

# *Precinct 2 Newsletter*

EL PASO COUNTY COMMISSIONER DAVID C. STOUT'S PRECINCT UPDATE

Dear Friend:

We are well into 2021, and all indications are that we are making progress toward ending the Covid-19 pandemic that has defined the past year. As a community, we have been able to ensure delivery of vaccinations as well or better than anywhere else in the state. That is great to see.

However, we are beginning to do better ensuring vaccines reach everyone in the community, especially those who may have greater need because of a prevalence of risk factors. To that end, my office arranged targeted vaccination events, which you can read more about in this newsletter.

Vaccinations are one facet in our community response. Others include support for small business, food distribution, people who are homeless, immigrants, and housing assistance. It has been an all-out response at all levels of government, including the federal government, which has provided multiple assistance packages to help the economy from crashing while supporting vaccinations and a range of much-needed personnel and services.

In fact, the County will receive \$163 million from the American Rescue Act (of which half has been received), the most recent of three legislative actions taken by Congress. These funds must primarily help people most affected by Covid, and to fill in existing equity gaps in such areas as housing, health care, and access to technology and employment that were further exposed by the pandemic.

While Covid response continues to be our focus, the County has a broad range of programs, services, and activities. The newsletter touches on some of those, including:

- Formation of a redistricting committee that will draw Justice of the Peace and County Commissioner districts, keeping County Commissioners out of the process as much as legally possible;
- Ascarate Park updates;
- Historic District and Segundo Barrio Historic District updates; and
- The TXDOT proposal to widen I-10 and add frontage roads around and through Downtown.

# COVID-19 Update

From the pandemic's first wave, the County has been working hard to help El Pasoans weather the storm. With its share of CARES Act funds, and Treasury funds, we provided \$4 million for small cities in the County, \$4 million for rental assistance, \$4 million for small business PPE and sanitization, almost \$1 million to the El Pasoans Fighting Hunger food bank, almost \$2 million in direct cash assistance, \$1.6 million in small business support, \$1 million to address people experiencing homelessness, and \$500,000 for broadband for public school students.

On many of these programs, such as rental and small business assistance, and support for people experiencing homelessness, the County has partnered with the City and local non-profits. Just to give one example, the County partnered with the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, which just reported that it used \$290,000 to provide 95 grants and save 304 jobs through the Work Safe – Work Smart program, and \$1,615,000 to provide 216 grants and save 798 jobs.

Through the El Paso Sports Commission, we established the County Coliseum drive-thru vaccination hub, with

University Medical Center (UMC) providing vaccinations.

Our work will continue over the next year and beyond. A new federal aid package, the American Rescue Plan, will allow the County to continue its support for community recovery, while also building a platform for future resiliency.

The American Rescue Plan provides \$65.1 Billion to counties across the country with \$162.7 million going to El Paso County.

Allowable uses for recovery funds include:

- Respond to or mitigate the public health emergency with respect to the COVID-19 emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality. These examples are intended to clarify congressional intent that these activities are eligible. However, state and local activities are NOT limited only to these activities.
- Provide government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue (i.e. online, property or income tax) due to the public health emergency.

- Make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.
- Respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers of the county that are performing such essential work, or by providing grants to eligible employers that have eligible workers who perform essential work.
- "Premium pay" means an additional amount up to \$13 per hour that is paid to an eligible worker for work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The law imposes a cap of \$25,000 for any single eligible worker.

On June 3rd, 2021 Commissioners Court ultimately approved the preliminary budget for the ARPA which established that we will spend these funds on revenue loss, jail medical costs, county public health response, broadband infrastructure, water/wastewater, county operations, administrative costs, economic recovery, and contingency/reserves.

# Vaccination Efforts

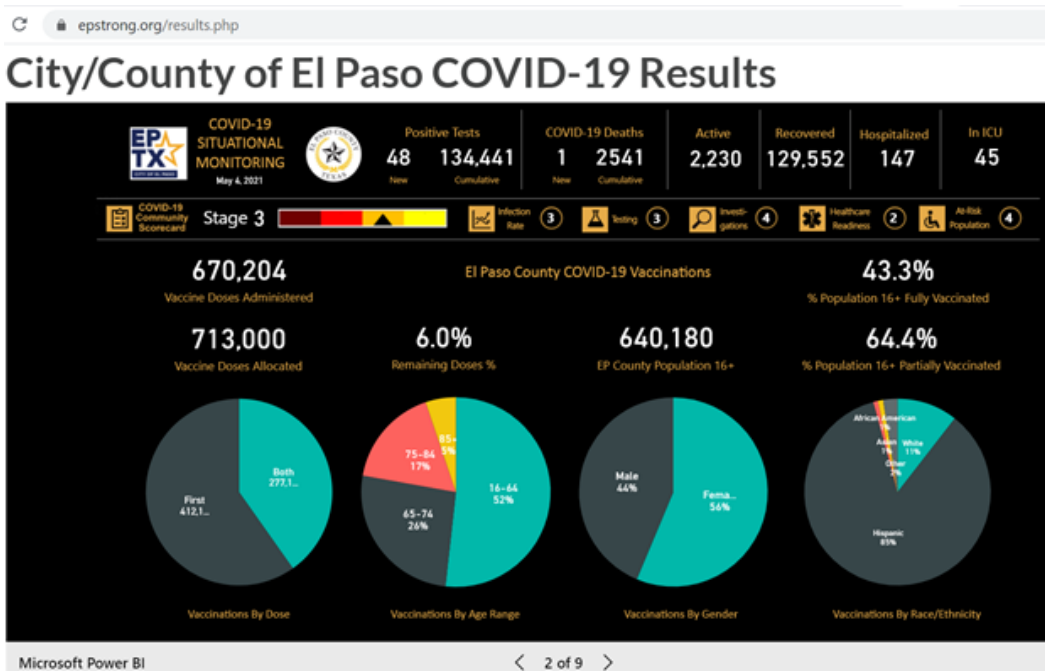
The finish is in sight for most people in the U.S. as we race to vaccinate enough people against COVID-19 to keep the virus from spreading uncontrollably. However, we face the reality that our community is binational, and Juarez lacks widespread vaccine availability. In El Paso, we are shifting to a new phase, de-emphasizing the mass vaccine hubs, which reached people by the hundreds and thousands, and developing more community-based events, in order to reach people by the ones and tens.

As of March 29, all individuals in Texas age 12 and above are eligible to receive the vaccine. In El Paso, 61.8 percent of those age 12 and up had been fully vaccinated, while 74.2 percent have been partially vaccinated. By far, the largest number of people vaccinated are on the West and Northwest, and on the East Side north of I-10.

Commissioner Stout repeatedly has advocated for fairness, transparency, and equity in the vaccination process. Initially the City and County were not tracking vaccination rates in the same detail that they were COVID-19 cases – by zip code, and by age, gender, race and ethnicity. It wasn't until late February/early March that Public Health began publishing that specific information that Commissioner Stout had asked be provided to the community.

His argument then, and his argument now, is that the data should allow vaccine administrators the ability to target the areas that are in most need. Just as the community saw that the outlying areas of the county, the inner city, and multigenerational households were most at risk of suffering from COVID-19, they should be prioritized in the vaccination process. COVID-19 vaccine data can be found at: <https://www.epstrong.org/results.php> after which one can click the right arrow below the dashboard image.

Commissioner Stout continues to advocate for fairness and equity as El Pasoans continue to be vaccinated. He has supported the efforts of University Medical Center (UMC) in their use of a Mobile Medical Unit to reach underserved populations, as well as those efforts undertaken by the County Judge's office and the Emergency Service Districts. In coordination with UMC, the mobile medical unit has visited underserved areas in Precinct 2 and will continue to do so; this includes the Delta/Washington neighborhood, Segundo Barrio, San Juan, and Chamizal. For more information about these vaccination clinics through UMC and the Mobile Medical Unit be sure to follow us on Facebook (@CommissionerDavidStout) or Twitter (@CommStout). If you can identify a community need, please also let us know by contacting us at 915.546.2111 or email at Commissioner2@epcounty.com.



# *Redistricting Advisory Commission*

Redistricting is one of the most critical functions of representative government, taking place every 10 years following the U.S. Census, which provides the data needed for redistricting to local and state jurisdictions. In 2019, Commissioner Stout's office was approached by the League of Women Voters (LWV) with an idea to create a more fair and independent redistricting process for 2020-2021.

The Commissioners Court of the County of El Paso is specifically responsible for the drawing of Commissioners Precincts, Justice of the Peace/Constable Precincts, and Voting Precincts. From the onset Commissioner Stout agreed that voters should have the ability to choose who they represent, not the other way around.

History and data show us that time and time again elected officials have gerrymandered various districts to benefit a particular party or person.

Taking action on the advocacy of the LWV, Commissioner Stout's office got to work on a Redistricting Proposal to present to the Commissioners Court to implement before redistricting occurs at the local level in 2021. The goal is to ensure the maps Commissioners Court are responsible for - Commissioner and Justice of the Peace precincts - are prepared in the most transparent and least political way possible.

After review of best practices and models around the country, with an emphasis on City of Austin's Redistricting Commission, Commissioner Stout's office produced a proposal that was presented to Commissioners Court in February. While much of the proposal tracked the City of Austin and other models, there was one significant difference - under state law, Texas cities can create a redistricting commission with final authority over maps, while

Counties are not allowed to do so. Given that limitation, Commissioner Stout's office proposal was to give an advisory commission maximum deference, although Commissioners still must vote on the final maps.

In March, Commissioners Court approved the basic framework for the Redistricting Advisory Commission, and at the beginning of May, began taking applications. If you would like to be involved with the process through meetings and such you may call the office at 915.546.2111 or email at [Commissioner2@epcountyy.com](mailto:Commissioner2@epcountyy.com).



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# *Downtown and Segundo Barrio Historic Districts*

The creation of the Downtown and Segundo Barrio Historic Districts has been a labor of love for Commissioner Stout. At the heart of Precinct 2 lies an area rich in history and deserving of preservation and protection. Commissioner Stout has led the County's work in this area, to support the people who live in those communities, property owners who seek long-term value, and for long-term economic development.

Nationally designated Historic Districts come with no property rights restrictions, but they do provide financing tools that give property owners incentives to renovate their properties. Certain restrictions on the property do apply if, and only if, property owners decide to use those financing tools, typically tax credits.

The application for the Downtown Historic District has been approved by the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and sent to the National Park Service (NPS) for evaluation. As the executive director of the THC wrote in his letter sending the application to the NPS, "this is an extraordinarily important historic district."

However, there have been some hiccups along the way, as a number of property owners have objected. For the most part, this is the result of

a Downtown law firm that has misrepresented the effect of the district on property owners, and the intent of the County.

First, being in a federal historic district ALLOWS private property owners to access financing tools for building renovations, but they don't have to if they don't want to. There are no new regulations just because they are in the district, only opportunity.

Second, the law firm brought up a new issue recently, asserting that the purpose of the proposed Downtown Historic District is to undermine the sports arena proposed in the neighborhood of Duranguito, which is within the consultant recommended boundaries of the proposed historic district.

Again, this is simply not so. Commissioner Stout promoted this project at the County well before the arena location was announced – more than half a year before, in fact.

Heritage tourism brings visitors who spend more time, spend more money, and have great appreciation for our history and culture than any other type of tourism.

That stated, there is a reality that we must face. The sports arena, underfunded to begin

with, now is estimated to cost twice the original amount approved by voters for a multi-purpose cultural arts and performing center, less than \$200 million. The former City Administration was planning to supplement the amount with debt issued by City Council, without voter approval. The current Mayor campaigned on restoring the Civic Center, which already is a multi-purpose center.

Commissioner Stout believes it would be foolish to throw away a potential financing tool that could end up having value for property owners in the neighborhood of Duranguito, and to the greater community, especially if the sports arena is not built there.

One other item of note. This law firm has not said who its clients are; in fact, it has claimed it has no clients on this issue, and is taking its actions for free. However, this law firm also represents large Downtown property owners on other issues.

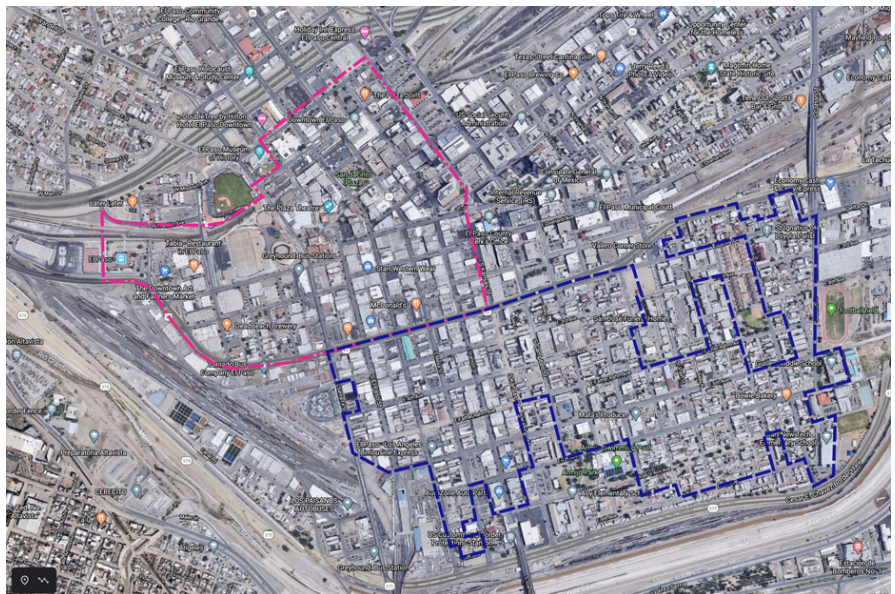
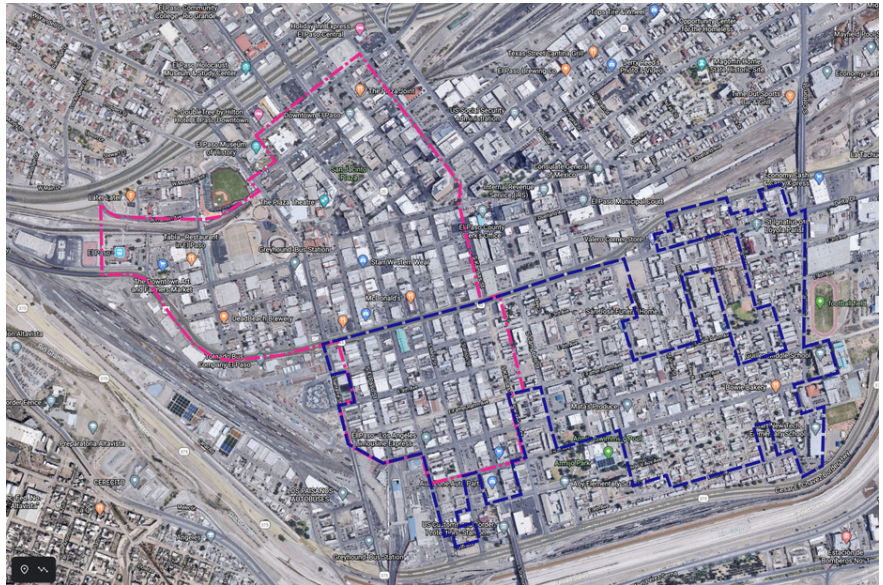
The Downtown Historic District is the first of two applications the County has been working on. Hopefully, the Segundo Barrio Historic District will not go through a similar process, with objections based on misinformation. It is, in many ways, the heart of El Paso, and is described in the application cont. pg 6.

## *Historic District cont.*

draft narrative this way:

*“South of downtown El Paso, the Rio Grande makes a switchback curve—flowing southeast, then northeast, then southeast again. The Segundo Barrio Historic District rests within the southernmost pocket of this curve. The Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez surrounds the district to the west, south, and east, while the bustling commercial El Paso Downtown Historic District borders Segundo Barrio on the north. Segundo Barrio’s significance arises from this position at the intersection of Mexico and the U.S. – embodied by the district’s ethnic history, social history, and architecture.”*

Commissioner Stout believes the designation of both of these districts will bring them the recognition they deserve, and set the stage for investments that enhance economic opportunity, residential quality of life, and community pride.



UPDATE 06/10/2021:

As of June 3, 2021 the National Parks Service listed the proposed Downtown Historic District as "owner objection determined eligible" ultimately meaning that the district nomination as received by the park service but was not listed on the national register leaving it in a state of limbo.

Commissioner Stout continues to believe in the value of the district and is disheartened that property owners' concerns and objections were influenced by misinformation that ultimately lead to this result.

## ***Delta Haven Update***

People experiencing homelessness are at particular risk in many ways. With respect to COVID-19, we needed to address high density group settings such as shelters, where the virus could spread quickly.

The City, County, and advocates created the Homelessness Task Force to protect not only those experiencing homelessness and people who work with them, but by extension, the rest of the community.

One part of this overall strategy was to set up the Welcome Haven at the Hilos de Plata Senior Center and the Acosta Recreation Center, which were closed due to the pandemic, to serve as a shelter and service center. Through this effort, we avoided large-scale outbreaks among those experiencing homelessness, including during the trying months of October and November when Covid surged throughout the community and hospitals were at capacity.

The Task Force, established in April 2020, met weekly until it officially disbanded in February, with its members working full time on case management and transitioning out of Hilos de Plata and the Acosta center. The County, which serves justice-involved individuals – for example, someone

recently released from jail with no place to stay - has committed up to \$850,000 to support the City's activities at the Inspira Hotel,

which serves as temporary housing for some people experiencing homelessness.

Throughout the time the Welcome Haven was utilized Commissioner Stout met with members of the community at least nine times to hear their concerns, and he took action, focusing on improving meal distribution, implementing off-duty sheriff's deputy patrols, and assisting in communication with the City of El Paso. Commissioner Stout is incredibly grateful to the community for their patience and support.



## ***FASTER Program Update***

The FASTER Program for small business support, approved earlier this year, makes available almost \$10 million in grants and loans to be distributed through the Great El Paso and Hispanic chambers, the El Paso Community Foundation, and Liftfund and Peoplefund. It also has provided \$1 million in technical assistance through Workforce Solutions Borderplex.

More than \$2 million in grants have been distributed so far, and more than 250 loan applications have been accepted. The bulk of the overall funding - \$6 million - is aimed for businesses outside the City limits and within the County. This is because similar City programs only served those within the City limits.



# *Downtown 10 Freeway Project*

On March 8, El Paso Commissioners' Court unanimously approved submitting a public comment to TXDOT requesting that the agency continue studying two alternatives they are preparing to abandon for the project known as Downtown 10.

Commissioner Stout put this on the agenda because, as currently proposed, the Downtown 10 highway project will be one of the largest ever in El Paso. Its features not changed in the last two years: It widens the highway, and adds freeway frontage roads.

The voted took place during a public comment period, after which TXDOT will formally narrow down its scope of study to three preferred "alternatives," which are variations of the freeway widening and frontage roads.

While it has been telling the public for two years that it had not yet made up its mind to widen the highway and add frontage roads in and around Downtown, it is on the cusp of now telling the public it has made up its mind.

This comes after TXDOT revealed for the first time that since its last public event, last year, that TXDOT has indeed studied several alternatives to that concept. That includes

Alternative B, reconstructing the highway as is, and a truly transformational option, Alternative F, digging a tunnel all the way from Piedras to just west of Downtown.

However, even as the public heard about those for the first time, especially the tunnel concept, TXDOT already is proposing to dismiss them. The public had only three weeks to understand these new concepts, and study those and the original concept, which has been split into three variations, and respond. Further, neither of those new concepts were developed enough to even have maps or drawings to respond to!

All this without seeing most of TXDOT's underlying work, the in-the-weeds details of how it arrived at its conclusions. That does not seem fair.

Commissioner Stout has raised questions about TXDOT's desire to widen the highway and add frontage roads from the very beginning.

In Precinct 2, I-10 destroyed neighborhoods by taking hundreds of homes, and diminished the values of homes that were left in proximity. It supported development east and west, but decimated the very type of quality-of-life that we are still trying to recreate now in

Downtown and Central, along great local streets like Piedras and Copia, both above the freeway where they cross Montana and below where they cross Alameda.

Now, TXDOT proposes not to repair that damage, but enlarge it, by potentially taking even more property, as all the TXDOT preferred options do to some extent. Several options create new elevated road structures that further impose the highway's noise and pollution and vibration on adjacent neighborhoods.

And for what? The stated reasons are to plan for future traffic. But their projections use inaccurate population estimates. For another thing, if you listen to traffic reports, frankly, what shows up regularly is not Downtown or the Trench that goes through Downtown - it's on the West Side, the East Side, on either side of the Spaghetti Bowl, at Montana and Loop 375 - all places that are growing.

Should neighborhoods around Downtown and Downtown itself begin to attract more population, as Commissioner Stout strongly advocates, we have an existing grid system to serve local traffic.

cont. Page 9



## *Downtown cont.*

I-10 is more than 50 years old, and as our region's population has more than tripled in that time, Downtown had never been a choke point, the way the Spaghetti Bowl, or I-10 at Yarbrough or Lee Trevino or Zaragoza are on the East Side, or Sunland Park and Mesa and Redd on the West Side. Commissioner Stout rejects the idea that traffic is heading to a standstill Downtown. The only area of traffic that may grow significantly is trucks.

In addition to producing far more pollution than vehicles, and being involved in accidents that lead to injury or death at a much higher rate than passenger vehicles, they produce close to 10,000 times the wear and tear on our roadways.

One of the reasons for this project, in fact, the only compelling reason, is that we do not want the highway to fail, which it is in danger of doing in the Trench, which was resurfaced about 25 years ago.

Why is simply reconstructing that portion, which would cost far less, take far less time than the four years projected for their preferred alternatives, and give our community the ability to apply state funding to other priorities in places that ARE quickly growing, being taken off the table?

But if we are looking for something truly transformational, the truly alternative option TXDOT is seeking to dismiss is tunneling the highway from around the Five Points area east of Downtown to west of Downtown. That ranks high on their choices but for cost – they say \$2 billion, although we haven't see how they arrived at that.

But if Austin can get \$7.5 billion for a similar project in its urban core, why should we settle for a project that does not enhance our core neighborhoods? Why would we not request, why would we not demand, that TXDOT do the work so that our community can see and evaluate true options?

Ultimately, Commissioner Stout would like to move toward a vision of the community where highways do not dominate certain neighborhoods. The long-term potential for removing I-10 west of the Spaghetti Bowl should be explored, for example.

In the short term, the community should expect nothing less than better, not worse, to result from work on roads that are next to neighborhoods.



# Ascarate Park

As the situation with the pandemic improves and vaccination rates continue to increase, County Parks and Recreation has worked closely with the City/County Public Health Authority to implement safe plans to return to somewhat normal operations at Ascarate Park and at other county parks. County Parks are currently operating Summer Hours which mean parks are open 5:30 am to 11:00 pm. The Golf Course continues to operate with adapted changes to keep the community safe; this includes longer intervals between teetimes, no dining inside the club house, and increased sanitization.

As has been reported in the past, the Parks Master Plan is under way. This comprehensive plan for Ascarate and the other county parks is important for the County to prioritize the most pressing issues to ensure our parks are of the highest caliber.

Commissioner Stout and his staff have continued to engage with County staff and the consultants on this topic to maximize engagement and to ensure the issues expressed by the community are taken into account.

Commissioner Stout has also remained engaged with Moms on Board (MOB) and Quantum Engineering Consultants as both collaborate with our County team to improve Ascarate Park. MOB has been working with the County for several years to create an All Abilities Park - accessible to ALL children, including those

who may have a disability - at Ascarate Park. MOB is selling bricks, to be placed in the park, as a fundraiser (information found to the left).

Commissioner Stout is excited that this project is nearing groundbreaking status and thanks MOB for all of their hard work and dedication to seeing it to fruition.

Regarding Quantum Engineering, they are assisting with a "Safe Routes to Parks" grant that will help connect the immediate community east of Ascarate to the park through a canal route that has been fenced and blocked for years. They will connect the existing Playa Drain Trail to Ben Swain Drive and to Ascarate Park. This access will be a game-changer for the community as research shows that by simply giving people access to parks and trails ensures that they are more likely to live a healthier lifestyle.

Finally, in March, Commissioners Court approved a new lease and purchase agreement for golf carts (pictured below) for the golf course! These new carts are a welcome addition to the amenities Ascarate Golf Course has to offer. In just a few short years the park and the golf course have improved dramatically thanks to the amazing team in Parks and Recreation and their fearless leader, Ms. Veronica Myers.

PAVING AND DONATION RECOGNITION



## PAVE THE WAY TO PLAY

### WE AREN'T

- playing around -

MOB needs your help to build an All Abilities Playground at Ascarate Park!

**Brick & Paver Fundraiser**

Brick: \$250  
(3 lines, 20 characters/line)  
Brick with clip art: \$275  
(3 lines 15 characters/line)

Paver: \$500  
(6 lines 20 characters/line)  
Paver with clip art: \$525  
(4 lines 20 characters/line)

Let's build a playground together!  
Build your Team • Compete in the brick/paver fundraiser • Win prizes!

Team Tiers

- Tier 1 Goal: \$5,000  
20 bricks or 10 pavers
- Tier 2 Goal: \$1,250  
5 bricks or 3 pavers

WWW.MOBEP.ORG • MOMSONBOARDUNITE@GMAIL.COM

## **6345 Alameda**

The County has formally taken possession of 6345 Alameda, which historically had been a theatre but for several decades was an adult entertainment venue called The Naked Harem. The club was closed because of illegal and illicit activities, such as prostitution and exploitation.

In 2014 the District Attorney obtained a Final Judgment of forfeiture against the property. Under the forfeiture, forfeited property is administered by the District Attorney. The DA has various rights and responsibilities including being able to dispose of the property for certain purposes laid out under Chapter 59, of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

These conditions include the provision of 1) mental health, drug, or rehabilitation services or 2) services for victims or witnesses of criminal offenses or instances of abuse or 3) the provision of training or education related to the first two. The property was donated officially in November of 2020 to the County with restriction that it would be used consistent with those restrictions.

County staff has been working hard just to get to that point, but while it's been a long road to get to this point, it really is just the beginning. Sambrano residents, and other nearby neighborhoods, are glad that the previous business no longer is operating.

Now, Commissioner Stout wants to make sure that what we do with the property fits both the legal purpose, and benefits and enhances the neighborhood. Can we offer classes that can benefit the community generally as well as clients specifically, for example. I am a proponent of supporting local food systems, and perhaps a community garden could fit, offering a range of life skills development while producing healthy, fresh food that can be shared with the neighborhoods.

However, regardless of how good certain ideas might sound, they must adhere to Chapter 59, as mentioned above, and also must be embraced by neighborhood residents, with whom we must work to turn this once blight into a boon. County staff has said they will not push forward a project that does not have community support, and Commissioner Stout will not support a plan that hasn't been created in partnership with neighborhood residents.

With that, Commissioner Stout is very excited about the potential for this property to serve the community at large, and enhance neighborhood quality of life.



### ***Staff Introduction***

Luis "Sito" Negrón has been a reporter, editor, communicator, and policy aide to a state Senator.

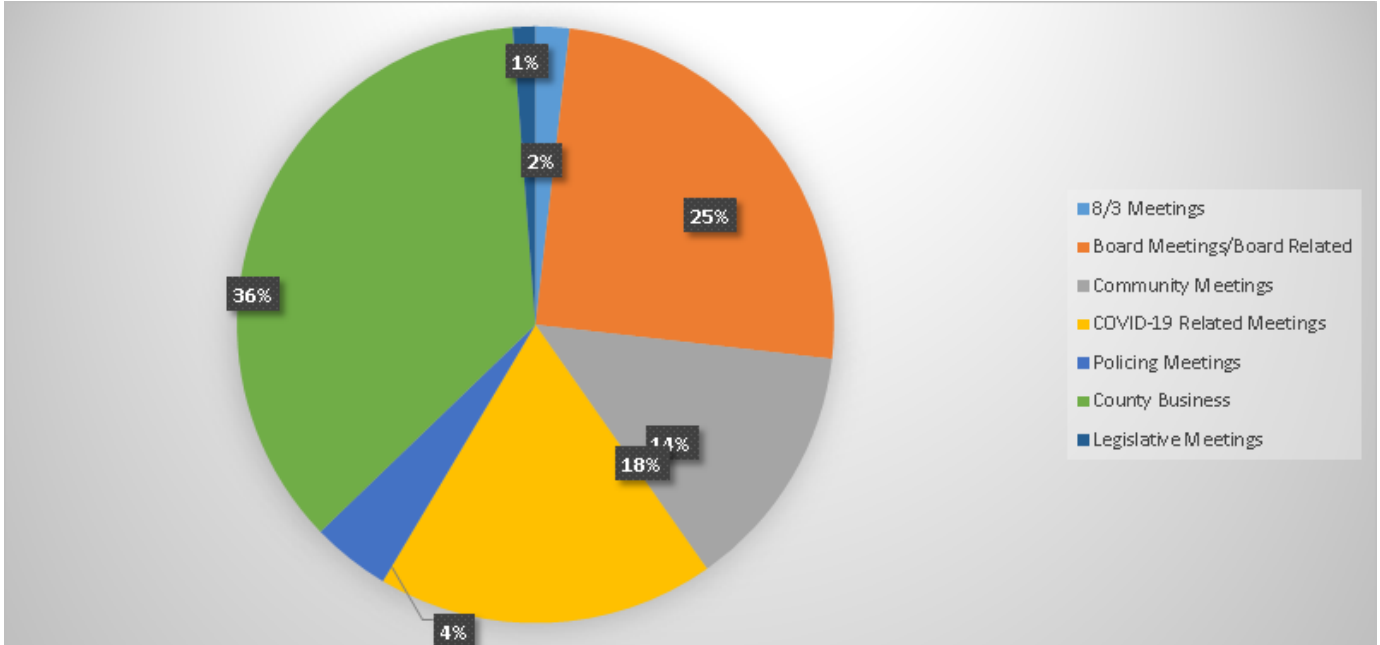
He started his career at the El Paso Times as a news assistant, where he worked as an award-winning reporter and Assistant City Editor for almost 10 years. Subsequently, he worked in both corporate and independent media environments for more than 10 years, gaining expertise in print and electronic media.

Negrón joined the staff of state Sen. José Rodríguez in 2012 as Communications Director, and worked as part of the Senator's legislative team for four sessions of the Texas Legislature. Most recently, he served as District Director for Sen. Rodríguez.

Negrón is active in local issues, advocating for transparent government, respect for cultural and historic community assets, and neighborhood quality-of-life. He is president of the Sunset Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association, and a graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso.

# *Precinct 2 by the Numbers*

## Office Meetings in Q1: Total 107



\*between January 1, 2021 and March 31, 2020

### Office Statistics

- 16 Virtual Commissioners Court meetings since January 1, 2021
- 6 resolutions sponsored
- 3 op-eds published

## *Precinct 2 Resolutions*

Resolution recognizing National Mentoring and Human Trafficking Awareness Month

Resolution recognizing Teen Dating Violence Prevention Month

Resolution recognizing Castner Range

Resolution recognizing Principles in Support of Refugee Resettlement

Resolution recognizing Texas' need to reform the Energy Grid and the environment

Resolution recognizing Social Worker Month in El Paso County, Texas

# *Commissioner Stout in the News*

<https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2021/05/25/el-paso-county-fireworks-ban-july-4-holiday/7430368002/>

<https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/local/el-paso/2021/04/27/downtown-el-paso-national-register-historic-district-plan-dealt-blow/7383850002/>

<https://www.ktsm.com/local/el-paso-county-commissioners-considering-suit-against-state-over-voting-restrictions/>

<https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2021/05/10/volunteers-needed-el-paso-county-redistricting-advisory-committee/5026143001/>

<https://elpasoheraldpost.com/texas-historical-commission-board-of-review-votes-unanimously-for-segundo-barrio-national-register-historic-district/>

<https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/local/el-paso/2021/04/20/derek-chauvin-verdict-george-floyd-el-paso-black-leaders-react/7301919002/>

<https://www.ktsm.com/local/el-paso-news/morgues-still-dealing-with-backlog-of-bodies-better-situation-than-5-months-ago/>

<https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2021/03/24/citizen-commission-approved-suggest-maps-redistricting-el-paso/6982476002/>

<https://www.ktsm.com/local/el-paso-news/el-paso-county-commissioners-approves-92-million-renewed-contract-with-u-s-marshals-service/>

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**Questions?**

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