

The Bandera PROPHEET

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County chief appraiser resigns

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The Bandera Prophet

Ending her 17-year tenure with the Central Appraisal District, Bandera County Chief Appraiser Wendy Grams submitted her letter of resignation on Friday, Feb. 14, to the Board of Directors. Her last day will be March 15.

“You’ve put up with a whole lot of stuff for a long time. We’re sad to see you leave,” Board President Bo Mansfield said after a 3-0 vote to accept Gram’s resignation.

Board Member George Sharman did not vote.

Grams’ resignation comes at the end of an arduous year, during which she has been under intense public scrutiny following a complaint filed by the Bandera County River Authority and Groundwater District with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. The complaint, which remains under investigation, focuses on property value appraisals in the Flying L Subdivision and other areas of the county.

“Thank you for the opportunity to serve the citizens of Bandera County, improve my skills, complete professional certifications and thrive in a variety of fast-paced and challenging situations. Thank you for supporting the appraisal district office and appraisal team,” Grams wrote in her resignation letter. “With the board’s approval, I will assist the board in posting and advertising the vacancy during this 30-day transition. I will continue to support the board’s desire for any staff training and/or hand-off of assignments to ensure continuity and timely work product. My goal is to make this transition period as smooth as possible. Every best wish for continued success for the entire central Appraisal District of Bandera County team.”

The board's vote followed an executive session in a special meeting held Friday, during which people spilled out of the office.

"I apologize for the small room," Mansfield said to the many in attendance. "We have a small building."

More than 15 people signed up to speak during the public forum, many of whom were in protest of the recent terminations of three appraisal district staff members.

"The turnover rate is something that needs to be looked at," Ty Billings said.

"In the last seven years, 27 employees either resigned or were run off," Scott Untied said.

"Invite each person who has been dismissed to come back," Darcy Hasty said. "It could save millions in lawsuits...these people are our neighbors and our friends."

"I'm here today as a taxpayer. I'm not here in my official capacity as a non-voting board member or tax collector/assessor," Gwenda Tshirhart said. "There seems to be a lot of write-ups and personnel action taken in the last three months...this is about fair and equal appraisals, accountability, transparency and ethical morals. We cannot afford a multi-million dollar lawsuit for employees in a whistleblower lawsuit."

"I'm here as a citizen and as a council member for the city," Glenn Clark said. "I'm standing with friends who I feel have been unjustly treated."

Some members of the public were upset that the BanCAD, in anticipation of a big crowd, had not moved the meeting to a larger facility. According to BanCAD Attorney Clarissa Rodriguez, the Texas Open Meetings Act requires that open meetings be held in a building that is open to the public, but does not specify size or capacity of the building.

Other rules that must be followed include posting a meeting agenda at least 72 hours prior to the meeting in a readily accessible place (e.g. a bulletin board in front of the building and on the agency's website), and there must be no participation or discussion from board members during the public forum.

Rodriguez said the board is entitled to reasonably limit the amount of time for each public comment, however all members of the public who wish to must be allowed to speak either during the public forum, or before or after a specific agenda item. She also said that Facebook and social media posts can be considered public record if it deals with the public's business.

On the subject of disclosing information discussed during an executive closed session, Rodriguez said it is not criminal, however public disclosure of items discussed in executive session could expose the person speaking and the district to civil lawsuit.

Following the executive session, which lasted from about 11 a.m. to 12:50 p.m., the board appointed Rodriguez and Board Members Don Giles and Ernest DeWinne to investigate a complaint against Grams by former appraiser Melissa Checkovage.