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FROM THE OFFICE OF  
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## County Eye Newsletter

The first public hearing, when citizens had the opportunity to comment on the proposed FY 2015-2016 county budget and tax rate, was set for Monday, August 24, after this column was written, and the second hearing is set for the commissioners' court meeting on Monday, Sept. 14. Later in September county commissioners will adopt the tax rate and budget for the upcoming year.

The proposed tax rate increase from 43.3 cents per \$100 valuation to 48.07 cents per \$100 valuation will provide the needed revenue to keep Kerr County government providing the services the residents of the community demand and deserve. The first 1.75 cents of the increase was approved last May when we approved the bond issue to add 92 beds to the Kerr County Jail...so that amount was already determined long ago.

The bulk of the remainder of the increase...approximately 3 cents...will be dedicated to rebuilding the road and bridge department budget and allow them to return to the schedule of resurfacing and repairing the county-maintained roads that has been followed for over two decades. A one cent increase provides approximately \$300,000 in new revenue.

Over the past three budgets Road Administrator Len Odom and his department have reduced their budget to allow the money to cover other county expenditures and keep the tax rate steady. During the economic downturn that challenged all taxing entities Kerr County did not increase taxes. Now that the economy has begun an upward recovery, Kerr County tax rates must be adjusted.

Simply calculated...the proposed increase will mean, after the homestead exemption is subtracted from the tax bill, about \$40 a year increase in a home valued at \$100,000, \$80 a year for a home valued at \$200,000 and so on. Property owners over 65 will see no increase in their tax rate because of the freeze approved several years ago.

County departments have been very responsible about spending and most departments have reduced staff positions during the three year period when an austerity plan was implemented. Employees have stepped up and taken on new responsibilities in order to provide the services required by law within the limited budget available. At no time were mandated services cut or endangered.

During that same period the county reserves were rebuilt from about 12% to now almost 25%, the amount recommended by the state to provide funds during the period between the time that the budget year begins Oct. 1 and when the bulk of the tax revenue begins to be collected in December and January. The reserve also provides emergency funds should they be needed in the event of a natural disaster or other crisis.

Nobody likes the idea of raising taxes...but the time has come to bite the bullet and do something. After the public hearings there may still be some adjustments made to either the tax rate or the budget, but the fact is indisputable that there will have to be a tax increase in order to keep Kerr County government in business and meeting the demands of an increasing county population over the years ahead.

The other hot button issue in this year's budget appears to be whether to hire a management company to market and operate the newly renovated Hill Country Youth Event Center. A quarter of a century ago a movie, "Field of Dreams", was released. The story was centered around the building of a baseball field in the middle of a Midwestern cornfield.

The famous line, “If we build it, they will come” came from that movie. It worked for a baseball field in a stand of corn but won’t work with the HCYEC facility. We cannot expect the facility to be marketed and managed efficiently long term by existing county personnel and without an aggressive marketing campaign and proper management and maintenance, the facility will become a liability to the county quickly.

We have a world class facility that needs to be utilized to provide the revenue to pay off the bonds issued for its construction...simple. Empty buildings don’t make any money.

On that note...a reminder that the first Hill Country Swap Meet of the fall season will be Saturday, September 5 at the Hill Country Youth Event Center. Come join us to buy or sell...and watch for the return of Kerr County Market Days on the courthouse square this fall. The first Market Day will be Saturday, September 26. For more information on the swap meet or market days go to [www.kerrcountymarketdays.org](http://www.kerrcountymarketdays.org).