



EL PASO COUNTY

Commissioner
David Stout
Precinct 2

Newsletter - Volume 3 - Issue 2 - 2017



Ascarate Park News, Events and Updates

General Updates

Ascarate Park participated in a contest by the National Recreation and Park Association called “Meet Me at the Park.” Throughout the month of April, we invited the public to join us in nominating Ascarate to win \$20,000 in order to help stock the lake with fish. Check for updates on my social media page.

The Sun City Fair took place at Ascarate Park. The Fair began on March 31 and continued through April 16. The Fair brought several fun and exciting attractions, shows, live music, animals, food and carnival rides.

We are also excited to announce that the County generated total revenue of \$143,161 throughout the Sun City Fair event that was allocated towards the General Fund. However, we are tracking all revenue from Ascarate Park to make sure it is reinvested into the park. We will continue to work to attract similar events to the Park to increase our local quality of life and revenue that can be reinvested into the park.

Fishing

The County continues to work hard to maintain Ascarate Park and the lake’s fish stockings. In the last quarter, we had the following fish delivered to Ascarate Lake:

- Jan 11- approx. 750 Rainbow Trout
- Feb 8- approx. 750 Rainbow Trout
- Mar 2- approx. 750 Rainbow Trout
- Mar 7- approx. 5000 fingerling Blue Gill

In addition, our Public Works department notified us that a recent water quality test came back, finding no samples of golden algae.

Domestic Ducks

There has been an issue in Ascarate Park regarding domestic ducks. These ducks are purchased as chicks and as they grow older, unfortunately, too many of them are abandoned here in the park by the lake.

However, the park is not a good home for the ducks because they are unable to feed themselves or live in the wild since they are domestic animals. Additionally, it is actually a criminal offense to abandon domestic ducks, punishable at the state level.

I take these problems very seriously and so my office, in partnership with the Parks department, the Sheriff's department and Stick House Sanctuary, have been in close contact to develop a plan to remove the animals from the park and take them to a safer home. We will remain in contact with our partners to finalize a date for the duck removal and adoptions.

We are also looking at long term solutions to inform the public about the problems associated with abandoning these animals.

County/UTEP Partnership

As you may know, the County entered into a partnership with UTEP's Civil Engineering Department for a Capstone Design course.

With the Ascarate Park issues on algae, water levels, and other concerns at Ascarate Lake, UTEP offered their assistance on these issues as a graduate course research project. This included water quality testing and a report on remediation efforts necessary for improving and sustaining water quality and quantity.

Additionally, the project includes the design of four enhancement projects within Ascarate Park. A final design report and a presentation from the work conducted will be given to the County at the end of their coursework.

Four projects include walking trails throughout the park that are ADA compliant; storm-water drainage improvements to mitigate ponding and promote rain harvesting; athletic fields; and an amphitheater.

It is my hope that we will be able to continue this conversation in the future with the rest of Commissioners Court to ultimately put some of these suggestions into practice and re-develop the facilities and aesthetics of Ascarate Park.



County Receives Clean Audit of Finances

In early April, the County Auditor published the County's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report or CAFR for the previous year. The CAFR serves has an independent audit of the County's finances.

We're very pleased to report that there were no significant audit findings.

During fiscal year 2016, the general fund revenue and other sources totaled of \$258 million, while expenditures and financing use totaled of \$243 million, resulting in fiscal year 2016 revenues outpacing expenditures by \$15.2 million.

County revenues and other sources grew by about \$13 million or 5.33 percent. Growth was attributable to overall increases totaling \$14.1 million, which included Charges for Services which increased by \$7.3 million or 20.07 percent; net Taxes of \$5.8 million or 2.99 percent, of which \$4.8 million was related to ad valorem property taxes; and \$910,708 related to sales and use taxes.

Additional increases included Fines and Forfeitures which grew by \$297,610 or 5.85 percent; Intergovernmental, \$249,204 or 5.16 percent; Interest Earnings, \$205,827 or 183.26 percent; and Other Financing Sources by \$189,948 or 18.29 percent.

Overall, the County's expenditures and other uses increased by \$7.9 million or 3.37 percent, and are mainly attributed to salary and fringe benefits associated to cost of living and step plan merit increases, as well as the cost of the Sheriff's collective bargaining agreement.

The County's net position increased by \$83.8 million or 185 percent, largely as a result to the change in actuarial valuations of pension liability.

The County's assets total \$484.9 million, up \$1.5 million from Fiscal Year 2015. Liabilities totaled \$541 million, which is an \$18.8 million decrease from FY 2015.

During fiscal year 2016, some of the major County initiatives funded with the debt issued in previous fiscal years were either completed or substantially completed, such as the Sportspark Complex Renovations and replacement of the Courthouse Mechanical Plumbing System. Ongoing projects include Courthouse Improvements, Financial Management Software, Jail Annex Expansion and Far Eastside Parks and Improvements.

County Receives Clean Audit of Finances (Continued)

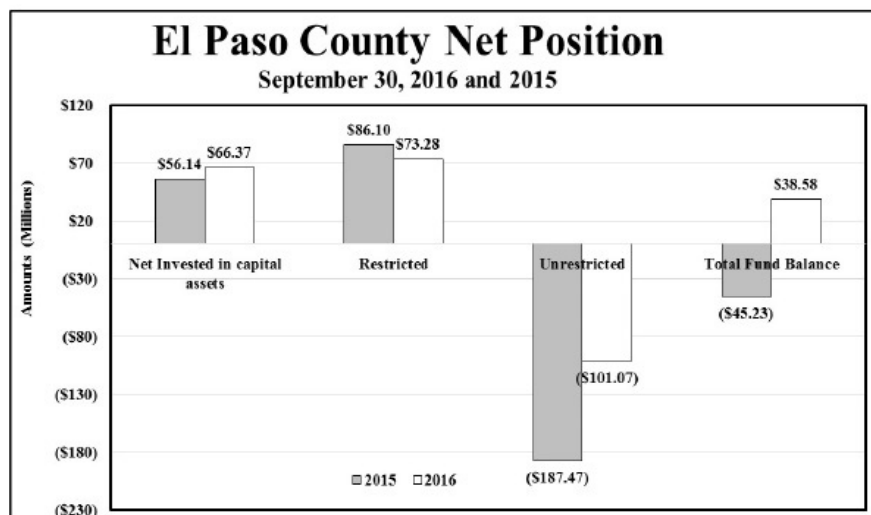
The audit report acknowledged numerous accounting awards the County received, and I thank our dedicated budget and audit staff for the tremendous work they did to earn those awards. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to the County for its comprehensive annual financial report for the fiscal year that ended September 30, 2015. This was the 27th consecutive year the County has received this prestigious award.

Additionally, the County received the GFOA's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its annual budget document for the 2016 fiscal year beginning October 1, 2015. This was the 19th year that the County received this prestigious award.

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While this information can be dense and not as exciting as the other County news, I think it's important to share and discuss the County's finances and handling of public tax dollars with the public. If you're interested in viewing the audit report yourself, you can find it online at www.epcounty.com/auditor/publications/cafr/cafr_16/main.htm.

	Governmental		Business-type		Total	
	Activities		Activities			
	FY2016	FY2015	FY2016	FY2015	FY2016	FY2015
Current and other assets	\$ 201,261,218	\$ 204,126,626	\$ 2,190,557	\$ 2,628,985	\$ 203,451,775	\$ 206,755,611
Capital assets	271,490,952	266,291,876	9,490,115	9,849,994	280,981,067	276,141,870
Total assets	472,752,170	470,418,502	11,680,672	12,478,979	484,432,842	482,897,481
Deferred outflows of resources	99,097,656	31,608,188	72,067	30,589	99,169,723	31,638,777
Long-term liabilities outstanding	513,892,007	524,151,703	1,693,749	1,816,304	515,585,756	525,968,007
Other liabilities	24,858,876	33,234,591	204,055	260,297	25,062,931	33,494,888
Total liabilities	538,750,883	557,386,294	1,897,804	2,076,601	540,648,687	559,462,895
Deferred inflows of resources	4,302,233	310,051	71,359	-	4,373,592	310,051
Net position:						
Net investment in capital assets	58,428,078	47,865,209	7,942,539	8,269,996	66,370,617	56,135,205
Restricted	73,058,295	85,780,466	225,221	321,763	73,283,516	86,102,229
Unrestricted	(102,689,663)	(189,315,330)	1,615,816	1,841,208	(101,073,847)	(187,474,122)
Total net position	\$ 28,796,710	\$ (55,669,655)	\$ 9,783,576	\$ 10,432,967	\$ 38,580,286	\$ (45,236,688)





Delegation of El Pasoans Offer Their Message, Values to State Leaders

In late February, I joined a delegation of El Pasoans representing the public and private sectors for a three day event in Austin to meet with state leaders. The event, “El Paso Days in Austin,” was organized by the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce and was sponsored in part by the County of El Paso.

Over the three days, from February 21 through February 23, local elected officials and business leaders had the opportunity to meet with the leadership in state government, including legislators and agency department heads.

The purpose of this event was to show a unified effort by El Pasoans to lobby on behalf of our community’s legislative agenda and our community’s legislative values. I had the opportunity to meet with State Senator Donna Campbell, the Chair of the Veteran Affairs and Border Security Committee to discuss steering state border security grant funds to our local law enforcement departments and our ports of entry to enhance the flow of commerce and trade. We also discussed Veterans affairs, including Veteran hiring practices, workforce development programs to assist service members transitioning into the civilian workforce, and addressing wait times at Veterans Affairs clinics and medical centers.

Delegation of El Pasoans Offer Their Message, Values to State Leaders (Continued)

Additionally, I participated in a meeting with Texas House Speaker Joe Straus to advocate for more state economic development incentives to grow business opportunities throughout El Paso County. We also expressed our deep concern and opposition to legislation that would bring harm to our community, including SB 4, the so-called “sanctuary cities” bill and SB 6, the so-called “bathroom bill.”

I further met with the legislative director to State Representative Dennis Bonnen, who chairs the powerful Ways and Means Committee and who serves on the Culture, Recreation, and Tourism Committee. We discussed our efforts to promote greater tourism in El Paso, through historic preservation and heritage tourism. Other meetings included those with the staff of State Senator Don Huffines, vice-chair of the Veteran Affairs and Border Security committee; State Representative Rick Miller, a member of the House Appropriations Committee; and with Charles Smith, a Commissioner with the Health and Human Services agency.

Events like this are an important way for local El Paso leaders to meet face-to-face with our state leaders and explain our community’s narrative, our needs, our challenges, and what we need the state to help us accomplish. Because of our geographic isolation from other metropolitan centers in Texas, our delegation of more than 90 people illustrated that El Paso is big player when it comes to state affairs, especially as it relates to international trade and security, tourism, and fighting for civil and human rights.



County Leaders Advocate for Local Control at State Capitol

Every biennium, state lawmakers meet in Austin to adopt the state's budget and enact or amend state law. During legislative sessions, counties and cities adopt their own legislative agendas. For the 85th Legislative Session, the County Commissioners Court prioritized several legislative items and proposals in the County's area of focus, including justice, community and economic development, transportation, taxation, public safety, health and welfare, and land use.

For example, the County supports legislative appropriations requests for the Texas Indigent Defense Commission, specifically in ensuring Texas counties are provided additional funding to offset the cost of providing indigent defense, which is a mandate.

We also support legislation that enhances El Paso County's ability to address the need for storm water management in the unincorporated areas of El Paso County, in collaboration with necessary municipalities and other necessary stakeholders.

The County also supports and is actively lobbying to legislation relating to the county regulation of lots in platted subdivisions that have remained undeveloped for 25 years or more so.

In addition, our legislative agenda provides a set of guiding values that provide insight on legislative concepts the Commissioners Court is ideologically in support of and opposed to. For example, the County opposes any law that would require local governmental entities to perform a federal function.

Unfortunately for El Paso County, we have been in defensive mode as state lawmakers have sought this year to pass legislation that would negatively impact our community. I have joined many colleagues, including County Judge Veronica Escobar, County Commissioner Vince Perez, County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal, and County Sheriff Richard Wiles, among other representatives of county officials, to testify and lobby against those bills that would hurt our community the most.

Among the most harmful pieces of legislation that I've testified and worked to fight against include Senate Bill 2, Senate Bill 4, and Senate Bill 6, all of which are priorities of either Governor Greg Abbott or Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick.

I find it hypocritical that our state leaders, who for years criticized the federal government for reaching into state affairs, are now trying to enact laws that would interfere with local control. The three bills listed above do just that, they are more unfunded state mandates that remove counties' and cities' ability to effectively represent and govern their own communities.

Senate Bill 2 Removes Local Ability to Pay for Services

State lawmakers are seeking to enact Senate Bill 2, a dangerous bill that would cap the amount of property tax revenue counties and cities can raise to pay for vital public services.

Local governments, like counties, fund their budgets primarily from property taxes. Currently, if a county or city increases its tax rate by eight percent from one year to the next, the citizens can petition for a rollback election to oppose or support that tax increase. Lawmakers in the Texas House and Senate have moved that bar throughout the session. The County of El Paso opposes a bill that would reduce that threshold from eight percent and opposes a bill or amendment that would automatically trigger an election, rather than requiring a petition for an election.

Now, it's never an easy decision to raise taxes in the first place, and I'm proud to say that in the two years I've been in office to vote on the El Paso County's tax rate, we've kept our rate flat. The County has now adopted the same tax rate for three straight years, holding the line diligently on taxing our residents.

But the fact is, counties across the state - including El Paso County - are already overburdened by unfunded mandates set by the State Legislature. In Fiscal Year 2017, El Paso County will assume about \$186 million in unfunded mandatory core services and an additional \$20 million in support services, for a total encumbrance of \$206 million. I've included the cost of support services - such as facilities, utilities, infrastructure, and technology - because while they are not considered mandates, they are essential to the function and performance of mandated services set by the state.

That figure of \$206 million represents more than half of El Paso County's budget.

Our resources are very limited, with 75 to 80 percent of our budget funded by local property and sales taxes. Counties do not have the same flexibility that municipalities have in creating fees to help fund services. But as I mentioned, despite that inability to create fees, El Paso County has remained a good steward of local tax dollars, keeping our tax rate stable and adopting the same tax rate for three years in a row.

El Paso County, like many counties throughout the state, is experiencing new growth. And the majority of our new growth and development is taking place in our smaller municipalities and unincorporated areas outside of the City of El Paso. That means much of the new growth will rely more heavily on County resources.

Should SB 2 be enacted with the revenue cap language, it is highly likely that El Paso County will be forced to target departments and programs for budget cuts, including our vital discretionary operations, like Sheriff Deputy patrols. As you know, El Paso County is geographically large, and requires our Sheriff's Deputies to patrol and protect more than 1,000 square miles.

Senate Bill 2 Removes Local Ability to Pay for Services (Continued)

SB 2 could have the unintended consequence of making our community less safe should we have scale back law enforcement services.

But that's just the beginning. Other important discretionary programs are at risk if revenue cap legislation is enacted. That includes our parks division, which provides recreational and extra-curricular activities for our youth and families; our General Assistance program which includes utility assistance and rapid re-housing assistance programs; and our nutrition program which provides daily hot meals to home-bound senior citizens and to senior citizen centers.

In addition, imposing revenue caps has the potential to negatively impact public health throughout El Paso County as there could be impacts to our interlocal agreements for dental clinics, restaurant inspections, and mosquito fogging programs. Those impacts will ultimately put greater stress on our public hospital district.

Other detrimental cuts as a result of reducing our ability to generate revenue would impact the County's newly created Economic Development Department, undermining business recruitment and development efforts. That would have a broader, negative economic impact on property values and job growth.

Further, the administration of justice would be negatively impacted as 24/7 jail magistration would be reduced, creating a backlog in our jails at a time when we have reduced that backlog through our office of Criminal Justice Coordination. Our specialty courts, including our Veterans and drug courts, might also be scaled back.

Finally, El Paso County only accounts for 16 percent of the tax bill for the local property owner. I submit to state lawmakers that if their concern surrounds high property taxes and finding solutions to reduce the tax burden on the property owner, then they should look elsewhere for solutions and not eliminate counties' and cities' ability to generate revenue to serve and protect our communities.

Counties and municipalities are not the problem when it comes to large tax bills, the problem is the state's formula for public school funding, which does make up the lion's share of the local tax bill. If the state focused its efforts on reforming public school finance, then they could truly find a solution towards lowering property taxes for the home or business owner.

‘Sanctuary Cities’ Bill a Threat to Public Safety

The state’s leadership has deemed the need to ban so-called “sanctuary cities” an emergency item during this legislative session and the vehicle through which they are addressing that is Senate Bill 4. In short, SB 4 allows local police and sheriff’s officers to enforce complex federal immigration laws, for which they have no training, and provides penalties to officers and local governments who don’t comply with that enforcement. This bill goes against local policies set by police chiefs and sheriffs.

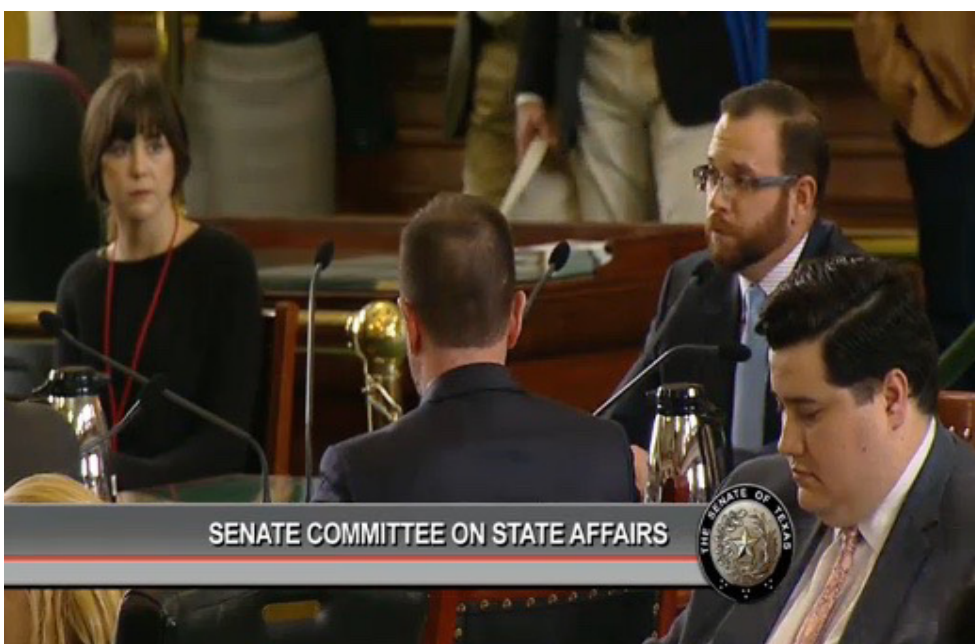
SB 4 is yet another bad piece of legislation that I and other County officials have offered testimony against in the state capitol. And we’re not alone in our opposition. Local officials, including law enforcement officials, are largely united in opposition to this state mandate.

Among the issues that concerns me, is that the bill leaves too much room for interpretation, which could easily put a community, like El Paso County, in non-compliance with the law, which brings financial penalties.

Supporters of the bill say it will make communities safer. I couldn’t disagree more. Border communities, like El Paso, are already among the safest communities in the nation. In our case, that’s largely due to the fact that our local police force has a stellar relationship with the community it serves. I fear this bill will erode that relationship and trust, resulting in witnesses to crimes or victims of crimes to not reporting to police.

What’s worse is that the latest version of the bill that was approved by the Texas House of Representatives, allows local officers to inquire into someone’s immigration status while merely being detained, even if it’s during a routine traffic stop.

This provision will only serve to erode the trust between local law enforcement and the community they are sworn to protect. This is not good for our community and if the state enacts this bill, I remain prepared to fight them in our courts.





‘Bathroom Bill’ Aims to Discriminate Against Transgender Community

Recently, I traveled to Austin to testify against Senate Bill 6 and Committee Substitute to House Bill 2899, which have also been referred to as the “bathroom bill.” Both bills are alternatives to each other in the House and the Senate and seek to find a solution to a problem that does not exist in Texas. These bills are detrimental to our friends in the transgender community and the introduction of these discriminatory bills has only served to divide our state. Because of this, I traveled to Austin to testify against both SB6 and CSHB2899.

Senate Bill 6

If enacted, this bill would regulate the most private and intimate aspects of Texans’ lives and subject one of the most vulnerable groups of Texans who already bear the brunt of harassment to more harassment. This bill would also encourage businesses seeking to work and invest in Texas to look elsewhere that has a friendlier and more welcoming environment. For example, the NBA decided against Charlotte, North Carolina as the location for the 2017 All-Star Game after a similar bill was passed into law in their state.

Simply put, this is a bad piece of legislation that does not come close to addressing our state’s most critical issues and areas of need such as focusing on our underfunded education system, expanding access to healthcare, funding transportation and infrastructure, reforming our state’s Child Protective Services and protecting the human and civil rights of all Texans.

'Bathroom Bill' Aims to Discriminate Against Transgender Community (Continued)

Committee Substitute to House Bill 2899

Introduced to the House as the alternative to Senate Bill 6, Committee Substitute to House Bill (CSHB) 2899 is equally dangerous—but goes even further. CSHB 2899 states that political subdivisions may not enforce laws that protect a class of persons from discrimination as it relates to regulating access to restrooms and other facilities.

Although it relates to the language in SB6, the passage of CSHB 2899 would make it illegal for local municipalities, such as the County, to enforce anti-discriminatory laws that already exist and protect our residents. It is clear that this bill is specifically crafted to target our already vulnerable friends in the transgender community, in regards to their bathrooms of choice. However, this bill is also concerning because the language leaves room for interpretation.

For example, the “class of persons” described in this bill is not defined. This allows political subdivisions the permission to interpret the language loosely and extend discriminatory practices towards many people.

Currently, federal law does not mention a protection for discrimination on the basis of veteran status, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity. This bill is dangerous to our friends in the LGBTQ community, but also to our veterans, our families and our community. If this bill were to pass, the State of Texas would be permitting discrimination against several groups of people. Furthermore, if enacted, it would also nullify existing non-discrimination protections from discrimination in bathrooms, showers, and changing facilities;

For these reasons, I traveled to Austin to urge the House to vote against this bill. I spent almost 16 hours waiting to testify and finally, at around 1 AM, I was permitted to voice my thoughts against this harmful piece of legislation.

The ugly truth is that these bills are designed to discriminate against transgender Texans and the LGBTQ community, something that is wholeheartedly against our County values.

In fact, last year, the El Paso County Commissioners Court unanimously adopted a resolution opposing legislation that deprives due process to members of the LGBTQ community and creates barriers to recognition and integration by the LGBTQ community. The resolution also opposed legislation that provides incentives and protections for the private sector to discriminate against the LGBTQ community and limits access to healthcare, education, and use of public facilities to the LGBTQ community.

The County of El Paso further conducted a review of our own anti-harassment and equal opportunity policies and adopted necessary changes to those policies to ensure that all county residents are protected despite their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Because of the great, progressive work the County has done in the last few years, it was imperative for me to testify against these terrible, discriminatory bills. It is my hope that neither SB6 nor CSHB 2899 will pass into law.

Representing El Paso County on a National Level

In the last few months, I traveled to Washington, D.C. and Seattle, Washington to attend two national conferences. Both conferences allowed me the opportunity to learn more about the issues that are important to our County, such as behavioral health, health care, criminal justice, education, economic development and employment. Each conference also gave me insight on strategies and policies implemented in other counties across the nation. I was excited to participate in discussions and workshops and the opportunity to engage with several government officials across the nation, including our own representatives such as Congressman O'Rourke, Congressman Hurd, and the staff of Senator Cruz and Senator Cornyn.



The National Association of Counties Legislative Conference

In February, I attended the National Association of Counties Legislative Conference. As an organization, The National Association of Counties (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government, and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

The NACo Legislative Conference, held annually in Washington, D.C., brings together over 2,000 elected and appointed county officials to focus on federal policy issues that impact counties and our residents. With a new administration, and newly elected members of Congress, the 2017 Legislative Conference was an opportunity to elevate the county voice at the national level. County leaders, including myself, had the opportunity to share issues counties are facing and explore best ways to address those challenges. The different forums focused on strategies for addressing social determinants—issues such as health care needs, transportation, social support networks, employment, education, economic development, housing and income.

Representing El Paso County at a National Level (Continued)

The National Council for Behavioral Health Conference

As the Vice Chair of Emergence Health Network's Board of Trustees, I also attended The National Council for Behavioral Health to gain further understanding of the challenges faced within the behavioral health sector and potential solutions that can best assist our community.

The National Council for Behavioral Health is the unifying voice of America's mental health and addictions treatment organizations. Together with more than 2,800 member organizations, serving 10 million adults, children and families living with mental illnesses and addictions, the National Council is committed to all Americans having access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery.

The National Council Conference is health care's behavioral health conference. Each spring, executives, board members, thought leaders, and behavioral health professionals from the nation's health, mental health, and addiction care organizations come together for this event that features the latest innovations, science and business and clinical best practices. The conference included many workshops with areas of focus on management and leadership, marketing and branding, health care, public policy, technology, population health, criminal justice, clinical practices, among many others.

I enjoyed learning more from these conferences and hope that we can work towards applying some best practices and solutions in the near future.



UMC Opens Neighborhood Clinics in East El Paso



I am excited to tell you about the UMC Neighborhood Clinic opening on the East side of El Paso. This facility was a long time in the making, but I couldn't be more proud of all the efforts by a range of people who turned this dream into a reality.

This state of the art facility is one of the many current UMC projects that aim to bring primary care closer to residents' homes. Now, it will be much more accessible to receive preventative care at the neighborhood clinic and avoid future trips to the hospital.

The 43,000 square foot clinic provides healthcare services for the East side of El Paso. Services at these facilities include family, pediatric, women's, and other specialty care. In addition, the clinics will offer lab and radiology services and includes a retail pharmacy. The total cost of this project was about \$22 million and the facility has the capacity to see close to about a hundred thousand people, with the expectation of growing in the future. The clinic offers extended hours and only about a 30-minute wait time for its patients.

Since taking office, I have made access to healthcare a policy priority of mine, working with colleagues in the community and at UMC to expand access to quality, affordable healthcare to County residents. El Paso County is already a medically underserved community, with about a third of the population uninsured. That's why it's critical that we expand facilities that offer primary and family health care to the community. These clinics will help reduce the stress put on hospital emergency rooms - which is the most expensive way to access healthcare - and instead bring primary health services closer to neighborhoods.

I thank all those involved and especially our dedicated medical and support staff that is on the front line, providing critical care to the public.

The clinic is located on the corner of Joe Battle and Vista Del Sol at 1521 Joe Battle.



Working to Address Food Insecurity In El Paso County

Recently, my office began working on a research project on the prevalence of food insecurity in El Paso County. After attending a conference last year, I learned that community partners within certain counties in Texas had worked together to create a master plan to eradicate hunger. During a presentation, I was amazed to see how groups worked together to bring ideas to life. Results of some of these initiatives led to new hospital food insecurity screenings and as a greater awareness in the community of what food insecurity is.

Through this presentation, I also learned that, unfortunately, thousands of families live in food insecure home across the entire nation—meaning that many families are unsure whether they will be able to pay for the costs of their next meal. In our research, we then discovered the rates of food insecurity in our own County, and learned that in El Paso County, about 13% of the population is food insecure. However, the rate for children is much higher, with about 29% of children living in food insecure homes. This is an alarming statistic, one that we hope to change with the help of several community partners.

After completing initial research of the issue, I began meeting with the key stakeholders in the region, such as Victor Nevarez, the CEO of El Pasoans Fighting Hunger, David Austin, the Executive Director of the Kelly Memorial Food Pantry, and Kathy Coronado, the Fresh Start Program Manager at Kelly Memorial. In these meetings, we gained a greater awareness of the food bank process, as well as the challenges and goals of each of these organizations.

We also learned that the problem has been identified by several other organizations—leading to the creation of a Food Policy Council, composed of the Paso del Norte Institute for Healthy Living and La Semilla Food Center, to name a few. It is my hope to continue learning more from the experts in the subject and to continue a discussion that will work towards creating a master plan for our own County. By working as a team, I hope our community may be able to help circumvent food insecurity and connect families to resources such as food banks or food stamp benefits.

Precinct 2 Resolutions

Black History Month

On February 6, 2017, the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court recognized the month of February as Black History Month. After enduring slavery, racism, and discrimination, as well as the challenges and obstacles related to the fight for equal rights, millions of African Americans rose above adversity and contributed a wide-range of achievements to American history in the military, academia, science, politics and the arts. We were glad to celebrate these contributions and also proclaimed that these outstanding achievements should be celebrated not only during one designated month of the year—but also year-round.

Barrio Duranguito

After watching the El Paso City Council reverse its decision multiple times on where to place the multipurpose cultural and performing arts center, including in Barrio Duranguito, I wanted to make my own stance on the issue clear, and challenge the entire Commissioners Court to do the same. On February 13, 2017, I proposed a resolution to oppose the selection of Barrio Duranguito as the site for the multipurpose cultural and performing arts center proposed by the City of El Paso.

Unfortunately, there was a motion to delete the resolution from the agenda—and the Court then voted to remove the item. Therefore, the resolution was not discussed or voted on, and Commissioners Court did not take a position on the issue.

However, I have been an active voice in the discussions regarding the proposed arena site. Although I do not oppose an arena in our downtown, I do oppose the arena in Barrio Duranguito. Since the site was announced, I have written letters to members of Council and voiced my concerns in public comment several times at the City Council meetings. I have made my personal stance on the issue very clear and will continue to fight against Barrio Duranguito as the site of the arena. Barrio Duranguito is home to a close-knit neighborhood that shares and practices values of dignity and respect for their neighbors and holds a strong sense of community, and it would be a shame to displace its residents. Additionally, Barrio Duranguito is a neighborhood rich with history and the buildings in the area deserve to be preserved.

Cesar Chavez Day

On March 27th, 2017 the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court recognized March 31, 2017 as César Chávez Day. Chávez suffered firsthand the inhumane working conditions and poor wages that our nation's farm workers and families endure to this day, and he committed his life to leading a non-violent uprising and a movement for safe and fair working conditions, decent housing, education, and the outlawing of child labor and harmful pesticides. For these reasons, we were proud to celebrate his life and his legacy.

Transgender Visibility Day

In addition to the resolution honoring Cesar Chavez, Commissioners Court also passed a resolution to recognize March 31, 2017 as Transgender Visibility Day and commend transgender Texans for their bravery, resilience, and contributions to El Paso County and the State of Texas. Too often, transgender Texans experience higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, violence, poverty, and health problems than the average citizen of the Lone Star State. However, El Paso County will continue to promote and advocate for safe spaces within our facilities that welcome all transgender residents seeking help and services.

RESOLUTION

THE STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF EL PASO

} *Know All Men By These Presents:*

WHEREAS, Barrio Durango, also known as Barrio Duranguito, is located within the Union Plaza District of Downtown El Paso and was first settled in the late 1820s, part of the Juan Ponce de Leon Rancho and later developed along the platting by Anson Mills; and,

WHEREAS, Barrio Duranguito and the Union Plaza District were the center of many of El Paso's early ethnic communities, including Mexican, African American, and Chinese residents; and,

WHEREAS, Barrio Duranguito and its buildings and structures are inextricably linked to the Mexican Revolution as a staging area to plot tactics during the war and includes a stash house used by Pancho Villa to hide his valuables; and

WHEREAS, a 1998 survey of the Union Plaza District titled, "The Union Plaza Downtown El Paso Development Archaeological Project: Overview, Inventory and Recommendations," conducted for the Sun Metro Transit Authority and the City of El Paso, concluded that numerous historic structures and landmarks exist within the Union Plaza District and recommended nominations for a National Register for Historic Places district as well as 20 NRHP designations for individual buildings; and

WHEREAS, the 1998 survey noted the risk of destruction these historic gems face from potential redevelopment construction; and

WHEREAS, The Mansion House, built in 1904 and located at 306 W. Overland Avenue in Barrio Duranguito, was recommended for recognition and placement on the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, The Chinese laundry building, located at 212 W. Overland Avenue, is one of the last vestiges of Chinese immigrants' history and is currently under review by the Texas Historical Commission to be designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark; and

WHEREAS, today, Barrio Duranguito is home to a close-knit neighborhood that shares and practices values of dignity and respect for their neighbors and holds a strong sense of community; and

WHEREAS, it remains clear that Barrio Duranguito and the Union Plaza District, along with the people, community, buildings, structures, and sites within the neighborhood, are indeed significant to the social, political, economic, and historical makeup of El Paso County and warrant immediate attention before they are forever lost; and

WHEREAS, planning and increasing opportunities for heritage tourism and historic preservation as a means to leverage greater economic development efforts are key components of the El Paso County Strategic Plan and are among the County's values; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court, that the County of El Paso opposes the selection of Barrio Duranguito for the site of a multipurpose cultural and performing arts center proposed by the City of El Paso.

SIGNED, this 13th day of February 2017

Commissioner Carlos Leon, Pct. 1

Commissioner David Stout, Pct. 2

Commissioner Vincent M. Perez, Pct. 3

Commissioner Andrew R. Haggerty, Pct. 4

Veronica Escobar
County Judge



Gallery



Commissioner Stout at the new Immunize El Paso clinic opening



Commissioner Stout visiting seniors in El Paso County



Commissioner Stout with Consul Marcos Bucio and leaders in Juarez's tourism and hospitality industries



Commissioner Stout speaking to Bowie High School Boys Club



Commissioner Stout reading to children for Dr. Seuss' Birthday (Read Across America Day)



Commissioner Stout at the UMC Neighborhood Clinic (East) ribbon cutting ceremony

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epcounty.com

Questions?

(915) 546 2111

commissioner2@epcounty.com