

The Bandera PROPHET

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Bandera City Council listens to presentations on proposed school bond, reserving City Park for 2024 solar eclipse event

By Jessica Nohealapa'ahi
The Bandera Prophet

Bandera ISD Superintendent Gary Bitzkie briefed City Council members on the details of the school district's upcoming bond election. His presentation last Tuesday was unexpectedly and ironically followed by an announcement released a few hours later that administrators were investigating a rumored threat to the Bandera High School campus.

"Because of the shootings that are happening, and they will continue... this is a top priority for our community," Bitzkie said told council April 4.

Bitzkie said the bond would fund safety measures, including unfunded mandates such as eight-foot fencing and bullet-proof windows, at every campus. He said the state promised \$400 million to protect schools; Bandera ISD received \$200,000. That amount, Bitzkie said, would solely pay for Bandera Middle School, the newest campus in the district. Russell Hevenor, speaking as a member of the bond steering committee that met several times last year, said he initially was one of the pessimists.

"This was a committee of 50 very diverse people...who came together for five very long meetings," Hevenor said. "Unfortunately we don't live in the world we grew up in. The number one thing that is important as a voter, parent and community member is to create four campuses that are safe."

Hevenor said the bond would benefit every campus, as well as create an environment to help every student succeed.

“College is not for everybody,” Hevenor said, adding the proposed Career and Technical Education (CTE) center at the high school would provide critical education in the trades, such as welding, ag mechanics, robotics, nursing and more. “I don’t like taxes either. I don’t have any kids in the school system anymore. But I believe the school represents the community. We have a chance to do something that is an investment.”

Council Member Tony Battle, who also served on the bond steering committee, said he was shocked at how “sub-par” some of the areas in the schools are.

“It’s amazing what our kids are able to do with what they are working in,” Battle said. “This bond is not just about the ISD, it’s about the community.”

The \$79,491,416 bond, if approved by voters, would fund numerous proposed projects including improved campus safety, a new CTE Center and Bandera multi-purpose facility, updated district wide ADA accessibility, new HVAC systems at Alkek and Hill Country Elementaries, and overall district-wide maintenance.

Bitzkie said for homeowners, the impact on a \$300,000 property valuation translates to an annual tax increase of roughly \$340.

The bond election will be May 6. Early voting will begin Monday, April 24, and continue through Tuesday, May 2.

“I encourage you all to get out there and vote. Vote yes, Vote no. Please think about what is best for our students,” Bitzkie said.

~ In other business, Leanne Beauxbeannes asked to reserve part of City Park from April 5-9, 2024, to provide camp and RV sites during the solar eclipse. She said she expected to mark off 100 tent spaces and 100 RV spaces to accommodate 600 “family vacationers, self-reliant nature lovers and star gazers.”

She said she reserved 20 porta potties from Buddy’s Well & Septic Service, and has already purchased solar viewing glasses. From the profit, Beauxbeannes said the Bandera County Boys & Girls Club would be the primary beneficiary. She is also coordinating with the Bandera

Lions Club, Junior Rangers Mounted Drill Team and the Cowboy Capital Trailriders.

Beauxbeannes proposed paying a \$500 cleanup and damage deposit, \$1 million insurance policy, and \$6,000 park rental fee.

“My wish is that you would consider this proposal,” Beauxbeannes said, adding the sooner council acted, if approved, the sooner she could shore up vendor agreements.

~ Council members unanimously approved the resignation of City Administrator William Cox, which will be effective April 30.

“Thank you. We will work through the month together, and we appreciate you,” Mayor Rebeca Gibson told Cox.

Council directed City Secretary Jill Shelton to post the open job position immediately after members are able to review the description.