



## **Bexar County Commissioners Court**

San Antonio, Texas 78205-3036

210.335.2555

210.335.2926/fax

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**Contact:** Laura Jesse

210.335.0073/o

210.787.9038/m

### **New budget at \$1.7 billion approved by Commissioners Court**

Commissioners Court on Tuesday approved a \$1.7 billion budget in a 4-1 vote. The new budget holds the current property tax rate steady, while providing increased funding for law enforcement, the justice system, technology and employee benefits.

The court also adopted a tax rate of \$0.3145 per \$100 valuation. That rate is lower than the rollback rate of \$0.33740 and higher than the effective tax rate of \$0.288232 per \$100 valuation. The tax rate, along with the senior citizen tax freeze and \$50,000 veterans' homestead exemption, results in a \$103.4 million tax savings for County taxpayers in the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

"There is quite a bit we will be able to get done with this budget, and we're taking care of some things that we've had to push down the road in previous budgets," Commissioner Paul Elizondo said. "We have gone from a 39 cent tax rate to 31.45 cents over the years. We've had deep discussions about cutting it further, but the important thing is that we get the resources we need for our employees to do their jobs."

Commissioner Kevin Wolff, who cast the sole dissenting vote, said the court has done a good job managing the budget over the past few years, but he wanted to see an additional cut in the property tax rate this year. Commissioners lowered the county's property tax rate in the 2014-15 budget.

"There are a number of good items in the budget that are the types of services we're supposed to provide as county government," Commissioner Wolff said. "But I know, as well as a number of property owners, I was very shocked by Bexar Appraisal District's increase in property valuations. And one way to take the sting out of that is by decreasing the tax rate."

Commissioners Court voted unanimously to provide for an additional 34 digital dashboard cameras to the proposal of 151 cameras for the Bexar County Sheriff's Office. The cameras can be dismounted from the dashboard and worn by deputies as body cameras. County Judge

Nelson Wolff asked the County Manager, District Attorney and Sheriff to work together on a policy that would address storage of and access to the camera footage.

“The policy is going to be very important,” Judge Wolff said. “We need to have answers to the issues of storage and how long we keep the footage.”

The adopted budget also includes funding for new public safety dispatchers in the Sheriff’s Office and Fire Marshal’s Office, as well as new radio equipment, technology and furniture for the new Regional Emergency Operations Center being constructed by the Bexar Metro 9-1-1-Network district.

Funding for the Criminal District Attorney’s Office includes \$2.2 million in program enhancements that will address criminal and civil cases associated with child abuse and neglect, and add staff at all levels that will help criminal cases move more quickly through the justice system. County Manager David Smith noted this is an investment that has already paid dividends when it comes to lowering the jail population.

Commissioner Sergio “Chico” Rodriguez said he is especially appreciative of funding for infrastructure to help the growing parts of his Precinct 1. The budget includes new funding for roads in the amount of \$31 million to include projects on Borgfeld, Fischer, Old Corpus Christi, Grosenbacher, Evans and Donop roads, among others. The funding also includes \$2 million for traffic safety improvements, \$1 million for drainage improvements and \$1.5 million for road rehabilitation improvements.

“With the growth happening in South Bexar County it will be important to me to bring more law enforcement out to these neighborhoods,” Commissioner Rodriguez said. “I’m happy to see we are moving forward with the Sheriff’s patrol substations.”

The new budget will see the county’s minimum wage for employees go from \$11.66 per hour to \$13 per hour. Employees on the non-exempt pay table who are not affected by that increase will receive a 3 percent cost of living adjustment. A performance pay program for exempt and executive employees will be effective April 2016, with the amount of the salary increase dependent on the individual employee’s performance.

“Our employees have gone with minimal increases in pay or no increase at all over the past few years, and we need to keep people who are providing extra service and doing good jobs,” Commissioner Elizondo said.

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