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**Amidst Another COVID-19 Surge in Cases, Bexar County Proposes
no Tax Rate Increase for FY 2021-2022**

County Manager David Smith has presented the proposed Budget for fiscal year (FY) 2021-2022 that proposes to again, maintain the current tax rate of \$0.301097. If approved, this would be the 27th consecutive year in which Bexar County either lowers or maintain tax rate for property owners.

Based on certified appraised property values reported by the Bexar Appraisal District, values increased by 4.9 percent, or \$9 billion. Property values on existing properties increased by \$4.2 billion, and new construction generated \$4.8 billion in additional value. The Proposed Budget is balanced at the existing tax rate of \$0.301097.

The Proposed Budget totals \$2.8 billion for all funds, including \$651 million in Operating Appropriations, \$1.28 billion in Capital Projects, \$147 million for Debt Service, \$389 million for American Rescue Plan Act funds, and \$278 million for contingencies and reserves, most of which is carry forward funding for multi-year capital projects. The FY 2021-22 Proposed Budget for the General Fund totals \$525 million compared to last year's operating budget of \$524.2 million, or an increase of just under \$1 million.

Notable program change highlights include:

- Funding for 1 Prosecutor, 2 Advocates, 1 Crime Victim Liaison and 1 support staff to support domestic violence and family justice services.
- Two Attorney positions for the District Attorney's Office are proposed to decrease the caseload per Attorney that handles Child Protective Service cases.
- Three Prosecutor positions are proposed to support Elder Abuse cases, Mental Health cases and misdemeanor cases in the District Attorney's Office.

Funding for four new Specialized Multidisciplinary Alternate Response Teams (SMART) is included in the proposed budget. SMART is run by the Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council to respond to 9-1-1 mental health calls with a trained, multidisciplinary team to divert individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. The program began in October 2020 and results have been positive:

- 40 percent of calls were resolved on scene
- 70 percent of individuals gained access to service for the first time by utilizing SMART response.
- 2,341 hours of patrol time (97 24-hour days) unencumbered
- No incidents of use of force on any call that SMART has been assigned to in the 9 months of existence

Funding for 17 positions, both civilian and uniformed, in the Sheriff's Office will be authorized on April 1, 2022, provided the Sheriff's Office is not projected to exceed the amount budgeted for jail overtime pay (\$8,013,406).

Seven Deputy Constable positions are proposed for each Constable precinct. Four of those deputies will provide patrol service for parks (does not include event security). The other 3 deputies will serve civil process currently handled by the Sheriff's Office. The total cost of these positions will be partially offset by savings generated by the deletion of 12 Sheriff's Deputies that were assigned to Civil Process. Deputy Sheriffs will be moved to existing vacant Deputy Sheriff positions (currently 24).

A new 10-year Infrastructure Program is included in the proposed budget. The program totals \$617 million and includes 84 projects. The program will be financed over a 10-year period and will not require an increase to the tax rate. The finance plan assumes bonds will be issued annually in accordance with funding requirements, the debt service tax rate remains unchanged, and a property tax growth rate of 4 percent. Wherever possible, funding from other sources will be leveraged.

Roads

Funding in the amount of \$187 million is included to fund a 10-year Roads program. Projects will include residential street reconstructions and arterial roadway enhancements, including improved pavement sections, Americans with Disabilities compliant pedestrian amenities, and necessary drainage countywide.

Flood Control

Twelve Flood Control projects are proposed at a cost of \$130 million. These projects will address frequent flooding events on the county roadway network, providing for safe and efficient mobility along these flood prone corridors during major storm events. Other major flood control initiatives include large-scale drainage improvements to effectively reduce the footprint of the regulatory 100-year floodplain in areas of residential and commercial flood inundation, enhancing public safety and reducing costs to the public for flood insurance.

Creeks and Trails

Bexar County Commissioners Court is undertaking a series of capital projects that are located along the County's rivers and creeks for the benefit of the community. Funding in the amount of \$227 million is proposed for 27 creeks and trails. These projects are intended to continue or complement previous Bexar County capital investments; restore a degraded aquatic or riparian ecosystem; improve water quality and flood control; promote the addition of trails and other recreational amenities; connect neighborhoods, public institutions, city and county parks to the existing linear creekway trail network; and serve as a catalyst for future economic development along the river and creeks.

Parks Master Plan

On July 13, 2021, Commissioners Court approved the 2021 Bexar County Parks Master Plan. The Plan is based on an evaluation and assessment of existing parks, park user surveys and an economic impact analysis. Funding in the amount of \$72.5 million is included in the Proposed Budget for 22 projects.

Separate from the 10-Year Infrastructure Program, the County currently has several major capital improvement projects underway. These projects include a Satellite Facility in Precinct 4, a new facility for Agri-Life Extension Services, jail improvements/upgrades and new enterprise systems. Work on these projects will continue through FY 2021-22.

Funding in the amount of \$71.4 million is proposed for new capital projects in FY 2021-22. Some of the more noteworthy projects include a new Criminal Investigation Laboratory, renovation to the Precinct 3 Satellite Facility, a new Workforce Training Center, improvements to the Urban Farm, and improvements to the Juvenile Detention Campus.

Due to the uncertainty regarding the potential impact of COVID-19 on the County's financial position, no salary increases or compensation enhancements were adopted in last year's budget. This year, Smith is proposing a 5 percent salary increase for all Bexar County employees, including eligible elected officials. This increase is equal to the rate of inflation over the past 12 months. This proposal includes the same percentage increase for employees covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreement, should the agreement be approved by the Deputy Sheriff's Association. A one-time lump sum payment of \$1,000 is proposed for all employees on the Non-Exempt Pay Table. Finally, out-of-pocket costs for health insurance for employees will remain unchanged from Plan Year 2021.

County Manager David Smith concluded, “We are grateful for the cooperation from all elected officials, appointed officials, department heads and county staff to help develop the FY 2021-22 proposed budget. It provides the framework for how Bexar County will navigate through the anticipated challenges during FY 2022 and continue to bring about our economic recovery.”

Budget work sessions will be held in the Double Height Courtroom in the Bexar County Courthouse and are currently scheduled as follows:

- Wednesday, September 8, 2021, at 9 a.m.
- Monday, September 13, 2021, at 9 a.m.

The FY 2021-22 is scheduled to be adopted on Tuesday, September 14, 2021, at 9 a.m.

Be advised that these dates and times may change. Please visit www.bexar.org for the latest information.

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