

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Briefings from Commissioners' Court

By Jessica Nohealapa'ahi Goode
The Bandera Prophet

Despite the pandemic, Bandera County Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Patricia Moore reported local businesses are producing higher revenues than anticipated.

"It appears our businesses are holding up," County Judge Richard Evans said.

Tourists have ventured to Bandera for the last several weekend events, including Bandera Honors Veterans and Halloween's Nightmare on Maple.

"Let's just pray that the Covid in this county stays low like it has been, and people are sensible," Moore said.

Christmas Lights

Hoping to maintain the holiday momentum, Pct. 3 Commissioner Jack Moseley put out a call for help to set up Christmas lights on the courthouse lawn. His effort coincides with DPS State Trooper Chip Aragones' plans to illuminate the courthouse.

Providing the lights and labor, Aragones told commissioners that if they approve, he would likely add more next year.

Moseley said he would lead a group of volunteers on Saturday, Nov. 21, beginning at 10 a.m. Anticipating an increase in electrical demand, Evans said he has researched how much power the lights would require, and doesn't feel there will be a problem.

"The courthouse was built before there was electricity," Evans said.

Election Results

Commissioners canvassed Election Day votes, absent the drama seen in other counties and states. Elections Administrator Gwenda Tshirhart said the state requires a hand recount of mail-in ballots, however the recount is not due to any irregularities, and it was not requested by any candidates.

Tshirhart said Bandera County had a 74.27 percent voter turnout.

“I’d like to commend the Elections Department,” Evans said. “It seemed to have been uneventful, considering what’s happening in the rest of the country.”

Covid Relief Funds

At the behest of County Auditor Darryl Sadler, commissioners unanimously approved a request for funds from the Covid-19 Relief Grant. Sadler said he was requesting \$3 million, though \$1.27 million is authorized and that’s all he expects to receive.

“They won’t give us more, but this means we’ve gotten all the money they’re going to give, unless they make changes,” Sadler said.

Sadler said the court would have to decide whether to disburse the funds, or hang on to them for future use.

“We may be on the second round of this Covid crap,” Pct. 2 Commissioner Bobby Harris said.

“We’re already in the second round,” Pct. 4 Commissioner Jordan Rutherford said.

Sadler said funds the county has already received paid for Covid testing, contact training, medical supplies, protective equipment, salaries for anyone who had to stay in quarantine or stay home for childcare, all of the labor at the Sheriff’s Office, the jail, EMS, juvenile detention and dispatch. Incrementally, he said the county spent about \$200,000 on Covid-related expenses that were not budgeted for.

“We might want to hang on to this for a little while,” Harris said.

Commissioners postponed action on funding \$200,000 for improvements to the county’s Point of Distribution scheduling system.

County Emergency Operations Coordinator Carey Reed said Covid vaccinations, when they become available, would be distributed via POD, and the new program would track who received what, as well as when they were scheduled for their second doses.

“You don’t think I can count 21 days for my second shot?,” Rutherford said, who voiced reservations about other Texas counties benefitting from the program without contributing to it.

Thus far, Reed said, only Fort Bend County and counties in the state’s panhandle have agreed to pay.

“I don’t mind funding it, but not if we’re paying the lion’s share,” Harris said.

Concerned about spending finite funds, Rutherford took a conservative approach.

“I don’t think this is over. I think we need to keep our hands on this money until we see what happens this winter,” Rutherford said. “Our county may be devastated by this.”

Savings

Commissioners approved the renewal of insurance coverage with the Texas Association of Counties (TAC). Sadler said auto liability increased by about \$2,000, however the rest of the coverages went down.

Personal liability decreased from \$89,780 to \$86,963 and workers compensation dropped from \$136,000 to \$124,000.

“Overall, we’re actually saving more than \$12,000 if we continue to go with TAC,” Sadler said, who also negotiated savings for the county’s long distance expenses.

Currently, the county pays \$.07 per minute for long distance calls in and out of the state. Sadler contacted state agency DIR (Department of Information Resources), and they negotiated a decrease in the county’s rate to \$.025 cents per minute. The change whittled the annual cost from \$4,100 to \$1,640.

Former EMS Building

Commissioners discussed the future of the former EMS building in Bandera at 1107 Main Street.

A potential use for the facility includes moving in the county auditor and human resources departments, which currently share office space with Justices of the Peace Precincts 1 and 4. Another possibility includes selling the property altogether. If commissioners choose to sell, the discussion would take place during a future court session.

Officials Reports

During the month of September, the EMS department responded to 215 calls, and traveled 12,973 miles.

The average time from tone to en route was 1.74 minutes, and the average time from tone to on scene was 9.42 minutes.

At the Sheriff's Office, deputies responded to 624 calls and traveled 23,445 miles. Dispatch answered 8,566 incoming calls.

"That number doesn't seem to be going down," Sheriff Dan Butts said.

The average response time for priority calls was 15.29 minutes.

The average inmate population at the county jail was 52, with five contract inmates. Ten inmates were transported out of the county after being released to the Texas Department of Corrections.