

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Bandera County Central Appraisal District swears in new board members, fields complaints, retains finance company

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Standing room only was left during the Bandera County Appraisal District's regular board meeting last Thursday.

During the public forum, Scott Untied, Rene Leith, Melissa Checkovage and Jana Herrera alleged tax code violations and retaliation, the latter two publicly seeking Whistle Blower's Protection for speaking out about alleged activities within the office.

Checkovage, an appraiser with the BanCAD, said she felt harassed for her role in a complaint made about Chief Appraiser Wendy Grams more than a year ago. The complaint, filed by the Bandera County River Authority and Groundwater District (BCRAGD), calls to question alleged disparities in property values in the Flying L subdivision. It is under investigation with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation.

"In the first few months, there was only speculation of my involvement," Checkovage said. "I have already sought protection and am covered by Texas Whistleblowers Act. The law forbids public employers from suspending or terminating employees who allege illegal actions. I'm asking the board to give protection from future retaliation."

Echoing Checkovage, former deputy chief appraiser Herrera said among other duties, she had assisted Grams in her defense against more than one complaint - which have been reportedly dismissed except one. Herrera said in the last four months of her employment, which began in 2018, she has been accused of insubordination, received disciplinary action and pressure to resign.

“At this time, it is my understanding that I am still employed by this district... I would like you to know I have not resigned,” Herrera told the board. “Since the day my employment cessation options were presented to me by Mrs. Grams, I have been in contact with multiple members of the district staff. I feel I have been presented a different perspective and now have a better understanding of the gravity of the allegations listed in the BCRAGD complaint as well as other complaints... I want to correct any wrongs that I have unknowingly facilitated.”

Grams was unable to comment on the matter, however BanCAD attorneys, who are reviewing the claims, issued a statement that Herrera is no longer employed by the district.

“Despite Mrs. Jana Herrera’s statements, her employment with the Central Appraisal District of Bandera County was terminated effective Monday, January 27, 2020,” the statement reads.

In other business, the board approved a resolution to retain Government Capital Corporation, a financing company out of Fort Worth, to work with them on financing for a possible purchase and renovation construction project.

“We’re not presenting any numbers,” Board President Bo Mansfield said. “It costs us nothing. We’ve done nothing, and we don’t have to use them. But it gives us the option to talk about a building.”

Newly appointed board members Ernie DeWinne and Gwenda Tshirhart said they had discovered some discrepancies in the Quickbooks statements. Tshirhart said several areas seemed to be over budget, totaling \$86,000. DeWinne said he’d seen similar issues with BCRAGD, on which he is also a board member.

“I volunteered to be on the BCRAGD budget committee,” DeWinne said. “We shouldn’t be off that much. I’d like to volunteer to help work with the budget.”

The next regular BanCad meeting is set for March 6, though a special meeting may be called some time this month.