

7-19-17 County Judge's Article

2018 BUDGET PLANNING BEGINS

The commissioners and I have concluded meeting with each of the elected officials and department heads this past week to discuss their 2018 budget requests for their department, and now the five of us will now meet together in workshop sessions to prepare the final draft of next year's county budget and proposed tax rate. It will be ready for public viewing on the web site and at the county clerk's office on August 4.

Public hearings will be held in the county court room in the court house at 9 AM on August 31 and September 6. I do not make presentations at these two meetings; they are scheduled in order to fulfill legal requirements to receive public comments. Last year a couple of you complained in those meetings that they were held during the day during working hours when it was difficult for working citizens to attend.

So let me remind all of you that these are not the only meetings that I and the commissioners hold in order to discuss the budget with you. Again this year, as has been done every year, we will be coming out into the community in the evenings to make detailed presentations with time to discuss and allow you to make public comments at these meetings as well. These sessions will begin at 6:30 PM as follows:

In Cameron, August 21, at the Court House

In Thorndale, August 22 at the Chamber of Commerce Conference Room

In Buckholts, August 23 at the Community Center

In Rockdale, August 24 at the One Stop Center

In Milano, August 29 at the Fire Station

I've also heard complaints that it doesn't make any difference if you make suggestions or disagree with something in the budget. Well, I disagree. Major changes in direction have occurred as a result of public input. Sometimes the change took place after the budget was set for the next year, but your suggestion have caused us to make modifications during the next year or in planning the following year's budget. We do take your input seriously just as we take the input from the other elected county officials and department heads seriously.

Not everyone gets their way, but we do listen to all input and we often make changes and modifications as a result.

There are a couple of things that are making this year's budget preparations somewhat different than past years. One is that 2018 may be the last year that the county's financial situation will be stable before we again enter into another period of extreme uncertainty with the likely prospect of further significant reductions in ad valorem tax revenues in the years ahead.

This will mean that Commissioner's Court will again be faced with the likelihood of significant cost cutting combined with tax rate increases in planning the 2019 budget and the years following that.

The other significant factor is that 2018 is an election year and I will not be seeking reelection. So the county judge candidates running to replace me along with the Precinct 2 and 4 commissioner candidates running for election or reelection will be discussing their positions regarding the 2019 budget and county tax rate. They will probably also have something to say about how good (or more likely how bad) a job we did with the 2018 budget. Of course none of this will affect the decisions that will be made regarding the budget this time around...