding from last year and no new requests for funding.

Smith categorized the current revenue situation as the “new normal”, meaning the County will not experience the explosive growth in population and tax revenue it did prior to 2008. At the same time, however, the population of unincorporated Bexar County is expected to flourish and with that will come more densely populated urban areas that once were rural and a demand for more and different services from the County.

During the next year Smith proposed that the County start developing a 5-year service demand forecast and plan to be adequately prepared to close any gaps. Because more County residents will be farther away from the urban core — where most of the offices are located — improved technology, e-government, and redesigned and automated business processes will need to be explored. That forecast would then be incorporated into the long range financial forecast for spring 2011.

“Bexar County is responsive to the increased need for County services and accessibility. With the anticipated opening of the Bexar County Satellite Office located on Pleasanton Road in Precinct 1, County services will move further south into the community and give residents the ability to access County services at their convenience,” Commissioner Sergio “Chico” Rodriguez said. “This is a huge leap for Bexar County to take a proactive measure to keep with the rapid growth in population and development. Services and accessibility cannot be compromised, so we will continue to brainstorm for more ways to become more efficient.”

Commissioners Court will hold work sessions over the next couple weeks to hash out details of specific parts of the budget. The Court will then have a public hearing on the proposed budget on Sept. 14 before adopting the tax rate and budget. The new fiscal year will begin on Oct. 1.