

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Commissioners discuss social distancing, littering and squatting during court session

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The Bandera Prophet

Asking commissioners to consider reopening the boat ramp at the County Park in Lakehills, Mack McKee said he thinks it's important for people to be able to recreate outside. McKee, who lives in Comanche Cliffs, said right now public boat ramps are open on Medina Lake, and he believes the risks of reopening are slight.

Since signs have been posted that river crossings are closed to the general public, McKee said he has not seen anyone at the crossings outside of vehicle traffic.

"So people are paying attention," McKee said during commissioners' court public forum yesterday, adding signs promoting social distancing could replace the closed ones.

Richard Lewis said he is in favor of park closures. Concerned that people from other communities in San Antonio and beyond would inundate the county if they had lake access, Lewis said they're still coming despite the park's closure.

"I can only imagine what the place would be like if we opened it," Lewis said.

Pct. 2 Commissioner Bobby Harris said people call from out of town daily to check on the park's status and whether it is open.

"On Monday we had 65 people from San Antonio call to see if the park is open," Harris said, adding he had 55 people call Tuesday and 20 already before 10 a.m. Thursday. "We just got our first case of the virus at Medina Lake last week, so it's here."

In other business, commissioners brainstormed ways to tackle illegal dumping and persistent squatting on county-owned lots in Lake Medina Shores and Lost Valley Shores. Pct. 4 Commissioner Jody Rutherford said he's been approached by several people who want the lots cleaned. Rutherford and Constable Rod Chalmers said people dump their trash on the properties in the middle of the night and a squatter, who was arrested for trespassing, appears to be back, as is evidenced by surveillance photos showing laundry hanging to dry.

"What if we put an offer out on the table," Harris said. "You clean 'em, you own 'em."

County Attorney Janna Lindig said commissioners may want to consider preparing a bid for solicitation, which would detail the property title as payment for the cleanup costs. Commissioners approved a motion authorizing Rutherford to coordinate with Lindig to prepare a contract. County Judge Richard Evans said all of the taxing entities would have to agree, but in the meantime he directed Chalmers to remove anyone who was illegally living on the land.

"I suggest that anyone who is trespassing get run off," Evans said.

Chalmers said he would issue a criminal trespass warrant with a three-day warning to vacate. He said refusal to leave is a jail offense, but most law enforcement is avoiding jailing people when possible.

"They'll be issued a citation filed at large for a Class B Misdemeanor," Chalmers said.

County Sheriff Dan Butts said every case is scrutinized individually.

"Right now, we don't have the facility to isolate people," Butts said, adding if someone who is sick enters the jail's general population, it would be a major problem for inmates and staff.

In his monthly report, Butts said the Sheriff's Office received 551 calls for service during March, and deputies traveled a total of 26,436 miles. Butts said the jail, which had an average population of 59 inmates and 10 of whom are contracted from surrounding areas, has had a couple of close calls with CoViD-19.

"We had people we thought may have been exposed so they were quarantined," Butts said.

Each department - the jail, dispatch and deputies - are separated as much as possible throughout their shifts. Butts said one contract inmate, who travelled with a person showing symptoms, is being kept in a negative pressure room. Butts said he has been tested, and will remain isolated until the results are available.

“So far we’re in good shape and we’re going to try to keep it that way,” Butts said.

Emergency Medical Services Director Calvin Plummer said his department received a shipment of disinfectant, gloves and 150 masks from the Texas Association of Counties. Plummer said the county EMS also received a \$23,351.53 stimulus check, which has been deposited but may not stay in the bank.

“If we keep it, we have to follow their rules and regulations,” Plummer said.

One consequence of keeping the money is writing off balances for emergency and ambulatory services that insurance does not pay.

“Many EMS offices are skeptical about keeping it because it will affect collections,” Plummer said, adding the county has 30 days to make a decision whether to keep or return the money.