

County Judge Nelson W. Wolff
GREATER Chamber speech
OCTOBER 28, 2013

• **Thank**

- **Arthur Coulombe, Chairman of the board**
- **Richard Perez, President/CEO**

BUDGET

- In 2008 Bexar County Commissioners Court directed the budget office to tighten spending while maintaining service levels and accelerating our capital projects.
- That helped us weather the recession and keep on a solid financial basis while maintaining a triple A credit rating
- This budget year is the first time in five years we have seen improvements in revenue and we were able to give a 3% raise to employees. Our lowest paid employees received an average 6 percent pay increase.
- One of the largest drains in the county budget historically has been our jail.

- We have a new Sheriff in town. Susan Pamerleau, who is a breath of fresh air, is working with us to address some past budget issues.
- She has hired a professional jail administrator, Raul Banasco. She has made critical personnel changes and is deploying her resources more efficiently.
- County staff is working with Sheriff Pamerleau to identify two new substations for patrol units.
- Sheriff Pamerleau works well District Attorney Susan Reed. If you are bent on criminal activity you had better head for the County line.
- Because we've had such sound fiscal management and innovative leadership from our elected officials, we have moved Bexar County beyond the basic functions of county government to embark on transformative projects that are shaping the future of this region.

TRANSPORTATION

- County has approved \$200 million of Advanced Transportation District funds to leverage another \$300 million in federal and state money to further improve Loop 1604 and 281.

- We have completed four of the eight connecting interchanges between Loop 1604 and 281.
- As part of the project we are creating the first ever public transit oriented lane as well as a managed lane on 281.
- We have restructured the Alamo RMA and absorbed oversight of the projects into our public works department.
- County Manager David Smith is the Director, and the money we are saving in overhead will go directly to increasing traffic capacity on the North Side.
- Former Councilman John Clamp is the chairman and former chamber president John Montford is a board member.
- We implemented a \$10 vehicle registration fee to fund RMA projects. We expect approximately \$12 million in annual revenue that the RMA will use to leverage additional funds from the state.
- Commissioner Kevin Wolff took the lead in expanding the MPO board to take in Comal, Guadalupe and parts of Kendall County to create a regional transportation strategy.

- We will now have the state's third largest MPO population and will bring in funding of an additional \$80 million over a 5-year period.
- We are presently working with TxDOT to create new funding strategies to complete Loop 1604 to Hwy 90 and highway 281 to the County line.

SAN PEDRO CREEK

- This month we just opened the 8 mile Mission Reach of the San Antonio River stretching all the way to Mission Espada. Bexar County Commissioners Court funded some \$200 million toward the project.
- With over 2,000 acres of land in the public domain this project is three times bigger than Central Park in NYC. It is the largest restoration of an urban waterway in the nation.
- When you walk or bike down the 8 miles of trail you will see egrets pulling fish out of the river, turtles basking in the sun, and people soaking it all in.
- The four historic Spanish missions are now visibly tied to the river with portals constructed at each Mission.
- Now we will turn our focus to another important waterway – San Pedro Creek.

- San Pedro Creek is as important to our city's history and culture as the San Antonio River. The Spanish founded our community's first permanent settlements along the banks of this historic creek.
- In 1718 they built the Presidio de Bexar where City Hall now stands.
- The Commissioners Court funded a "fatal flaw" and feasibility analysis of San Pedro Creek. The design study is complete with a finding that we should proceed to create final designs.
- The initial study found that by widening and deepening the flood channel, we will be able to take 40 acres out of the floodplain.
- The project envisions continuous walkways, lush landscaping and 6 distinct character areas along the 4-mile stretch of the creek from near Fox Tech High School downstream to the confluence with the San Antonio River near Mission Concepcion.
- The study estimates that the cost of the San Pedro Creek project will be around \$175 million including right-of-way acquisition. The Court has approved \$125 million toward the project.

- \$31 million of the additional \$50 million cost is in the right-of-way, of which the city owns a large part. We'll need to ask for help from our partners, both public and private sector, to complete the funding strategy.
- County Manager David Smith is now putting together a team to do the final design. It will take about 2 years to complete.
- We plan to open the first segment of the project 2018 in time for the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Presidio de Bexar.
- Commissioner Paul Elizondo has great memories of fishing from this creek as a young man and he has been a great leader on this project. Thank you, Paul.

BEXAR COUNTY HOSPITAL

- Commissioners Court in 2008 approved a \$900 million capital improvement program for the Bexar County Hospital District doing business as University Health System.
- UHS opened up a 286,000 square foot outpatient center downtown with hundreds of specialists offering expertise in health care including outpatient surgery.

- Approximately 100 new pediatric specialists joined our team taking children's health to a new level in the central city.
- The new one million-square-foot state-of-the-art trauma tower will open in the medical center this coming April. The emergency center will more than double in size. There will be 30 advanced surgical suites and 401 patient rooms all private.
- It will be the most technologically advanced hospital in the region.
- With more than 5,000 employees, 700 resident physicians and 1,000 doctors on the medical staff we offer the best in medical services. We always rank as on the top 50 hospitals in the nation.
- Thank President/CEO George Hernandez and Chairman of the Board Jim Adams and other board members.
- The UT Health Science Center is in talks with Methodist and with Bexar County Hospital District to share pediatric services in the medical center. Under the proposed plan Bexar County's hospital system would provide trauma, burn, transplant and neo-natal services.

BEXAR COUNTY COURTHOUSE

- Over the last 10 years we have undertaken a massive restoration and remodeling of our courthouse, which was built in 1892.
- It is the largest and oldest continually used courthouse in Texas. We have built the nation's first state of the art children's court. Last fall we opened the new Presiding Courtroom, on the first floor and added an attorney conference area.
- We are now restoring the original two-story courtroom that dates back to 1896. We're restoring the rose windows, balcony, and attached exterior porch.
- Commissioners Court will meet in there as the governing body did more than a century ago. But it will also be available for large trials and open for civic groups to use in the evenings.
- We have begun preparations to remove the 1972 Gondek addition. In November we will start dismantling the interior and complete demolition in 5 months. This will be the first time this portion of the courthouse exterior has been visible since the early 70s.

- We will add landscaping to the south end of courthouse, create an adjoining plaza to the Justice Center, and build a History Center within the courthouse.
- Commissioner Tommy Adkisson is the court's resident historian and has encouraged the preservation of our Courthouse. Thank you, Tommy.

BEXAR COUNTY GAMES

- Five years ago the voters approved the Commissioners Court proposal to build 13 regional amateur sports parks. We have completed 12 of them, and the final project – Mission City Soccer Complex – will open in November.
- We put on the first ever Bexar County Games in four of these venues. Thousands of young people competed in track & field, soccer and swimming. The fourth event in basketball will be in November. Many of the track & field competitors went on to state competition.
- Numerous regional and state tournaments have been held in the sports complexes. Three major national swimming championships will be held at the Northside Swim Center in 2015.

Urban living environment

- We have worked with the city and the private sector to create a dynamic and vibrant urban living environment in our city's core.
- Projects such as the Museum and Mission Reach of the San Antonio River, as well as San Pedro Creek provide attractive green spaces in an urban landscape.
- The Briscoe Western Art Museum opened this past weekend to great acclaim. Chairman Debbie Montford and the board members, including my wife, have created a unique museum.
- Bexar County contributed \$6 million toward the project and the Board raised an additional \$26 million dollars. Thank Jack Guenther, museum Director Steven Karr and most importantly the late Gov. Dolph Briscoe and wife Janey who contributed \$4 million to the museum.
- VIA's modern streetcar will further evolve our Downtown area. The final route has been announced and now the board will make the decision on priority route that is funded by the state, city and VIA. They will stay within their budget.
- We continue to see housing being constructed in and around the Pearl, down South Flores and at Blue Star.

- Graham Weston is transforming the Rand Building into a permanent home for Geekdom.
- HEB announced a \$100 million expansion of their campus eventually adding 1000 jobs and a new 10,000 square foot grocery store. Thank Charles Butt and President Craig Boyan.
- All of these pieces are coming together perfectly to move Downtown into a new era where we can attract the best and brightest of young professional and entrepreneurs who prefer an urban living environment.
- But there is still a major piece missing in attracting the best and brightest – and that is the lack of a first class music scene.

Music

- I mentioned six months ago in a speech to the North Chamber that we need to do more to enhance the music scene in San Antonio.
- Next year we will take a significant step forward when we open the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts in September. Chairman Bruce Bugg and the board have raised more than \$40 million dollars and the County contributed \$100 million to project.

- As San Antonio's performing arts center the Tobin will include state-of-the-art acoustics, an adjustable floor, and 1750 seats. The project will also include a theater and an outside performance area.
- The County just opened the Mission Park Pavilions, an outdoor music venue on the banks of the River by Mission San Jose. They are located on 60 acres parkland that we own.
- The County is presently remodeling our coliseum to make it more music friendly.
- The Aztec theater plans to reopen next year with 2000 seats.
- Independent bands are gaining large audiences through social media and the Internet.
- Blaine Tucker and his partner Matthew Wolff staged the first successful event to bring the new emerging music to us. The Maverick Music Festival held this year featured rising star Gary Clark Jr. and nine other great indie bands including Girl in a Coma.
- More than 3,000 people attended the event. Next year it will expand to two days and include more national and international acts.

- C3, the largest promoter in the country, brought Grammy-nominated Silversun Pickups here in October and will stage Kanye West and Kendrick Lamar at the AT&T Center in December.
- Our best opportunity to rival Austin's South by Southwest music festival would be to stage a major musical festival featuring the new sounds of music along the Mission Reach of the San Antonio River.
- When we opened the final leg of the Mission Reach in October we had bands playing along the river and at Mission Park Pavilions from noon to 8 p.m. We need to build on this success.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The good news is that we still have a net in new jobs, our per capita income is at its highest level of \$36,000, unemployment levels to 6.1% ,and our real estate market is booming.
- But our growth rate of new jobs has slowed down. Out of the top four cities in Texas we rank fourth at a 1.6% growth.
- We lag because a large part of our economy is driven by the military and they have been affected by sequestration, furloughs, and uncertainty about future military budgets.

- Port San Antonio recently announced the layoff of 11 people reflecting concerns about the private sector aerospace companies.
- We have met with officials from Lockheed and Boeing.
- 1000 jobs are at risk with Lockheed Martin with respect to work on the T-56 engine.
- We are seeing steep competition from Tinker AFB in Oklahoma City.
- Boeing just laid off 50 workers because of the slowdown in work on the 787 Dreamliner.
- We must step up our lobbying efforts with Congress and the Pentagon. This has been a major role of the Chamber in the past, and once again you will have to lead the effort.
- I have asked Bexar County Economic Director David Marquez to develop a more focused economic strategy centered around four sectors.
 1. Strengthen our aerospace sector including commercial and military.
 2. Focus on Information Technology and Cyber Security. He is reaching out to John Dixon, president of the Denim Group, to help organize key leaders to develop closer relations with the Air Force and the NSA.

3. Build on our industrial base, the Eagle Ford Shale, vehicle production, other manufacturers.

4. Corporate services.

Bexar BiblioTech

- In August of last year I was inspired by Walter Isaacson's book on Steve Jobs. The world was moving fast to e-books and the virtual world of information over the Internet.
- Yet new libraries are still being built in the traditional brick and mortar buildings filled with stacks of physical books.
- Literacy is no longer the ability to read and comprehend, it is about understanding technology and how it can help us in our day-to-day lives.
- So I assembled a team to begin work on developing an all-digital library in September 2012. We had two objectives, "Break down the barriers to reading" and to provide state of the art technology to residents that do not have access.

- Nobody on our county team had expertise in public libraries and I wanted it that way. We did receive guidance and inspiration from the UTSA Dean of Libraries Krisellen Maloney who is chair of our library advisory board.
- It took us 13 months to take that idea to the actual grand opening of the library on September 14th of this year. It became the nation's first bookless, digital public library.
- BiblioTech is located in Commissioner Chico Rodriguez's district. He has been a great supporter and proponent of the library.
- It is located on the South Side on Pleasanton Road in a building we own. The area's population is 88% economically disadvantaged, 92% Hispanic, and 100% on free lunch program. The vast majority do not have an Internet connection in their homes.
- The library includes an Internet café, children's area, lounge, a community room, two study rooms and a central reading room with 48 desktop computers, laptops, and iPads.
- We have 200 pre-loaded children's e-readers and 600 e-readers that patrons can check out to take home.
- Our resources will raise the level of technology literacy.

- Because we did not have to store physical books we were able to create a library at one-third of the cost of a traditional branch library.
- Our greatest reach to break down the barriers to reading will be through the virtual world.
- Our collection includes 20,000 e-books, magazines, and audio books. All you need to do is get on your tablet go to BexarBibiloTech DOT ORG and register; then you can start borrowing books straight from your smart device or home computer. You do not need a physical library card or have to come to our library.
- My wife, Tracy raised \$500,000 in private funds.
- We have nearly 8,500 registered patrons in less than two months of opening with nearly 7,000 checkouts of e-books.
- We have received publicity all over the world. National Public radio, BBC, Wall Street Journal, French, Japan, Australia television, Today Show, Los Angeles Times.
- Please recognize our team: County Manager David Smith, Thomas Guevara, Laura Cole, Laura Jesse, Cathy Maras and her BCIT team, Ken Villano, Mario Obledo, Librarian Ashley Eklof and Branch Manager Catarina Velasquez and their 15 member team.

CLOSING

- We are in the midst of a cultural renaissance, The Briscoe Museum, the Performing Arts Center, the Alameda, expanded music scene, the improvements to the Museum of Art, the Witte, and the McNay.
- We are creating an urban life style in the center city.
- We are enhancing education through the Mayor's Pre K and the county's Biblio Tech.
- We have completed our connecting ribbon of water from the north to the south, the San Antonio River.
- We are expanding health care through the Bexar County Hospital District.
- We are building a great city, let's not lose the momentum.