



County Judge Nelson W. Wolff

Annual Statement Before Commissioners Court

January 15, 2003

As I have done twice before since becoming Bexar County Judge, today I want to offer to my colleagues and the people of Bexar County a review of our accomplishments in 2002, and an agenda outlining our priorities for the new year.

Economic Development

Economic development issues dominated our 2002 agenda, and will continue to do so this year.

In 2002, we were swinging for the fences, and now in 2003, we need to connect for a few home runs, including one grand slam.

The grand slam that we need to connect on is Toyota.

We must continue to be aggressive in our efforts to land this proposed South Side vehicle assembly plant. If we are successful, it will be the most important private sector economic development in San Antonio's modern history, and we will no longer be thought of as the poor cousin of Dallas and Houston.

Mayor Ed Garza and the City Council have been great partners on this issue. The State of Texas, under the stewardship of Governor Rick Perry, has also provided great leadership in these efforts. The County's primary responsibility will be to build, if necessary, the rail line to the

proposed Toyota plant site. The Bexar County Rail District Board that we appointed last year is off to a fast start, but we must keep up the pressure to approve a specific route and a financing plan and to conclude an agreement with Burlington Northern Santa Fe as part of our incentive package.

Just yesterday, Commissioner Paul Elizondo and I attended the opening session of the 78th Legislature, and we visited with several Legislators regarding the Toyota plant. We talked with them about the need to transfer \$15 million in state funds to the Bexar County Rail District, and we received a very good response.

The leadership of Commissioner Robert Tejeda, in whose district the plant would be located, has been critical, and I look forward to seeing Commissioner Tejeda, a former baseball player, hit that Toyota ball over the center field wall with the bases loaded.

Our next most important economic development project will be to build on the successful opening of the SBC Center. Thanks to the skilled leadership of Commissioners Elizondo and Lyle Larson, the Community Arena was built on time and within the County's budget. Now we need to follow up with a plan to develop other portions of our 172-acre site and to provide the leadership for economic development surrounding the site. We need to complete a joint study with the Spurs on economic development in the surrounding neighborhood. I will look to Commissioner Elizondo to continue his guidance of this project and to Commissioner Tommy Adkisson for his continued leadership for development in the surrounding area. Tommy needs to get on base and Paul, smash one over the right field fence.

On another important economic development issue, the proposed PGA Village, Commissioner Lyle Larson needs to sail the PGA ball over the left field wall. Commissioner Larson has taken the lead in helping to build public support for the project and committed road

and bridge dollars for his district to the project. Now that the City has completed the non-annexation agreement with the developer, we all need to be supportive of Mayor Garza as he works to bring the PGA to San Antonio.

One more key development issue is the downtown convention center hotel. While our friends at City Hall disagreed with our advice that they should have consummated the agreement with Starwood Development and the AFL-CIO Pension Fund to build a Sheraton Hotel many months ago, we should continue to support Mayor Garza and the Council's effort to build the hotel. We will look to Commissioner Adkisson, who represents the downtown area, to help us move this project forward by hitting the fourth home run.

We must continue to be supportive of our small businesses. We had a successful second year in our joint effort with the City in sponsoring the Small, Minority and Women-Owned Business conference. Nearly 3,000 small business owners joined us. In 2002, we also participated in a "Grow Our Own" conference to foster the development of local small business.

As co-chair of the SATAI partnership we have hired a nationally known expert in technology development, Randy Goldsmith, to be our Executive Director. We supported the downtown location of UTSA's Economic Development Center and helped obtain funding for the UT Health Science Center – UTSA Life Sciences Institute. Now we must continue our support for fuel cell technology and its commercialization through the Advanced Engineering Technology Center in the Alamo Community College District.

Facilitating the move of the US Army South headquarters to Fort Sam must be at the top of our list of priorities for working with the military in the coming months. Next month, I will join a working meeting in Puerto Rico, along with City and Chamber of Commerce representatives, to ensure that this transition remains on track.

As chair of a task force coordinating efforts to attract a proposed National Vaccine Facility to Bexar County, I will continue to work with Mayor Garza and other community leaders. To achieve this, we need to develop multi-city partnerships, coordinate with homeland security and biomedical interests, and work with our state and Congressional delegations to establish a national policy justification for locating this facility in San Antonio.

Transportation

Transportation issues are also prominent on our agenda.

In 2002, the San Antonio Mobility Coalition, of which Bexar County is a founding partner, was instrumental in helping our community obtain a \$500,000 grant to do a feasibility study for a possible toll road. We should know by summer if one is feasible.

We got a head start by sending Seth Mitchell, our Intergovernmental Services Manager, to Houston along with other members of SAMCo, who met with toll road authorities there. If we find a feasible route, then we need to create and appoint a Regional Mobility Authority to build and run the toll road.

With our partners in SAMCo, Commissioner Larson and I made a very successful presentation to the Texas Transportation Commission on San Antonio's highway infrastructure needs. We expect that our top projects will be funded, and this year, we need to institutionalize these efforts as truly regional partnerships and to pursue our agenda in Austin aggressively.

Bexar County was a partner along with Travis County and the cities of Austin and San Antonio in the creation of the Austin – San Antonio Commuter Rail District. We appointed Commissioner Tommy Adkisson to the Authority and will look to his leadership in implementing commuter rail.

With advent of cross-border trucking and the possible location of Toyota in San Antonio we also need to revitalize and strengthen our commitment to develop the Laredo – San Antonio Corridor. On January 21st, Commissioner Larson and I will be hosting a meeting of the Laredo-San Antonio Corridor Coalition, and I am grateful to the Commissioner's hard work on promoting the Corridor.

Environmental Issues

Our agenda of environmental issues is long and diverse.

In early December, we signed an Early Action Compact to develop a Clean Air Plan as part of a tri-party agreement with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. We were the first governmental entity to ratify the pact, which will delay the effective date of our "non-attainment" designation by EPA until 2007.

Now we must agree on the control strategies, including possible vehicle inspection requirements that will bring our region back into air quality attainment and we must complete the technical deliverables that are required by EPA.

We must meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act to adopt a Stormwater Management Plan and obtain an NPDES permit to prevent stormwater runoff from polluting our waterways. This will require legislation to give us needed funding authority for implementation.

Bexar County is a founding partner of the Metropolitan Partnership for Energy, and for the past year, I have served as chair. In 2003, we will continue to work with other members to complete and implement a Green Building Program, to facilitate more energy-efficient home mortgages, to develop a Sustainable Energy Awards program, and to conduct an annual Energy Symposium.

This year, we also need to analyze potential improvements in energy efficiency in County public buildings, to meet the mandate of Senate Bill 5 to reduce energy requirements by 5% per year over the next five years. Then we will need to implement appropriate upgrades, retrofits and additions to our facility infrastructure such as HVAC, lighting and environmental controls, both to save energy and to reduce our budget. We are indebted to the work of Commissioner Adkisson who has been a creative and effective leader on energy and environmental issues.

Last year, in response to the excessive rains and concerns over the West Nile Virus, we conducted a pilot program to control mosquitoes in the unincorporated areas of the County. Given the success and relatively low cost of that program, we need to develop and support a permanent program in 2003.

And with grant funding through the Alamo Area Council of Governments, this year we will begin our first door-to-door household hazardous waste collection service for residents of the unincorporated areas. We will need to evaluate this pilot project over the next 12 months and to fine-tune it to prevent pollution and illegal dumping in our County. We should also explore the potential of establishing this program on a permanent basis through some form of City-County cooperation.

Intergovernmental Partnerships

Intergovernmental partnerships have become a major theme on our agenda in recent years.

Last February, we adopted the first-ever “overarching agreement” for City-County Cooperation, including a mission statement, goals and objectives, general policy principles, and a work program listing the specific agreements that we intended to reach and implement during

2002. We approved renewal City-County contracts on library services, animal control and the forensic science lab. We had a successful opening of the SBC Center, which required extensive coordination with the City on traffic control, road improvements and regulation of off-site parking. And we opened the first permanently staffed, round-the-clock emergency operations center in cooperation with the City, and pursued funding for vaccines and other elements of our \$66 million emergency preparedness plan. I am grateful to our County staff for coordinating and managing all of these efforts.

In a few weeks we will adopt the second stage of the City-County Cooperation plan, which will extend the work program through 2003. It will also include a more comprehensive statement of agreed policy principles on cost allocation, which is a key generic element in any City-County agreement.

The renovation of the Frank Wing Municipal Courts Building is underway, and we should be able to initiate our new central booking and magistration system before the end of March. Once that system is fully established and any last-minute kinks are ironed-out, we should explore the potential to increase efficiency in the collection of the fees and charges that are associated with these processes.

The City's One-Stop Development Center is also well along toward completion, with space allocated for appropriate County functions to be located there. We need to approve a plan for the staff restructuring to implement this initiative.

Also in concert with the City, both governments should implement the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on a Bexar County/San Antonio History Center, which has just completed its report. I am grateful to County Clerk Gerry Rickhoff as well as Commissioner Adkisson for their continued leadership on this initiative.

We still need to finalize our agreement with the City of San Antonio on the approval of subdivision plats in the City's extra-territorial jurisdiction. Then we will need to approve similar agreements with the suburban cities that have an ETJ in Bexar County.

We also need to conclude an agreement to use the City's GIS system in our infrastructure-related services, rather than to develop a wasteful and duplicative system.

And, we need to complete the improvements to the "Courthouse Front Yard" facing the Plaza de las Islas under our agreement with the City for the redesign of that parcel.

Bond Issue

Improvements in local infrastructure and County facilities are always high on our agenda.

As you know, our financial projections will allow us to place a general obligation bond issue on the ballot in November. This may be approximately \$100 to \$150 million with no tax increase. Four regional justice centers, a juvenile justice academy, roads, parks, courthouse renovation, technology, a city-county emergency operations center, development of a Bexar County/San Antonio History Center and other possible issues could be addressed.

I believe a centerpiece of our bond program should be to develop a network of decentralized County Service Centers – one in each quadrant of the County – to house the constables and Justice of the Peace Courts, and to replace the unplanned patchwork of other decentralized County offices that are now scattered in leased spaces across the county. And again, this presents a unique opportunity to work with the City in developing a more seamless and transparent structure of local government, by providing for the City's Community Link Service Centers to be located in the same space.

The development of a Juvenile Justice Center on the south side and residential placement and treatment for at-risk youths are both critical to the needs of juveniles who have gotten in trouble and need help. Commissioner Tejeda will provide the leadership to make this happen.

The completion of our long-range plan for restoration and improvement of this Courthouse is important. And incidentally, I would note in this connection that the exterior work on the Courthouse will be completed within the next few months, and that we are also close to starting construction on our Children's Court – the first of its kind in Texas, and only the second in the United States. My wife Tracy has raised \$5 million from SBC and other private sector contributors for the improvement of the Courthouse and its environs. I am grateful to Commissioner Tommy Adkisson and former District Clerk Reagan Greer for their strong support of these efforts. I am also looking forward to working with new District Clerk Margaret Montemayor on these and other issues. I know she will be a valuable partner.

Late last year we created a new regional flood control partnership with the City and the San Antonio River Authority. In 2002, we also completed two segments of the San Antonio River channel improvements - again in partnership with the City and SARA. Design is proceeding on extensions of the river improvements in both the "museum reach" to the north and the "mission reach" to the south.

Now it is important to give life to our new regional flood control arrangement by increasing our commitment to funding drainage projects in other watersheds and tributaries to the San Antonio River. We could do this by submitting a bond package on flood control projects, although this would require the voters to approve a flood control tax increase.

Health and Mental Health

As the parent government of the University Health System and a principal sponsor of Bexar County MH/MR, health and mental health issues are always part of our agenda.

We have made significant improvements in our health care system since the September 2001 Health Care Summit. Our University Hospital will be in the black this year after several years of deficits. However, we are still faced with the need to make capital improvements.

The public-private effort that we created to increase nursing faculty in order to graduate more nurses is off to a good start. It has raised \$2 million, but we need to raise additional funds. We should continue to support Mayor Garza's Fit City campaign and the work of the Health Care Summit Commission chaired by former Mayor Bill Thornton. In addition, we need to support legislation both to fund our trauma care effort appropriately and to link mental health funding directly to clients in need.

General Government

Issues of general government also have a permanent place on our agenda.

Last January, we created a Strategic Management Team to streamline our internal business processes and to institute greater management accountability by granting staff more flexibility over budget and personnel matters while placing more emphasis on managerial results and performance measures. Last year, Bexar County was one of nine public organizations recognized by the Government Finance Officers Association for its use of performance measures in the budget process. We adopted yet another annual budget with a small tax reduction, and we also completed our redistricting, eliminating one justice precinct, which will save about \$300,000 for Bexar County taxpayers. And in an effort to build consensus among our elected

leadership, we retained a consultant to help develop a Countywide Strategic Plan, which will provide the basis for the bond referendum I mentioned earlier.

Of course, 2002 was also an election year and Bexar County and our voters faced challenges in both the primary and general elections. In March, voters were faced with long lines at the polls when the party-run primary polling locations were insufficiently staffed. I am pleased to say that when the County took over the run-off election at the request of both political parties, the result was a well-managed election. Unfortunately, in the general election, we were all once again frustrated by tabulation delays on Election Night.

Today, after an \$8 million investment in our new electronic touch-screen voting machines, I hope those problems will be permanently behind us. Our new voting system is in use today for the early voting period of the San Antonio River Authority election. Dr. David Morgan has joined Elections Administrator Cliff Borofsky in managing this new system. I am grateful to Commissioner Elizondo for his continuing leadership in this area.

Another great challenge in 2003 will be to control the spiraling costs of managing our jail population and of maintaining our employees' health insurance. We must continue to work with Sheriff Ralph Lopez, the judiciary and the Legislature in managing the jail population. We will continue to look to Commissioner Adkisson for leadership on this issue.

To fight the rising cost of health care, we must work with our own employees to help them make better choices, and they must work with us to control costs we cannot sustain. To cut down on administrative costs, we must keep our County Human Resource Information System on track to becoming operational as scheduled by October.

Legislative Program

Finally, the 78th Legislature convened yesterday. Because everything we do as a County must be authorized by either the Texas Constitution or an Act of the Legislature, these sessions are always very important to us.

This session, we will be working with our local delegation to pass legislation related to improving election laws, managing our jail population, protecting the privacy of veterans, protecting the Edwards Aquifer, controlling stormwater runoff, and keeping our air clean.

For the first time, we have worked with the City of San Antonio and other community partners to endorse legislation affecting our community as a whole. These issues include trauma care and mental health care funding, homeland defense and our bioscience industry.

I believe we must also address the issues of governmental integrity and campaign finance reform forthrightly. And to this end, we should work with our legislative delegation to craft and implement needed reforms.

This all adds up to a very long agenda. I have only touched upon what I see as some of its highlights.

But once again, I look forward to working with my colleagues on this Court and all of you on these tasks. And so now, let's get on with the job and make the year 2003 the year we break the home run record.