

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Briefings from Commissioners' Court

Commissioners hear annual CVB report, table decision on subdivision request to cull deer population, hear rumors of Haitian citizens being seen in the area

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Delivering his annual budget report to commissioners, Greg Hicks said the Bandera County Convention and Visitors Bureau saw an unexpected increase in Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) revenue last year, despite the Covid shutdowns. Further, Hicks said, as of Sept. 17, there has been an unprecedented increase in HOT funds, accounting for a surplus of \$125,000.

“Bandera County had an unparalleled year. The resilience of Bandera County as a tourist destination is not happenstance,” Hicks said, adding the board is comprised of people who remain fiercely committed to the county’s tourism success.

After some discussion on the budget, which Hicks said he was confident would grow even more this year, Pct. 2 Commissioner Bobby Harris suggested the CVB seek out HOT revenue from Airbnbs and other short-term vacation rentals.

“We’ve got them all over the lake,” Harris said. “I don’t know if they’re compliant or just operating under the table.”

CVB Executive Director Patricia Moore said she recently learned during a travel summit she attended that the issue of Airbnb hosts not paying proper taxes is a statewide problem.

In other business, commissioners opened four sealed bids for the County Annex Building Project, in which the county is seeking architectural and

engineering services. Commissioners agreed to postpone action on any of the proposals to allow time for research. They are expected to revisit the bids during the next regular court session.

Commissioners tabled a decision on whether to grant a variance for the Bridlegate Ranch Subdivision Property Owners Association (POA) to allow the culling of its deer population.

Billy Greeson, representing Bridlegate, said three separate deer counts over a 6.3-mile area during a four-week time frame totaled 235, 237 and 234, which he said equates to about 1.9 acres per deer.

“Everyone in the Hill Country has problems with deer,” Greeson said. He stated part of Bridlegate is high-fenced, but it’s impractical to build a high fence around the entire subdivision.

Greeson said a “controlled harvest” by archery was recommended, allowing 81 does to be eliminated from Oct. 2 to Feb. 28 on designated days. Currently, hunting on residential property under 10 acres is prohibited. Greeson asked the court to grant a variance, which would allow the POA to adjoin properties and conduct the hunt.

County Judge Richard Evans asked if the POA board members unanimously approved the proposal. Greeson replied they have not yet voted on the matter. Wondering what would happen if someone injured a deer and it wandered out of the designated “harvesting zone,” Evans asked if the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department had a relocation program. Greeson said there was a program, however the fees were expensive.

Agreeing that it is not humane to leave an area overpopulated with deer, Harris asked if the “killing zones” were in the areas of the greatest population.

“You’re going to have people screaming ‘you’re killing our Bambis,’” Harris said, adding Greeson should come back to the court with the approval of the POA.

“Parks and Wildlife will take the easy way out,” Evans said, on the subject of the relocation program. “You have to push them.”

Commissioners also postponed making nominations to the Bandera Central Appraisal District Board of Directors for the 2022-23 term. The deadline is Oct. 15, however with the exception of Ernest DeWinne's request to remain on the board, commissioners did not have any names to propose.

"No one on the West end wants a piece of the action," Pct. 4 Commissioner Jordan Rutherford said.

Pct. 3 Commissioner Jack Moseley said he spoke with three people in the Medina area, none of whom were interested. Pct. 1 Commissioner Bruce Elikier and Harris said they were also out of luck.

The court is expected to discuss nominations again at their next regular meeting.

As a result of the National Pandemic Declaration, commissioners added a policy for county employee quarantining. The Department of State Health Services and the CDC do not require someone who tested positive for Covid to later test negative before returning to work, after their 10-day quarantine period has ended. Commissioners discussed whether the county should.

The waiting period for a nasal swab can be 48 to 72 hours, however Rutherford said the quick test is "96 percent accurate and it's five minutes." Insurance does not pay for rapid tests, so the court deliberated whether the county should cover the expense so an employee may return to work sooner.

"It might cost \$2,000," Emergency Management Coordinator Carey Reed said, adding if the court's purpose was to create a pandemic policy, no one knows what the next pandemic could be. Nasal swabs and rapid tests are specific to Covid, she said.

EMS Director Calvin Plummer said his department follows the CDC guidelines. Some tests stay positive for a month, Plummer said, but they're not contagious after symptoms go away and it's been 10-14 days. As the policy is written, a supervisor may request a doctor's release before an employee can return.

The motion to approve the policy carried, with Moseley opposed.

Chief Deputy Matt King told commissioners the Sheriff's Office received a call this week about 19 suspected people hiding in the Tarpley area. King said law enforcement officers were unable to see or locate anyone.

King said there were also rumors that a bus full of Haitian migrants was traveling through Hondo, and all of the people were released. The buses came through and stopped to get supplies on their way to San Antonio, King said, but only Homeland Security personnel got off the bus.

"We never saw them," King said.