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County approves proposed non-profit funding and salary increases
Public hearing set for Aug. 8

By Jessica Goode
The Bandera Prophet

Commissioners continue to tiptoe on the tightrope as they try to balance the county's annual budget, support the community and be responsible stewards of taxpayers' dollars.

During a budget workshop on Thursday, commissioners discussed the county's non-profit entities seeking funding from block grants. At the top of the list was a \$20,000 request from the Arthur Nagel Community Clinic, which provides medical care to low-income, uninsured county residents.

Because the county already funds indigent health care, it is unable to provide the clinic financial assistance, something County Judge Richard Evans is looking for a way around.

"We asked the Texas Association of Counties to see if there's any way we can," Evans said. "We cannot find anything that grants the county authority to legally fund it."

Saying the clinic is a big asset to the community, Evans said there is no question of the good job members of the clinic do.

"The Nagel Clinic is one of the greatest things to happen in our county," Evans said.

County Auditor Christina Moreno said she could not recommend granting the clinic money because Bandera already has an indigent health care department.

Other non-profit agencies that requested and were granted funding include the Boys & Girls Club of Bandera County, the Silver Sage Community Center, the area libraries (Bandera, Lakehills and Medina), the Soil & Water Conservation District and Court Appointed Special Advocates for children (CASA).

Pct. 3 Commissioner Jack Moseley asked to add funding for the installation of Christmas lights on the Courthouse lawn. Owned by the city's Economic Development Corporation (EDC), the lights will be set up in Bandera City Park by the Bandera Wranglers and the Boys & Girls Club.

The EDC agreed to set aside the same lights that were used on the courthouse lawn last year, however the county will be responsible for replacing any burned out bulbs and supplying extension cords. Stating the Bandera Business Association and the Chamber of Commerce will contribute, Moseley asked for \$200 to fund those expenses.

"Maybe we should look to some of the entities that use the lawn for various events," Pct. 1 Commissioner Bobby Harris said. "They have a vested interest."

Evans said the money would have to be apportioned to a specific entity, potentially the Convention and Visitors Bureau, as the lights do promote tourism.

Salaries increase

Also discussed during a previous budget workshop was county employee salaries. A proposed 3 percent pay raise was approved for elected officials and county employees, in addition to a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA).

The increased cost to county taxpayers will be \$710,000, however the proposed tax rate, \$.6769 per \$100 valuation, is not expected to increase.

"One of the most important drivers in a county budget is employee salaries and benefits," Evans said. "Elected officials come and go, but the employees keep the county going. The cheapest thing we can do is retain people. That's my philosophy from 33 years. We need to take care of our people."

Health insurance, which increases universally every year, went up by 1.8 percent, which will cost the county \$37,000. Moreno said employees won't feel the difference, unless they're covering dependents.

"The county does not pay for dependent health care," Moreno said.

Life, dental and vision - all with no or nominal increases - were approved, as was a 2 percent COLA for about 100 people who collect retirement benefits - which translates to an extra \$21,000.

Moreno said she recommended giving the increase now, as next year “may not be so fruitful.”

Evans said due to legislative changes, the county will absorb more unfunded mandates, which may affect the tax rate, which has not increased in nine years.

“The Legislature changed the rule book,” Evans said. “So next year is going to be a different ballgame.”

Concerned that the county may face future layoffs, Pct. 4 Commissioner Jordan “Jody” Rutherford said the changes will take a bite out of the budget.

“We took the hit on this,” Rutherford said. “We’re going to have to be careful. I think we need to do what we can right now to help people. We don’t want to eat our fund balance up next year on salaries.”

Moreno said she has until Wednesday, July 31, to file the budget, which will then be open to public hearing and review until its final adoption.

The first public hearing will be Thursday, Aug. 8, at 10 a.m.

See the detailed notice in the Banderaprophet at www.banderaprophet.com/public-notices.html.