



Bexar County Commissioners Court

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Budget proposal includes lower tax rate, minimum wage increase

County Manager David Smith presented his fiscal year 2016-17 budget proposal Tuesday with the recommendation that Commissioners Court adopt a lower property tax rate because of an increase in property values appraised by the Bexar Appraisal District. The lower tax rate would cap property tax revenue growth at 6 percent.

Combined with the existing senior citizen tax freeze and \$50,000 veterans homestead exemption, the recommended tax rate of \$.30895 will represent a savings of \$120.2 million for taxpayers in the new fiscal year.

The \$1.828 billion proposal includes \$555.8 million for operating expenditures and \$814.6 million for road, flood control and capital projects. The proposed general fund operating budget of \$426.7 million represents an increase of \$14.1 million over the current budget. The general fund balance of \$65 million, or 15 percent of expenditures, will help the County maintain its triple-A bond rating. The rating also 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 over the life of the bonds.

“This is a financially sound proposal, but one of our most challenging budgets that will require difficult decisions for the court,” County Judge Nelson Wolff said.

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 in the Candlewood subdivision, and \$750,000 to design road improvements for the Highland Oaks subdivision.

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Commissioners Court will once again consider raising the livable wage for non-exempt employees. The plan includes an increase from \$13 per hour to \$13.50 per hour and adjusts other wages for compression. Under the proposal, non-exempt employees who do not receive at least a 1 percent increase from the livable wage adjustment, and exempt employees would receive a 1 percent cost of living allowance.

“It is a tough year, but we also have to remember it is not easy for taxpayers,” Commissioner Paul Elizondo said. “I wish we could do more, but we have covered the essentials and will be able to get done what is needed.”

Commissioners Court will have budget work sessions on Aug. 30, Aug. 31, Sept. 1 and Sept. 6. Public hearings on the proposed tax rate will be included in the Sept. 1 and Sept. 6 sessions; and the final budget will be adopted on Sept. 13.

The proposed budget is online at www.bexar.org.

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