

May 20, 2015

FROM THE OFFICE OF
ROSA LAVENDER
KERR COUNTY VICTIM'S
RIGHTS COORDINATOR
700 MAIN ST.
KERRVILLE, TX 78028

County Eye Newsletter

The overwhelming approval of the bond issue on May 9th to expand the inmate capacity of the Kerr County Jail plus several renovations to the existing facility now gives the sheriff and other county officials a mandate to move forward with the project. Sheriff Hierholzer and the architect for the project Wayne Gondeck will work closely as the county's financial advisors prepare to sell the bonds needed to fund the jail construction. It takes a lot of collaboration from many sources to bring all the pieces of the puzzle together before actual construction can begin.

The sheriff predicts a window of up to two years before the first inmates will be moved into the new addition to the jail...but the wait will be worth it. The Kerr County Jail will remain a first class facility that should address the needs of a growing community for many years to come.

Work on the budget for FY2015-2016 which begins Oct. 1st will move forward in the coming weeks as commissioners and the county auditor work with the county judge to prepare a proposed budget for the coming year. Elected officials and department heads will be asked to appear before Commissioners' Court at special budget workshop sessions to answer questions about their proposed budget for next year.

The certified tax rolls from the appraisal district that will give the court a window into the expected revenues for next year will not be finalized until the end of July so in the coming weeks county officials will work with only projected revenues in their deliberations.

State law says the tax rate and budget must be adopted by Oct. 1st but in recent years Kerr County leaders have worked diligently to get the process completed by early September to give the tax office time to get the tax notices out in early October. Other taxing entities in the county also use that same goal.

School district budgets begin Sept. 1st so they must complete their work in August. Likewise the budget adopted by the Texas State Legislature in the next two weeks begins Sept. 1st. The state legislature is faced with an even larger challenge they are required to adopt a two year budget because the legislature only meets every other year.

Several bills now pending in the legislature could have a financial impact on the county's budget including the creation of a new judicial district for Kendall County which would reduce the 216th Judicial District to only Kerr and Gillespie counties. A vote is expected this week to approve the district.

The new judicial district would not be in place until January, 2017 after the Nov. 2016 election of a judge and district attorney but budget adjustments for the other two counties would need to be considered immediately since it will require additional costs beginning with the 2016-2017 budgets. Lots of challenges face county leaders related to upcoming budget decisions.

Revenue projections for the county include sales tax revenue that is shared with the cities of Kerrville and Ingram, property tax revenue which comes in the form of a projected revenue amount provided in early June by the Kerr County Tax Appraisal District, and the revenue gleaned from fees charged for services in various county offices.

While sales tax revenue and property values on which ad valorem taxes are assessed have slightly increased in recent years in the county, the amount of fees collected by the county clerk, district clerk, county tax-assessor collector, and law enforcement for civil work have held steady or declined.

Fees collected in the district and county clerk offices include filing fees for divorces, child custody, guardianships and other civil actions plus marriage licenses, birth certificates, passports, guardianships, probate fees, etc. Fees for serving civil papers by the sheriff's office and constables have also become a moving target.

Unfortunately the fee schedules in those offices cannot be adjusted easily to bring in additional revenue because of a change in state law in a recent legislative session that allows private servers to serve most civil papers in Texas.

Civil papers primarily involve lawsuits, divorce, child support, and related actions in court. The agency or party that issues the papers determine who the papers go to for service and currently most private servers are charging less than the fee schedule for the sheriff and constables offices in Kerr County.

Another source of revenue includes projected grant money that has been applied for from the state or federal sources. Unfortunately it is often late in the budget cycle before grant money awards are announced.

Adopting a budget each year that will continue to provide those services mandated by law and other services demanded by a growing county population is a most daunting challenge for county officials.

Watch in the weeks to come as the process moves forward. Public hearings will be scheduled on the proposed budget and proposed tax rate to give residents the opportunity to comment on the budget and the tax rate before they are adopted.

We wish everyone a safe Memorial Day weekend and invite you to join us next Monday for the annual Memorial Day service and dedication of the new panels on the Kerr County War Memorial on the courthouse square.