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by order of Presidio County

City of Presidio balances budget after fraught conversations about tax rates, property sales

By SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — At Monday's meeting, Presidio City Council voted to approve the city's budget for the upcoming year and to adopt its proposed property tax rate. This year's tax rate will decrease from last year's rate by 2.27% but will raise a total of $40,538 in new revenue. None of that revenue will come from new property on the rolls.

Monday was the deadline for the city to adopt its new budget. That deadline loomed at a public hearing on Friday afternoon, when City Administrator Pablo Rodriguez explained there was a budget deficit of around $400,000 at the beginning of the budget drafting process — but the city's finance department had been able to slash that number by over half.

The city had three days to figure out how to fill those gaps. Rodriguez suggested selling off some of the city's property — a discussion that had come up a few weeks prior at a council meeting when the city debated whether to sell land it was currently leasing out at a rate well below market. "We don't want to sell ourselves short on property," he said.

None of these speculative transactions could make it into the final budget, so Rodriguez and Finance Director Glorisel Muñiz had to think on their feet. By Monday night, the budget had been carefully shaved in order to be balanced. He hoped that the future sale of the land would help fill in the gaps. "It's not an easy thing to do," he said.

Monday night's meeting began with a disagreement between Rodriguez and former finance specialist Malynda Richardson. Richardson — who was transferred to the city's EMS department as a cost-cutting measure — felt that the city was missing out on around $70,000 in revenue because their tax rates were not calculated correctly.

For communities with over 30,000 residents in Texas, tax rates are proposed year to year by calculating 3.5% of the entity's tax revenue the previous year. Then they work backward, figuring out what tax rate is needed to equal the 3.5% figure.

This figure is known as the "voter approval rate," which — as the name implies — does not require an election to approve and voters may not petition to roll back the rate.

But smaller municipalities like Presidio play by different — and confusing — rules. The state comptroller's Truth in Taxation

(Continued on page 2)



Photo by Sam Karas / Foto por Sam Karas

Jesseca Murillo and Stephanie Rivera of Presidio EMS led a presentation on Wednesday about a community paramedicine program coming to Presidio.
Jesseca Murillo y Stephanie Rivera de Presidio EMS dieron una presentación sobre un programa de paramedicina comunitaria que está viendo a Presidio.

Crowd packs Presidio Activities Center to learn about new clinic, paramedicine

By SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — Last Wednesday, the dining room at the Presidio Activities Center filled to standing room only as community members gathered to learn about a new clinic and community paramedicine program coming to Presidio. The panel of hosts included representatives from the City of Presidio, the Big Bend Regional Hospital District (BBRHD), Preventative Care Health Services and Presidio EMS.

The meeting was a coordinated effort among these agencies to educate the public about a grant awarded last summer that will allow Presidio and Terlingua to expand their healthcare services. A total of $5.5 million dollars was allotted for the two communities — and represented just one of thirteen such grants awarded to healthcare entities nationwide.

The BBRHD and Terlingua Fire and EMS hosted an equally well-attended town hall for south Brewster County residents back in June. For Terlingua, the grant will provide for the opening of a part-time clinic and the launch of a community paramedicine program that will expand the scope of care that EMS personnel can provide to local residents.

Presidio will take the lion's share of the grant in order to offer Presidio

(Continued on page 2)

Homeland Security Investigations, Consulate of Mexico to return smuggled artifacts to Coahuila

By SAM KARAS
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ALPINE — On Tuesday, representatives from Homeland Security Investigations and the Consulate of Mexico met at the Museum of the Big Bend to celebrate the return of dozens of cultural artifacts to Casa de la Cultura, a museum in the small town of Cuatro Cienegas, Coahuila. The artifacts have been in limbo for 16 years, in the wake of a major heist, federal investigation and protracted legal battle.

In 2007, a thousand artifacts — roughly half the collection at Casa de la Cultura — were stolen by smugglers. The cache includes cordage, projectile points, ceramic figurines and silver coins, spanning 2,000 years of human history.

Antonio Javier Reyes of McAllen, Texas, was identified as one of the smugglers. Reyes was apprehended by Homeland Security Investigations at K-Bob's Restaurant in Fort Stockton, where he was attempting to sell "rabbit sticks," or boomerang-like tools used to hunt small prey, to a potential buyer. The rabbit sticks were valued at $7,000.

(Continued on page 2)

Multitud llena el Centro de actividades de Presidio para aprender sobre la nueva clínica y paramedicina

Por SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — El miércoles pasado, el comedor del Centro de Actividades de Presidio se llenó hasta quedar de pie solo cuando los miembros de la comunidad se reunieron para conocer una nueva clínica y un programa comunitario de paramedicina que llegará a Presidio. El panel de anfitriones incluyó representantes de la ciudad de Presidio, el Distrito Hospitalario Regional de Big Bend (BBRHD), los Servicios de Salud de Atención Preventiva y Presidio EMS.

La reunión fue un esfuerzo coordinado entre estas agencias para educar al público sobre una subvención otorgada el verano pasado que permitirá a Presidio y Terlingua ampliar sus servicios de atención médica. Se asignó un total de $5,5 millones de dólares para las dos comunidades, y representó sólo una de las trece subvenciones otorgadas a entidades de atención médica en todo el país.

BBRHD y Terlingua Fire and EMS organizaron una reunión pública

(Continued on page 3)

Investigaciones de Seguridad Nacional y Consulado de México devolverán artefactos de contrabando a Coahuila

Por SAM KARAS
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ALPINE — El martes, representantes de Investigaciones de Seguridad Nacional y el Consulado de México se reunieron en el Museo del Big Bend para celebrar el regreso de docenas de artefactos culturales a la Casa de la Cultura, un museo en el pequeño pueblo de Cuatro Ciénegas, Coahuila. Los artefactos han estado en el limbo durante 16 años, tras un gran atraco, una investigación federal y una prolongada batalla legal.

En 2007, contrabandistas robaron mil artefactos (aproximadamente la mitad de la colección de la Casa de la Cultura). El tesoro incluye cordeles, puntas de proyectiles, figurillas de cerámica y monedas de plata que abarcan 2.000 años de historia humana.

Antonio Javier Reyes de McAllen, Texas, fue identificado como uno de los contrabandistas. Reyes fue detenido por Investigaciones de Seguridad Nacional en el restaurante K-Bob's en Fort Stockton, donde intentaba vender "palos de conejo", o herramientas tipo boomerang utilizadas para cazar presas pequeñas, a un comprador potencial. Los palitos de conejo

(Continued on page 3)

La ciudad de Presidio equilibra el presupuesto después de tensas conversaciones sobre tasas impositivas y ventas de propiedades

Por SAM KARAS
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PRESIDIO — En la reunión del lunes, el Concejo Municipal de Presidio votó para aprobar el presupuesto de la ciudad para el próximo año y adoptar su tasa de impuesto a la propiedad propuesta. La tasa impositiva de este año disminuirá con respecto a la tasa del año pasado en un 2,27%, pero generará un total de $40,538 en nuevos ingresos. Ninguno de esos ingresos provendrá de nuevas propiedades en circulación.

El lunes vencía el plazo para que la ciudad adoptara su nuevo presupuesto. Esa fecha límite se avecinaba en una audiencia pública el viernes por la tarde, cuando el administrador de la ciudad, Pablo Rodríguez, explicó que había un déficit presupuestario de alrededor de $400,000 al comienzo del proceso de redacción del presupuesto, pero que el departamento de finanzas de la ciudad había podido reducir esa cifra a más de la mitad.

La ciudad tuvo tres días para descubrir cómo llenar esos vacíos. Rodríguez sugirió vender algunas de las propiedades de la ciudad, una discusión que surgió unas semanas antes en una reunión del consejo cuando la ciudad debatió si vender el terreno que actualmente estaba arrendando a un precio muy por debajo del mercado. "No queremos quedarnos cortos en propiedades", dijo.

Ninguna de estas transacciones especulativas pudo incluirse en el presupuesto final, por lo que Rodríguez y la directora de finanzas, Glorisel Muñiz, tuvieron que pensar con rapidez. El lunes por la noche, el presupuesto había sido cuidadosamente recortado para equilibrarlo. Espera que la futura venta del terreno ayude a llenar los vacíos. "No es algo fácil de hacer", dijo.

La reunión del lunes por la noche comenzó con un desacuerdo entre Rodríguez y la ex especialista en finanzas Malynda Richardson. Richardson, que fue transferido al departamento de EMS de la ciudad como medida de reducción de costos, consideró que la ciudad estaba perdiendo alrededor de $70,000 en ingresos porque sus tasas impositivas no se calcularon correctamente.

Para las comunidades con más de 30.000 residentes en Texas, las tasas impositivas se proponen año tras año calculando el 3,5% de los ingresos fiscales de la entidad el año anterior. Luego trabajan hacia atrás, calculando qué tasa impositiva se necesita para igualar la cifra del 3,5%.

Esta cifra se conoce como "tasa de aprobación de los votantes" y, como su nombre lo indica, no requiere una elección para aprobarla y los votantes no pueden solicitar una reducción de la tasa.

Pero los municipios más pequeños como Presidio se rigen por reglas diferentes y confusas. La iniciativa Verdad en los Impuestos del contralor estatal explica que los "distritos especiales" pueden

(Continúa en la página 3)

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ENGLISH NEWS

New clinic

(Continued from page 1)

County's largest population center with an after-hours clinic to supplement the existing Preventative Care Health Services (PCHS) clinic that operates during business hours. The grant will also provide for a community paramedicine program similar to the one being launched in Terlingua.

Linda Molinar, CEO of PCHS, gave an overview of the history of the clinic and how far it had come over the years. The community went from having no clinic to having a once-weekly clinic to the present day clinic — which has three rotating internal medicine doctors on staff serving patients regardless of their financial status. "There wasn't a voice for the people," she said of the days before PCHS. "I worked very hard to bring [a clinic] to town. Now everybody who comes is treated the same whether or not they can pay."

Jesseca Murillo and Stephanie Rivera of Presidio EMS gave a presentation about the concept of community paramedicine. With additional training — and a boost from the USDA grant — Presidio's paramedics will be able to provide certain home visits, preventative healthcare and education for the community's most vulnerable.

Murillo began by explaining the challenges facing the rural emergency service: hundred mile ambulance rides, broken equipment and strained finances. Many patients complained of weeks-long waits to get appointments at the clinic, leading many preventable health issues to snowball until they became emergencies. "This is the reality for Presidio," she said. "Unfortunately, there just aren't the resources here."

The community paramedicine program would help ease the strain on the clinic by allowing EMS staff to treat some of these issues with home visits — instead of waiting for illnesses and injuries to become a crisis, community paramedics could provide non-emergency services such as changing bandages and colostomy bags, administering blood tests and checking to make sure patients were using their medications regularly and correctly.

Helping Presidians with their medication was a top priority in the program. The community faces a particularly high rate of cardiac conditions and diabetes, where a regular regimen is key. Many older folks have mobility issues or simply can't get a ride to the clinic.

Others have grown used to long clinic wait times and the lack of a pharmacy. While the PCHS clinic currently services a pharmacy, that wasn't always the case — when there was not a pharmacist on staff, patients were reliant on a weekly medication delivery from City Drug in Alpine.

Presidio EMS personnel were hoping that those issues would quickly become a relic of the past. The approach would be two-pronged: first by extending the hours of the existing clinic, which would be open three days a week until 10 p.m., allowing more time to treat acute, urgent problems.

The community paramedicine program would help medical providers spend more time with each patient in the comfort of their own home. "Fifty percent of what we're going to do at your house is education," EMS Director Troy Sparks said. "Sometimes doctors [in physical clinics] just get you in and out, and they don't have time to educate you."

The entities involved in administering the grant — the BBRHD, PCHS, Big Bend Regional Medical Center, Presidio EMS and the City of Presidio — were still hashing out all the details of the program. At press time, there was an open position for someone to take calls answering questions and schedule appointments, to begin on September 1.

After September 1, the operator will be physically located at City Hall and can also be reached by phone at 432-229-3273.

City of Presidio

(Continued from page 1)

initiative explains that "special districts" may instead adopt an 8% increase. Special districts that pull from property taxes include hospital districts and river authorities. These rules come with an asterisk: municipalities under 30,000 can be calculated differently. Chapter 26 of the Texas Tax Code gives these small cities the power to calculate their voter approval rates with the 8% increase threshold as though they were a special district.

Richardson said that the city had adopted the 8% increase for last year's budget after reaching out to the city's legal counsel, Bojorquez Law Firm, for the green light. The attorneys found no issue with these calculations.

Rodriguez, on the other hand, said that he had asked Natalia Williams, the county's tax assessor-collector, for her input. "She is not a tax attorney," Richardson said.

Mayor John Ferguson conceded that because this conversation was taking place on the deadline for the new budget to be adopted, it was too late to make changes or ask for clarifications. "There's nothing we can do to change this," he said. "So it's kind of water under the bridge at this point."

Councilmember John Razo was disappointed that this year's budget team hadn't reached out for help from multiple people. "My concern here is that we're getting all our information from the tax [assessor-collector] and that's just one source," he said. "We can look around and ask more questions."

Rodriguez conceded that it was too late to change the budget — but that they would fine-tune their process for the following year. "This is not something that was done on purpose," he said.

Smuggled artifacts

(Continued from page 1)

Homeland Security Investigations — the lead agency on the investigation — knew that this wasn't Reyes' first rodeo. In 2001, customs officials seized artifacts Reyes was attempting to smuggle into Laredo.

Francisco Burrola, special agent in charge for Homeland Security Investigations in El Paso, said that a lot of the agency's investigation into stolen relics took place on the internet. After museums report missing artifacts, agents take to auction sites like eBay and the dark web to trace the cache's movement. "If a museum is burglarized and items are stolen, we immediately start looking at the black market," he said.

Reyes was charged with smuggling, fraud and the sale of stolen goods in 2009, but the charges were eventually dropped. Litigation began again under the same charges in 2011 as authorities tried to figure out what to do with the stash — normally, defendants may file to have seized property returned to them if it can be proven the items were not obtained illegally.

Reyes's legal counsel filed for the return of the artifacts, which was denied. His smuggling charges were once again dismissed.

In 1970, the United States and Mexico signed a treaty mandating the return of archaeological artifacts and artworks to their home country. Gamaliel Bustillos Muñoz of the Presidio branch of the Consulate of Mexico spoke to the importance of this treaty at the ceremony. "These artifacts belonged to our pre-Hispanic societies and they are a fundamental part of Mexico's cultural past," he said.

Bustillos said that the consulate was now responsible for turning the artifacts over to the Secretary of Foreign Relations. The agency will then return the materials to Cuatro Cienegas.



Staff photo by Sam Karas / Foto por Sam Karas

Homeland Security Investigations and the Consulate of Mexico celebrated the return of artifacts stolen in 2008 from the state of Coahuila. From left to right: Francisco Burrola, Gamaliel Bustillos and Bernie Canteñs.
La Oficina de Investigaciones de Seguridad Nacional y el Consulado de México presentaron una ceremonia para celebrar la devolución de unos artículos robados en 2008 del estado de Coahuila. De izquierda a derecha: Francisco Burrola, Gamaliel Bustillos y Bernie Canteñs.

Big Bend Reproductive Coalition to host Marfa town hall

MARFA — The Big Bend Reproductive Coalition (BBRC) will hold a town hall in Marfa on Tuesday, August 29, 2023, at 7 p.m. at The Sentinel. The town hall is the second of five that will take place across the region.

The months-long community needs assessment process includes town halls, anonymous electronic survey, and door-to-door canvassing. Big Bend Reproductive Coalition hopes to learn about potential service gaps and what types of services and educational opportunities women and people with a uterus would like access to, including reproductive healthcare services, funding, workshops, support, community events and more. This information will help inform how BBRC will serve the community. Volunteers are needed. To volunteer for the community needs assessment, please reach out to morganneBconsulting@gmail.com.

Future town halls will take place in Fort Davis, Terlingua and Presidio. The town halls are free and open to all. There will be Spanish language interpretation at each event.

For more information about the Big Bend Reproductive Coalition, visit www.bigbendrc.org.

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The Sentinel, 209 W. El Paso St., Marfa, TX

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NOTICIAS EN ESPAÑOL

Nueva clínica

(Continuación de la página 1)

igualmente concurrida para los residentes del sur del condado de Brewster en junio. Para Terlingua, la subvención permitirá la apertura de una clínica a tiempo parcial y el lanzamiento de un programa comunitario de paramedicina que ampliará el alcance de la atención que el personal de EMS puede brindar a los residentes locales.

Presidio tomará la mayor parte de la subvención para ofrecer al centro de población más grande del condado de Presidio una clínica fuera del horario de atención para complementar la clínica existente de Servicios de Salud de Atención Preventiva (PCHS, por sus siglas en inglés) que opera durante el horario comercial. La subvención también financiará un programa comunitario de paramedicina similar al que se está lanzando en Terlingua.

Linda Molinar, directora ejecutiva de PCHS, brindó una descripción general de la historia de la clínica y de lo lejos que había llegado a lo largo de los años. La comunidad pasó de no tener clínica a tener una clínica que funciona una vez por semana y llegar a la clínica actual, que cuenta con tres médicos de medicina interna rotativos en su personal que atienden a los pacientes independientemente de su situación financiera. "No había voz para la gente", dijo sobre los días previos al PCHS. "Trabajé muy duro para traer [una clínica] a la ciudad. Ahora todos los que vienen reciben el mismo trato, puedan o no pagar".

Jesseca Murillo y Stephanie Rivera de Presidio EMS dieron una presentación sobre el concepto de paramedicina comunitaria. Con capacitación adicional, y un impulso de la subvención del USDA, los paramédicos de Presidio podrán brindar ciertas visitas domiciliarias, atención médica preventiva y educación para los más vulnerables de la comunidad.

Murillo comenzó explicando los desafíos que enfrenta el servicio de emergencia rural: viajes de cien millas en ambulancia, equipos rotos y finanzas en dificultades. Muchos pacientes se quejaron de esperas de semanas para conseguir citas en la clínica, lo que provocó que muchos problemas de salud prevenibles se multiplicaran hasta convertirse en emergencias. "Esta es la realidad de Presidio", dijo. "Desafortunadamente, aquí simplemente no hay recursos".

El programa comunitario de paramedicina ayudaría a aliviar la tensión en la clínica al permitir que el personal de EMS trate algunos de estos problemas con visitas domiciliarias; en lugar de esperar a que las enfermedades y lesiones se conviertan en una crisis, los paramédicos comunitarios podrían brindar servicios que no sean de emergencia, como cambiar vendajes. y bolsas de colostomía, realizando análisis de sangre y verificando que los pacientes estuvieran usando sus medicamentos de manera regular y correcta.

Ayudar a los Presidians con sus medicamentos fue una de las principales prioridades del programa. La comunidad enfrenta una tasa particularmente alta de enfermedades cardíacas y diabetes, donde un régimen regular es clave. Muchas personas mayores tienen problemas de movilidad o simplemente no pueden conseguir transporte para ir a la clínica.

Otros se han acostumbrado a los largos tiempos de espera en las clínicas y a la falta de farmacia. Si bien la clínica PCHS actualmente presta servicios a una farmacia, ese no siempre fue el caso: cuando no había un farmacéutico en el personal, los pacientes dependían de la entrega semanal de medicamentos de City Drug en Alpine.

El personal de Presidio EMS esperaba que esos problemas se convirtieran rápidamente en una reliquia del pasado. El enfoque sería doble: en primer lugar, ampliar el horario de la clínica existente, que estaría abierta tres días a la semana hasta las 10 p.m., lo que permitiría más tiempo para tratar problemas agudos y urgentes.

El programa comunitario de paramedicina ayudaría a los proveedores médicos a pasar más tiempo con cada paciente en la comodidad de su propio hogar. "El cincuenta por ciento de lo que vamos a hacer en su casa es educación", dijo el director de EMS, Troy Sparks. "A veces los médicos [en las clínicas físicas] simplemente te hacen entrar y salir, y no tienen tiempo para educarte".

Las entidades involucradas en la administración de la subvención (BBRHD, PCHS, Big Bend Regional Medical Center, Presidio EMS y la ciudad de Presidio) aún estaban analizando todos los detalles del programa. Al cierre de esta edición, había un puesto abierto para que alguien pudiera atender llamadas, responder preguntas y programar citas, a partir del 1 de septiembre.

Después del 1 de septiembre, el operador estará ubicado físicamente en el Ayuntamiento y también podrá comunicarse con él por teléfono al 432-229-3273.

La ciudad de Presidio

(Continuación de la página 1)

adoptar un aumento del 8%. Los distritos especiales que recaudan impuestos a la propiedad incluyen los distritos hospitalarios y las autoridades fluviales. Estas reglas vienen con un asterisco: los municipios de menos de 30.000 habitantes se pueden calcular de manera diferente. El Capítulo 26 del Código Fiscal de Texas otorga a estas pequeñas ciudades el poder de calcular sus tasas de aprobación de los votantes con el umbral de aumento del 8% como si fueran un distrito especial.

Richardson dijo que la ciudad había adoptado el aumento del 8% para el presupuesto del año pasado después de comunicarse con el asesor legal de la ciudad, Bojorquez Law Firm, para obtener luz verde. Los abogados no encontraron ningún problema con estos cálculos.

Rodríguez, por otro lado, dijo que le había pedido su opinión a Natalia Williams, la tasadora y recaudadora de impuestos del condado. "Ella no es una abogada fiscal", dijo Richardson.

El alcalde John Ferguson admitió que debido a que esta conversación se estaba llevando a cabo en la fecha límite para la adopción del nuevo presupuesto, era demasiado tarde para hacer cambios o pedir aclaraciones. "No hay nada que podamos hacer para cambiar esto", dijo. "Así que en este momento ya es agua pasada".

El concejal John Razo estaba decepcionado de que el equipo de presupuesto de este año no hubiera pedido ayuda a varias personas. "Mi preocupación aquí es que estamos obteniendo toda nuestra información del [tasador-recaudador] de impuestos y esa es sólo una fuente", dijo. "Podemos mirar a nuestro alrededor y hacer más preguntas".

Rodríguez admitió que era demasiado tarde para cambiar el presupuesto, pero que afinarían su proceso para el año siguiente. "Esto no es algo que se haya hecho a propósito", afirmó.

Artifactos de contrabando

(Continuación de la página 1)

estaban valorados en 7.000 dólares.

Investigaciones de Seguridad Nacional, la agencia principal de la investigación, sabía que este no era el primer rodeo de Reyes. En 2001, los funcionarios de aduanas confiscaron artefactos que Reyes intentaba contrabandear a Laredo.

Francisco Burrola, agente especial a cargo de Investigaciones de Seguridad Nacional en El Paso, dijo que gran parte de la investigación de la agencia sobre reliquias robadas se llevó a cabo en Internet. Después de que los museos informan sobre la desaparición de artefactos, los agentes acuden a sitios de subastas como eBay y la web oscura para rastrear el movimiento del tesoro. "Si un museo es asaltado y roban objetos, inmediatamente empezamos a buscar en el mercado negro", dijo.

Reyes fue acusado de contrabando, fraude y venta de bienes robados en 2009, pero los cargos finalmente fueron retirados. El litigio comenzó de nuevo bajo los mismos cargos en 2011, cuando las autoridades intentaron descubrir qué hacer con el alijo; normalmente, los acusados pueden solicitar que se les devuelvan los bienes confiscados si se puede demostrar que los artículos no se obtuvieron ilegalmente.

El abogado de Reyes solicitó la devolución de los artefactos, la cual fue denegada. Sus cargos de contrabando fueron nuevamente desestimados.

En 1970, Estados Unidos y México firmaron un tratado que obligaba a devolver los artefactos y obras de arte arqueológicos a su país de origen. Gamaliel Bustillos Muñoz de la sucursal de Presidio del Consulado de México habló sobre la importancia de este tratado en la ceremonia. "Estos artefactos pertenecieron a nuestras sociedades prehispánicas y son parte fundamental del pasado cultural de México", dijo.

Bustillos dijo que ahora el consulado era responsable de entregar los artefactos al Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores. Luego, la agencia devolverá los materiales a Cuatro Ciénegas.

La Coalición Reproductiva de Big Bend organizará el ayuntamiento de Marfa

MARFA – La Coalición Reproductiva de Big Bend (BBRC) celebrará un ayuntamiento en Marfa el martes 29 de agosto de 2023 a las 7 p.m. en El Centinela. El ayuntamiento es el segundo de cinco que se llevarán a cabo en toda la región.

El proceso de evaluación de las necesidades de la comunidad, que dura meses, incluye reuniones públicas, encuestas electrónicas anónimas y sondeos puerta a puerta. Big Bend Reproductive Coalition espera aprender sobre posibles brechas en los servicios y a qué tipos de servicios y oportunidades educativas les gustaría acceder a las mujeres y personas con útero, incluidos servicios de atención de salud reproductiva, financiación, talleres, apoyo, eventos comunitarios y más. Esta información ayudará a informar cómo BBRC servirá a la comunidad. Se necesitan voluntarios. Para ofrecerse como voluntario para la evaluación de las necesidades de la comunidad, comuníquese con morganneBconsulting@gmail.com.

Los ayuntamientos futuros se llevarán a cabo en Fort Davis, Terlingua y Presidio. Los ayuntamientos son gratuitos y abiertos a todos. Habrá interpretación en español en cada evento.

Para obtener más información sobre la Coalición Reproductiva de Big Bend, visite www.bigbendrc.org.







CLASSIFIED

OUR WATER MATTERS

Groundwater joint planning: A pathway to a desired future

By TREY GERFERS
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Groundwater management areas (GMAs) across the state are currently in the thick of a new round of groundwater joint planning, a process that has been taking place in five-year cycles since 2005. The 16 groundwater management areas in Texas were created to "provide for the conservation, preservation, protection, recharging, and prevention of waste of the groundwater," according to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB). GMAs seek to achieve these objectives by studying the available data and developing what are known as desired future conditions, or DFCs, for the aquifers they manage. DFCs are commonly understood to involve acceptable drawdown levels in regional aquifers over a 50-year time window.

GMA 4 is the management area that covers the Big Bend region, including all of Brewster, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties along with parts of Culberson and Hudspeth counties. GMA 4's joint planning encompasses the Edwards-Trinity, Pecos Valley, Bone Spring-Victorio Peak, Capitan Reef Complex, Igneous, Marathon, Rustler, and the West Texas Bolsons Aquifers (in whole or in part).

Robert Bradley is a groundwater technical assistance manager with the TWDB, who has been advising GMA 4 on its joint planning efforts for 18 years now. When asked to explain the process to a layperson, he described it as a "forum for stakeholders to come together and discuss groundwater issues and planning … the process gives a framework whereby groundwater resources are managed for future generations." He also stated that the process is "the way by which groundwater conservation districts within a groundwater management area cooperatively work together to develop policy statements called desired future conditions. These statements describe how districts want the aquifer conditions to be at some point in the future."

In addition to the data collected by each individual groundwater district, GMAs can also use groundwater availability models, or GAMs, developed by TWDB to understand the volumes available for future planning purposes. Once a GMA arrives at its proposed DFCs, each groundwater conservation district has 90 days to accept public comments, which are then incorporated into the DFCs that the GMA ultimately adopts. According to Bradley: "These desired future conditions are then used by the TWDB to estimate pumping volumes known as modeled available groundwater [or MAGs]. These estimates are the amount of groundwater that can be pumped to achieve the desired future condition for an aquifer."

GMAs? DFCs? MAGs? GAMs? The alphabet soup of groundwater management in Texas can be difficult to navigate for the ordinary folks that comprise groundwater conservation district boards across the state. This is why many GMAs hire consultants to guide them through the regulatory labyrinth of the joint planning process. At a recent meeting in Van Horn, GMA 4 representatives hired RMBJ Geo, Inc. and Close Consulting Group LLC to manage the statutory timelines, gather the requisite data, run groundwater models, and write the explanatory report. According to Amy Bush of RMBJ Geo, "One of the biggest obstacles to effective joint planning is most people just don't understand the whole process. The … multiple steps and organizations involved are enough to make you pull your hair out … The process includes stakeholder input at several points, and requires the consideration of nine factors, including aquifer uses and conditions, environmental issues, private property rights, and local economies." GMA 4 representatives were motivated to hire Bush and her colleagues because of their experience with other GMAs, where a widely divergent availability of data, highly variable demands on groundwater resources and extreme budget differences among member districts create difficulties that are not dissimilar to the difficulties faced by GMA 4.

According to Bradley, the most challenging aspect of this work is the "lack of public participation in the groundwater joint planning process. Sometimes folks don't get involved in the process until the later stages of planning when decisions have already been made. And while it's helpful to have that engagement, it would be most beneficial to everyone involved if there's a high level of engagement earlier and throughout the process."

The next meeting of Groundwater Management Area 4 will take place at the Culberson County Groundwater Conservation District office in Van Horn on Tuesday, November 14, at 10 a.m.

Local groundwater management area meeting schedules can also be found at: http://www.twdb.texas.gov/groundwater/management_areas/schedule/index.asp

Trey Gerfers is a San Antonio native and serves as general manager of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District. He is also chairman of the Presidio County Water Infrastructure Steering Committee and president of the Marfa Parks and Recreation Board. Trey has lived in Marfa since 2013.

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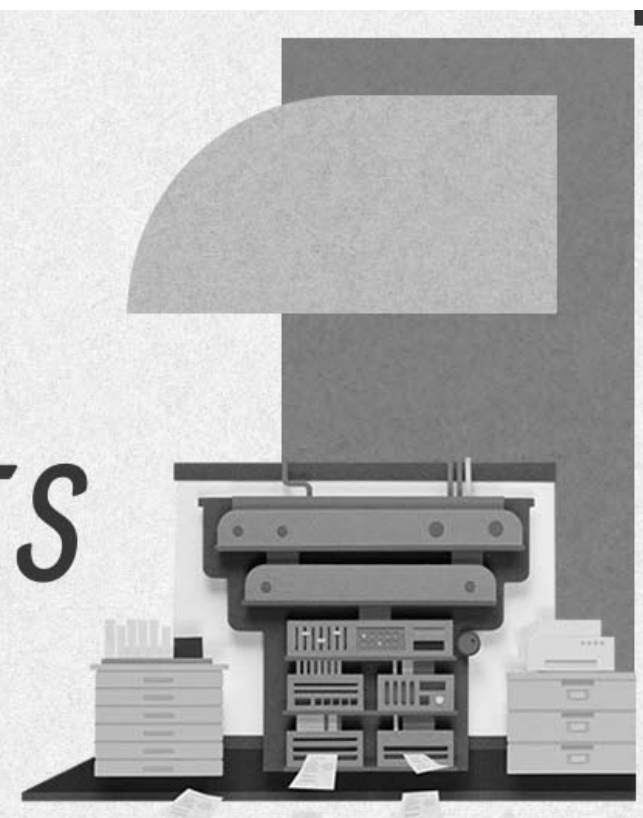
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PRESIDIO SPORTS CALENDAR

FRI, AUG 25 - SAT, AUG 26: PHS VOLLEYBALL JV/VARSITY @ DENVER CITY TOURNEY

SAT, AUG 26: PHS CC BOYS/GIRLS @ MIDLAND

TUE, AUG 29: PHS VOLLEYBALL VS FT. DAVIS @ PRESIDIO:
JV @ 5:00PM; VARSITY @ 6:00PM

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