

**FORT BEND COUNTY
LEGISLATIVE AGENDA
WORKSHOP**

COUNTY JUDGE

LOCAL CONTROL- COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE:

Counties, cities, and local governments are the closest forms of government to the people

- SOLUTION:

- Support Legislation that advances local control to allow locally elected officials to make decisions that are beneficial to the interest of County residents
 - Oppose legislation that preempts or erodes the authority of county government or is detrimental to the County's ability to pursue citizen priorities or respond to local citizen concerns
-

COUNTY'S REVENUE AND BUDGETING – COUNTY JUDGE

- ISSUE:

- Fort Bend County is growing by leaps and bounds
- Our services support our residents and continue the growth

- SOLUTION:

- Adequately fund public school finance system to help schools and provide largest savings to taxpayers
 - Eliminate unfunded mandates on counties for which the cost is then passed down to residents
 - Oppose revenue caps including reduced rollback rates, mandatory tax rate ratification elections
 - Oppose restrictions on the County to issue debt in order to fund public improvements either through General Obligation or Certificates of Obligation bonds or otherwise
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TRANSPORTATION FUNDING – COUNTY JUDGE

- ISSUE:
 - As our population grows, so do our transportation needs.
 - Transportation helps define our residents' quality of life.
 - Less congestion and more mobility allows us to attract more residents and jobs.
 - Our 8 county region is approximately 25% of the State's population.
 - Solution:
 - Support Legislation that:
 - increases state funding for transportation projects
 - creates local option funding choices for transportation projects
 - discontinues the diversion of transportation revenues to non-transportation purposes.
-

COASTAL SPINE– COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE:

Flooding costs the country \$54 billion in economic cost annually (Congressional Budget Office, 2019).

Flooding is also a leading cause for fatalities caused by “hydrometeorological disasters” in Texas, including Galveston & Harris County (Paul, Sharif, & Crawford, 2018)

Abnormal flood levels can jeopardize the industries coastal industries, causing abrupt interruptions to plastic production and fuel as well as the loss of thousands of jobs (Jim Blackburn, 2019)

- SOLUTION:

Support the construction of a coastal spine that protects the Houston-Galveston area from storm surge caused by Hurricanes.

A coastal spine would protect 5 million (FAQ, n.d.).

Successful models have been built and used in places like New Orleans & the Netherlands.

The concept of an “Ike Dike” has been researched.

DRAINAGE DISTRICT TO BECOME FLOOD CONTROL & MITIGATION DISTRICT- COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE:

The Drainage District's statutory mission is limited to the maintenance of drainage channels.

Brazos River, the 11th largest in the US, passes through the Fort Bend County (FBC). Erosion of the river can cause damages to infrastructure of up to \$8 billion & affect 700,000 residents (Project Brazos - Addressing Brazos River, 2019).

FBC experienced significant amounts of flooding in 2016 as a result of rainstorms, and during Hurricane Harvey in 2017. The latter caused 20% of the land in FBC to flood, including 200,000 affected residents and 3 fatalities (FORT BEND COUNTY HURRICANE HARVEY IMPACTS).

- SOLUTION

Expand the responsibilities of the Drainage District to include flood mitigation and flood control

The new mission would include designing solutions to prevent flooding, execution, and maintenance.

ADD A HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROCUREMENT CLAUSE TO THE STATE OF TEXAS CONTRACTS- COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE:

Lack of awareness about human trafficking laws by State-level contractors

“ Human Trafficking is a crime that involves exploiting a person for labor, services, or commercial sex.” (The United States Department of Justice, n.d.)

“300,000 Texans are being trafficked, including 79,000 youth victims of sex trafficking.” (Office of the Texas Governor, n.d.)

- SOLUTION

Support the State’s inclusion of a clause stating its position against the violation of human trafficking laws in procurement and contracts, and the state’s refusal to support contractors who violate those laws.

Fort Bend County has successfully included this language in all bids, solicitations, purchase orders, and contracts to raise awareness.

HB 810 GOOD SAMARITAN HOT CAR PET RESCUE – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE:

Saving a pet from a hot car leads to facing legal action.

“Temperatures inside a car parked in direct sunlight can reach 130 to 172 degrees when outside temps are between 80 and 100 degrees” (Entrust Energy, 2018).

This issue made significant progress last session.

- SOLUTION

Support previously filed HB 810 by Rep. Israel that protects Good Samaritans against legal action when they break into a vehicle to save an animal from heat.

The bill outlines that any individual who breaks into vehicle should immediately call the police.

GRANT FUNDING FOR ANIMAL CRUELTY LE THROUGHOUT TEXAS – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE:

The Harris County Animal Cruelty Taskforce is the only centralized initiative to regulate calls and investigations in the area against animal cruelty.

The Harris County Animal Cruelty Taskforce is based on individual effort. “law enforcement and animal control and health groups, and businesses devoting their time and energy and donating needed funds to make it happen.” (Harris County Animal Cruelty Taskforce, Harris County Animal Cruelty Taskforce – What It Is and Is Not, n.d.).

The Texas penal code prohibits animal cruelty, and Loco’s Law in Texas labels animal cruelty as a felony, where violators can face a fine or even jail (SPCA of Texas, n.d.).

During the first 10 months of 2020, Fort Bend County received 224 calls reporting animal cruelty (Harris County Animal Cruelty Taskforce, 2020).

- SOLUTION

Support the need for State funding to enhance local initiatives against animal cruelty, including funding for animal cruelty investigators positions and efforts to track animal cruelty throughout Texas.

SB-295/HB-940 BASIC STANDARDS OF SHELTER AND CARE FOR RESTRAINED DOGS – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Lack of clarity in the clauses of the SB-295/HB-940 against dog restraining.

Dogs' restraining is inhumane and can endanger a dog's life.

Restrained dogs are more at risk of malnutrition and suffering during extreme temperatures (The Humane Society of the United States, n.d.)

Restraining increases a dog's aggressiveness, thus creating danger to humans (The Humane Society of the United States, n.d.)

The bill provides owners 24 hours to fix the situation. The time limit can be easily manipulated by owners and is hard to monitor. Officers are left unable to act against violators.

- SOLUTION

Support the modification of the existing laws against dog restraining.

Laws should remove the 24 hours limit, push for adequate shelters with access to water and right temperature, as well as prohibit the use of chains.

Exceptions can apply in cases where the dog is left unattended (e.g. owner camping, fishing, etc.)

SB-361/HB-1097 PROHIBITION OF PET LEASING – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Animal stores adopting the approach of pet leasing. Sellers and pet breeders take advantage of buyers through this financial scheme.

The concept of leasing a pet is unethical.

The financial approach also disadvantages buyers, as they might end up paying more than the pet is worth. The leasing approach may incur additional costs on buyers due to exceptionally high interest rates & Balloon payments.

Pets must be given back at the end of the lease, which gives advantage to sellers to breed and further profit from the animal.

- SOLUTION

Support the SB-361/HB-1097 to ban animal leasing in the state of Texas.

By 2017, several states have prohibited animal leasing, and this bill came close to passing last session by Fort Bend Sen. Joan Huffman

Does not apply to livestock and for companion animals only.

MEDICAID EXPANSION – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Texas has the highest rate of uninsured individuals in the US. In Fort Bend, 23% of residents are uninsured.

During the pandemic, almost 700,000 individuals in Texas lost their insurance coverage (Straus, 2020).

Texas hospitals pay \$5 billion yearly in uncompensated care. In turn, this leads to higher property taxes that paid by Texas residents.

- SOLUTION

Support the expansion of Medicaid in Texas to cover to low-income healthy adults.

Expanding the Medicaid coverage would help 1.5 million individuals in Texas to receive medical care.

Funds for the Medicaid expansion will simply be redirected to other states in refusal as is the case now for Texas.

For the first 3 years, the cost of expansion is covered by the Federal government and a minimum of 90% of cost after that.

Every \$1 spent following the expansion of Medicaid generates \$1.29 state revenue, save \$1.21 for state governments and increase local governments tax collections by 51 cent.

SANE NURSE – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Access to Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) is limited in the US. SANE Nurses are only available in 962 hospitals across the US.

Sexual violence is a state and national crime that affects people of different genders and ages. In 2010, 18.3% of women and 1.4% of men have been raped in the US. (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, n.d.)

Sexual assault victims may suffer from long term physical and psychological challenges. “81% of women and 35% of men report significant short- or long-term impacts such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, n.d.)

Sexual assault incurs the highest crime cost nationally and increases the costs of healthcare for female sufferers.

“Annually, rape costs the U.S. more than any other crime (\$127 billion), followed by assault (\$93 billion), murder (\$71 billion), and drunk driving, including fatalities (\$61 billion)” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, n.d.)

- SOLUTION

Support the presence of SANE nurses in hospital ERs 24/7, especially in urban/suburban areas

SANE nurses “are registered nurses who have completed specialized education and clinical preparation in the medical forensic care of the patient who has experienced sexual assault or abuse.” (International Association of Forensic Nurses, n.d.)

The primary goal of SANE nurses is to provide a holistic support to sexual assault patients. That includes physical, psychological, and emotional.

EQUITABLE ALLOCATION OF COVID-19 VACCINES – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Race, poverty and other factors place specific groups in the community at a higher risk of facing health issues and dealing with economic repercussions of being sick. They also promote bias in accessing health care and treatment.

Covid-19 cases have topped 11 million in the US and 1 million in the state of Texas, with deaths reaching more than 240,000 and 20,000, respectively.

In April of 2020, studies showed that “counties that are majority-black have three times the rate of infections and almost six times the rate of deaths as counties where white residents are in the majority” (Washington Post, 2020).

Black & Latino communities are more likely to face economic hardships due to the pandemic (Getachew, et al., 2020).

Especially at risk are also front-line workers, seniors, individuals with pre-existing conditions and schoolteachers working in person.

- SOLUTION

Support the equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines, through access to monetary and other forms of resources.

Support the administration of the Covid-19 vaccine at no cost to community members, and partner with organizations to ensure reach to various groups and members of the community.

JUVENILE PROBATION; IF AGE IS RAISED: SUPPORT FUNDING FOR PROBATION AND DETENTION CENTERS— COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

In Texas, currently a juvenile is anyone who is at least 10 years old, but is not yet 17 years old. There is ongoing debate around raising the age of maturity to include 17 year olds and raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 19 years old. Texas is one of only three states that has not yet made this change. An increase in the age maturity would increase the burden on County Juvenile Probation & Detention Services

With Texas on the verge of making this significant and historic change, it will be necessary for adjustments to be made to the infrastructure of County Juvenile Probation Departments in order to support the entry of 17 year olds and some 18 year olds in the Juvenile Justice System.

Areas that will be greatly affected by this legislative change include, but are not limited to, significant increases in detained juveniles, caseloads, supervision, education, counseling, programming, operational costs, and building capacity.

- SOLUTION

Support the need for state funding for County Juvenile Probation and Detention Centers to be able to deal with the increased numbers, in case of an age increase.

ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATION – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

The state of Texas issues voter registration cards through a paper-based system utilized by voter registrars.

The reliance on cards for voter registration is costly, time consuming as well as prone to error making.

Online voter registration application is more secure, less time consuming and more efficient.

Online voter registration has already been adopted in 38 states.

Texas voters can register when applying for a driver's license. Using the same procedure for a voter registration system is more secure due to the unique numbers of the drivers' licenses.

Online registration in Texas would help reduce mailing and data entry costs. At the same time, the state will continue to receive reimbursement for voter cards issued electronically.

- SOLUTION

Support the development of a truly online voter registration application in Texas.

Voter registrars would have to receive electronic voter registration applications from DPS, even if individuals choose to fill paper applications, once the data entry is complete.

VOTER REGISTRATION AT THE AGE OF 18 IN SCHOOLS – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Compliance among schools with the Texas high school voter registration law.

Although adopted in 1985, until 2018 only 34% of schools have taken action to implement the law on their campuses (Slattery, 2019)

Citizens of ages between 18 and 29 make up 29% of those eligible to vote in the US (John Carroll University, n.d.)

Elected officials affect decisions related to the youth future's, including education, students loans and the economy of the country.

- SOLUTION

Urge Texas and local private and public schools to implement the Texas high school voter registration law, that requires high schools to offer voter registration to students at least 2 times during the academic year.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: THE USE OF DRONES – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Using drones or small unmanned aircraft systems before, during and after emergencies.

Texas Government Code 423 prohibits the use of drone unless a state of disaster or law enforcement is declared.

Sending machines instead of a person helps protect lives.

Machines are faster and allow for the collection of more data, showing the different stages of a said project.

Using small unmanned aircraft systems in non-emergency situations is allowed by Federal law.

- SOLUTION

- This is ONLY for public application (not commercial)

Support reconciling Texas State Law with Federal Law by adding to the Government code 423.002:

It is lawful to capture an image using an unarmed aircraft in the state:

(22) If the image is captured by state or local government personnel, or a person who is under contract or otherwise acting under the direction or behalf of state or local authorities, for the purpose of performing non-disaster emergency management activities such as inspecting, maintaining, preparing public infrastructure facilities.

DEBRIS MANAGEMENT FUND – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Ability to manage debris during natural disasters

Unavailability of funds can delay the process of debris removal following a natural disasters. A similar scenario was faced by Houston City after Hurricane Harvey (Morris, 2017).

Funds can be reimbursed if a debris removal contractor complies with the regulations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

After Hurricane Harvey, Fort Bend County had to deal with 500,000 cubic yards of debris, requiring more than a month worth of work (Balch, 2017)

Unremoved debris can cause injury to residents as well as respiratory problems as a result of mold spores (Balch, 2017)

- SOLUTION

Support the establishment of a debris management fund to be allocated during natural disasters

PREVENTING PRICE GOUGING ON PPE – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Preventing price gouging on necessities during emergency situations. Price gouging happens when businesses increase the price of necessities due to an increase in demand caused by natural or other forms of disasters.

Texas Business and Commerce Code 17.46 states: “False, misleading, or deceptive acts or practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce are hereby declared unlawful and are subject to action by the consumer protection division:

(27) subject to [Section 17.4625](#) , taking advantage of a disaster declared by the governor under Chapter 418, Government Code, or by the president of the United States by:

(A) selling or leasing fuel, food, medicine, lodging, building materials, construction tools, or another necessity at an exorbitant or excessive price; or (B) demanding an exorbitant or excessive price in connection with the sale or lease of fuel, food, medicine, lodging, building materials, construction tools, or another necessity;

With the increased demand on necessities such as PPE during Covid-19 and the shortage in supply in some situations, price gouging can be a serious problem for consumers (Barnard et al., 2020)

- SOLUTION

Support law enforcement efforts against price gouging on necessities, including personal protection equipment during emergency declarations.

EMERGENCY FUND FOR HOUSING DURING NATURAL DISASTERS– COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Helping residents displaced due to damages caused to their houses by natural disasters

Past natural disasters have left thousands of Texas residents displaced.

In 2017, 23,000 households in Texas had to be left due to flooding caused by Harvey (Amadeo, 2020)

One year after Hurricane Harvey, 8% of individuals affected were still unable to return to their houses (Formby, 2018)

In 2017, the cost of repairing houses damaged by natural disasters reached \$14 billion among homeowners (Hermann, 2018)

Natural disasters often leave those affected in financial distress, and especially affects low-income groups and minorities.

Displacement due to natural disasters can cause trauma and depression among those affected, as well as increase the risk of sexual abuse and rape among women (Ferris, 2008)

- SOLUTION

Urge the establishment of a statewide emergency fund directed at housing affected by natural disasters that strike residential areas.

STATE STOCKPILE OF CRITICAL EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Dependence on the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) for critical emergency equipment negatively affects the state's ability to meet its local demands during emergencies. This has been especially clear during the Covid-19 pandemic.

During Covid-19, states received varying amounts of the emergency equipment, with several getting a much smaller supply than the demand really is (Chen et al., 2020).

E.g.: “only 11.7 million N95 respirator masks have been distributed nationwide—less than 1% of the 3.5 billion masks that the Trump Administration estimated would be necessary in the event of a severe pandemic. Only 7,920 ventilators have been distributed from the stockpile, even though a recent survey of 213 mayors—which did not include New York City, Chicago, or Seattle—identified a total estimated need of 139,000 ventilators.” (Popescu, 2020)

Receiving equipment through the SNS is timely due to procedures of distribution, transportation of items and in some cases lack of local training on the use of some equipment (Gerstein, 2020).

Distribution efforts and sufficiency are hindered by the underfunding of the SNS and slow re-stocking decisions and prolonged reactions to looming emergencies (Gerstein, 2020).

- SOLUTION

Urge the establishment of a state level stockpile of critical emergency equipment, including personal protection equipment (PPE).

APPRAISAL REVIEW REFORM DURING ECONOMIC DISASTERS – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Home tax assessments can be unfair during times of economic distress caused by uncontrollable disasters or events.

The valuation date is January 1, 2020, thus unable to consider the effects of COVID-19.

Section 11.35 of the Texas Tax Code exempts businesses damaged by a disaster from property tax temporarily. Texas General Attorney ruled this does not apply to Covid; “purely economic, non-physical damage to property caused by the COVID-19 disaster is not eligible for the temporary tax exemption” (The Popp Hutcheson Team, n.d.)

Disasters can cause huge changes to businesses and revenue. Covid-19 had spread causing wide-spread closures of business.

- SOLUTION

Research possible fixes to appraisal requirements during economic crises caused by uncontrollable disasters, such as pandemics and natural disasters for example:

e.g. : - temporary exemptions

- Freezing values from previous years
- Alterations to the valuation reflect sudden changes
- Provide for a fair and transparent appraisal process

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES REGULATORY AUTHORITY

- Issue:
 - Local government EMS do not have the ability to regulate private EMS within their jurisdictions.
 - Solution:
 - Provide local governmental EMS units to regulate private EMS services within their jurisdictions
-

BODY CAMS & BODY CAM POLICIES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Equipping Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) with bodycams

The use of bodycams increases the security of officers

The use of bodycams provides more evidence for cases dealt with by LEOs.

Footage from bodycams can be used to deal with community complaints and thus allow governing bodies to face less risk of liability following incidents of arrest or other.

- SOLUTION

Request state funding to equip LEOs with bodycams & establish standardized policies on when to record and how to use recordings obtained through bodycams

INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Redistricting in a state is often influenced by partisanship and can lead to different forms of gerrymandering.

An independent redistricting unit would decrease the effect of partisanship by appointing officials to take responsibility of the redistricting in the state.

Appointed officials lower the chances of decisions affected by personal and political gains (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2010)

Redistricting can also affect minorities and minority voting rights by “cracking”, “stacking” or “packing” minority groups (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2010).

- SOLUTION

Support the development of an Independent Redistricting Commission to create fair, equitable and data-driven districts for all jurisdictions OR at least research this concept

Independent redistricting divisions can be based on limits to the number of partisan members, and can consider geographical, political, population numbers and other factors.

The members of the division would have to be re-appointed following every Census.

Members of the division can be selected after nominations and can be “regular citizens”

Allow voters to select their politicians, not the other way around

TERM LIMITS – COUNTY JUDGE OFFICE

- ISSUE

Limit terms for all elected officials.

Limited terms enhance democratic values in institutions as well as accountability of office holders.

Even the presidency is limited to 2 terms.

Turnover is ensured; new people are given a chance to come into office, thus giving way to fresh ideas and novel approaches.

Limited terms also motivate office holders to fully maximize their time to pursue policy solutions

- SOLUTION

Support the limitation of office terms to a maximum of 4 terms for elected officials.

Increase the years per term to 4 years for any office with less than 4 years

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES #1. CHAPTER 423. USE OF UNMANNED AIRCRAFT

- The Environmental Health Department would like the ability to utilize Unmanned Aircraft Systems to conduct public health nuisance inspections and assessments.
- Example: in a reported Zika or other mosquito-borne disease investigations, the Unmanned Aircraft could be deployed to view and investigate suspected properties and conditions. Many Public Nuisance complaints cannot be safely accessed.
- Currently, CHAPTER 423 does not provide the authority (Sec. 423.002. NONAPPLICABILITY)
- The Environmental Health Department would like to **add** in 423.002. NONAPPLICABILITY: *“ if the image is captured by or for a County Health Department or County Health District . 1. For the inspection of suspected properties and conditions of a public health nuisance”*.
- The Environmental Health Department would like to strike out under Sec. 423.002. NONAPPLICABILITY.
- (8) if the image is captured by a law enforcement authority or a person who is under contract with or otherwise acting under the direction or on behalf of a law enforcement authority:
(B) for the purpose of documenting a crime scene where an offense, **not including misdemeanors or offenses punishable by a fine only**, has been committed;

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES #2. HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE CHAPTER HEALTH & SAFETY CODE SEC. 437.010. SUBMISSION OF PLANS AND SUBSEQUENT INSPECTION.

Health & Safety Code Sec. 437.010. SUBMISSION OF PLANS AND SUBSEQUENT INSPECTION.

The Environmental Health Department would like the ability to be able to charge a fee for the service of conducting the plan review to new and renovated Food Service Establishments within our jurisdiction.

Currently, Sec. 437.010 has no verbiage to allow or disallow a payment of a fee.

The singular advantage of the fee collection is the move towards an individual fee based service, where the individual utilizing the service pays for the service. This would eliminate the taxpayers of Fort Bend County subsidizing a service that they do not use.

COUNTY ADVOCACY

- Issue:
 - Special interests have teams of lobbyists to pass bills
 - County government advocates on behalf of our community and community efforts such as but not limited nonprofits, food banks, and similar entities and causes
 - Solution:
 - Support the County's ability to communicate with legislators and advocate on behalf of the community through:
 - Participation in grassroots advocacy efforts
 - Membership with county associations
 - Employment of in-house intergovernmental relations staff
 - Engagement of legislative consultants
-

FORT BEND COUNTY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA WORKSHOP

COMMISSIONER VINCENT MORALES

TCEQ CONTAMINATION NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENT-

- ISSUE:
 - In September a deadly bacteria was discovered in the Brazosport public water supply. The City of Rosenberg, as a downstream consumer and purveyor of this water, learned of this through the media.
 - SOLUTION:
 - While press releases are an integral part of notifying the public about urgent public health emergencies, they cannot be relied upon solely. TCEQ must notify downstream water users/providers, such as the City of Rosenberg, prior or simultaneous to media notification in order to ensure proper public notification and allowing local water providers to initiate their own safety measures in a timely manner.
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CENTRAL APPRAISAL DISTRICT FAIRNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN PROCESS–

- ISSUE

- Although each Central Appraisal District in the State of Texas has the same objective, each operate somewhat autonomously with regards to best practices. Fort Bend County residents do not currently have adequate access to or an understanding of the methodology at which protest decisions are arrived at.

- SOLUTION

- Create policy that calls for and establishes a fair, transparent and standardized appeals process making available to public the methodology, data factors and scoring criteria considered when review board make their final appeal determination.

FORT BEND COUNTY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA WORKSHOP

COMMISSIONER ANDY MEYERS, PRECINCT 3

COUNTY PARKS RULES – HOUSE BILL 72

- ISSUE:
 - Fort Bend County has no authority to regulate parks, as that authority is only granted to certain counties through Local Government Code, Section 320.0455. The County needs the authority to enforce rules, as it's a safety and cost issue.
 - SOLUTION:
 - Rep. Reynolds has pre-filed HB 72, which adds Fort Bend County into existing legislation. This legislation will allow Fort Bend County to enact and enforce rules in county-owned parks. This legislation also specifically prohibits enacting any rules and regulations regarding fireworks.
-

ETJ REMOVAL

- ISSUE:
 - Precinct 3 is in Houston's ETJ from the county line to FM 1463. The provisions in SB 2 from the 2017 special session essentially ended municipal annexation in populated areas. The residents in Houston's ETJ will never be annexed into Houston, yet expect city level services. They have also expressed a desire to have a remedy to this issue through a petition process that would force removal from Houston's ETJ.
 - SOLUTION:
 - Modify existing legislation to allow for communities to petition out of Houston's ETJ with the option of remaining wholly unincorporated, joining another city (either through full annexation or the ETJ process), or forming their own city.
-

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

- ISSUE:
 - The City of Houston is collecting approximately \$20 million in sales taxes (split 50/50 with the MUDs) from the residents of Precinct 3 through the SPA process and not providing any services in return. The residents of Precinct 3 (and Fort Bend County as a whole) are being taxed without the right to vote on the people taxing them. They have no say in Houston business whatsoever, yet their spending directly benefits the city.
 - SOLUTION:
 - Modify existing legislation to force Houston to spend 25% of the SPA revenue it collects in Fort Bend County within a certain distance of the area in which the tax is collected. MUD collections will not be impacted, and they will be free to spend their portion of the collections on projects beneficial to those residents.
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SPECIAL DISTRICT TRANSPARENCY

- ISSUE:
 - In Fort Bend County, our special districts regularly have the highest tax rates in a given area, high debt, and large constituencies. They are not, however, required to be as transparent as cities and counties. A number of boards don't even meet inside the county, much less their district boundaries. This keeps residents/taxpayers in the dark and doesn't allow them to freely and easily seek and find information that they may need.
 - SOLUTION:
 - Modify Government Code, Section 551.1283 to force special districts with over 500 residents to maintain a website listing elected/appointed official contact information, debt and tax information, the posting of agendas, meetings, and minutes. Also work to bring board meetings as close to the district boundaries as possible (within reason).
-

MUNICIPAL CONSENT FOR CAD CREATION

- ISSUE:
 - Currently, when a CAD is proposed for creation, a municipality may exclude territory from the proposed CAD, even if such land is in their ETJ. Given that the local government in an ETJ is the County and not the municipality, municipal governing bodies should not have the right to exclude land from a CAD as long as the land is removed from any created CAD upon full annexation of a given area.
 - SOLUTION:
 - Modify Local Government Code 387 to remove the exclusion authority of a municipality when a proposed CAD is in an ETJ. A provision can be added to remove the CAD from a given area upon full annexation of the municipality.
-

FORT BEND COUNTY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA WORKSHOP

COMMISSIONER KEN R. DEMERCHANT – PRECINCT 4

VOTING

Issue:

- Currently Fort Bend County residents are unable to track their mail in ballots to ensure their vote is counted.

Solution:

- Update the Election Code Title 7. Early Voting Subtitle A. Early Voting Chapter 86. Conduct of Voting by Mail.

VOTING

Issue

- Texas voter registration laws require Voter Registrars to distribute, receive, decipher, process and archive millions of voter registration cards each year. This process is inefficient, expensive and error ridden.

Solution

- Support HB 104 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to electronic voter registration.

VOTING

Issue

- Texas voters are no longer allowed to vote a straight-party ballot. This change increases the time each voter spends in the voting booth and caused confusion for voters.

Solution

- Support HB 120 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to allowing straight-party voting.

VOTING

Issue

- Texas voters are required to show a picture ID card along with their Voter Registration Certificate. This causes confusion among voters.

Solution

- Support HB 110 by Rep. Ron Reynolds, relating to requirements to vote, including presenting proof of identification.

VOTING

Issue

- Texas voters have the options of registering to vote through the “motor-voter” program upon the issuance or changing of a driver’s license or identification card; however, it is a cumbersome process and includes paperwork.

Solution

- Support HB 124 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to automatic voter registration on issuance or change of a driver's license or identification card by the Department of Public Safety.

COUNTY ASSISTANCE DISTRICTS

Issue:

- Currently it is difficult to include non-residential areas to a County Assistance District. There are several steps that can take years to accomplish.

Solutions:

- Update the current code, Local Government Code Section 387.003(i), to annex non-residential areas into a current County Assistance District without requiring petitions from majority of landowners and approvals from other Special Purpose District Entities.

COUNTY ASSISTANCE DISTRICTS

Issue:

- Current County Assistance District language only allows for funds to be spent within the boundaries of the district. This limits how the money can be spent, as there are instances where money can be spent directly adjacent to the district within one project.

SOLUTION:

- Modify language in Local Government Code 387 to allow County Assistance Districts to “perform functions in the district or for the benefit of the district.”
- Definition of proximity is 5 miles outside of the district.

FLOOD CONTROL

Issue

- The Brazos River is eroding at a rapid pace.
- Developers are currently platting housing developments near the Brazos River.

Solution

- Change Platting Reg. No. 5.11.B.1 to include a required 500' meander corridor as recommended by USACE Brazos River Flood Risk Management Study, for future development.

MENTAL HEALTH

Issue

- There is no data integration between jail, court systems, jail medical provider probation, public defenders, and community services.

Solution

- Create legislation for systems that allow communication between jail, courts and providers.
-

MENTAL HEALTH

Issue:

- People with mental illness (MI) and co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse (CMISA) are overrepresented in our jail population. 48% of jail population in MH housing identified as having mental illness.

Solution:

- Support HB 78 by Rep. Reynolds - Relating to the creation of a mental health treatment for incarceration diversion pilot program.

PAY

Issues:

- Employers paying prevailing wage rates are generally required to maintain what are called certified payroll records in order to prove compliance with the prevailing wage laws. While Texas law does not specifically define "certified payroll records," [Section 2258.024](#) of the Government Code provides that contractors must keep records showing that all employees working on public projects have been and are being paid at least the prevailing wage rate for all time worked on the project.

Solution:

- Update the current Government Code Title 10. General Government Subtitle F. State And Local Contracts And Fund Management Chapter 2258. Prevailing Wage Rates Subchapter A. General Provisions, for Fort Bend County only. Fort Bend County will name the department responsible for certifying payroll records on public projects.

PAY

Issues:

- Currently there is little oversight over the payment, accrual, and use of sick leave.

Solution:

- Support HB 87 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to requiring certain employers to provide paid sick leave to employees; providing administrative and civil penalties.

PAY

Issues:

- The current minimum wage in Texas is \$7.25. This not a livable wage to cover food, housing, transportation and other basic necessities. This rate has not changed since February 2015.

Solution:

- Support HB 60 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to the minimum wage.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Issue:

- Currently industrial businesses are built next to residential developments and create environmental concerns for homeowners.

Solution

- Create a buffer zone of 500' around residential developments study to evaluate environmental pollution issues.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Issue:

- The operation of roadside vending can result in personal injury or property damage or negatively affect the area in which it is conducted

Solution

- Create a bill to prohibit roadside vending of any kind in unincorporated areas of the county.
-

DISCRIMINATION

Issue

- Currently there is no prohibition for certain grooming policies that are commonly and historically associated with race.

Solution:

- Support SB 77 by Sen. Miles and HB 38 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to discrimination on the basis of hair texture or protective hairstyle associated with race.

PARKS

Issue:

- Fort Bend County owns and operates public parks but has no authority to enact or enforce regulations in County parks.

Solution:

- Support HB 72 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to the power of certain counties to enact certain park use rules.

GROUP HOMES

Issue

- Currently in Fort Bend County, there are an unknown number of group homes. The safety and welfare of these residents are not regulated.

Solution

- Support HB 149 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to a study to evaluate state and local regulation of group homes.

SHORT TERM RENTALS WITHIN SUBDIVISIONS

Issue:

- Currently within unincorporated Fort Bend County, homes in subdivisions are being used as a short-term rental property (less than six months). This creates a negative environment to the homeowners surrounding the property.

Solution

- Create a bill to regulate short term rentals of homes within a subdivision.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Issue:

- There is no disincentive for guns sold at a gun show without completing a background check.

Solution:

- Support HB 52 by Rep. Reynolds, relating to the creation of certain criminal offenses concerning firearm sales at gun shows.