

COUNTIES

from page A1

about the expansion of the Westpark Tollway, which she said would soon add “multi-functional modes of transportation.” She mentioned the \$2.5 billion expansion of public health services through clinics which serve the county through the Harris Health system. Harris Health operates the Danny Jackson Health Center at 5503 N. Fry Road in Katy.

Briones also said that she received feedback from community leaders that Harris County was not as engaged in the Katy area as it should have been and that she was working to change that. According to Briones, her office has put out a call for partnership projects and the “winners” will be announced after Labor Day. Briones also gave an update on several mobility projects in the Katy area, such as the widening of Clay Road from Peek to Porter and installation of six traffic signals. She said that upcoming projects included the installation of signals at five high-traffic locations, the widening of the intersection of Clay Road and Katy Hockley Cutoff to accommodate larger commercial vehicles and the widening of Clay Road from Porter to Katy Hockley Cutoff.

Briones also spoke about Harris County Commissioners Court’s creation of an apprenticeship program, much of which will focus on the construction industry. In the area of public safety, Briones described the creation of a “retention incentive” for detention officers

and also outlined a program which provides mental health services to women inmates in jail. Briones said that the precinct would be hosting a breakfast in September to facilitate communication with area leaders, including the chamber, school districts and area officials. “We are here to ensure that we are driving the whole region forward,” she said.

Waller County Judge Trey Duhon then took the stage and thanked Buckingham and the GLO for the \$8.7 million check that Waller County received for three flood mitigation projects. Duhon focused his remarks on the growth in his area. “We’ve known for a long time that growth is coming; now it is here and it is exponential and explosive and beyond what anybody expected or could have imagined,” he said. Waller County currently has a population of around 65,000 residents – but at present, there are between 35,000 and 40,000 homes under varying stages of construction within the county, he said. He stated that earlier projections showed that the county would double in population by 2040; Duhon predicted that would happen before the end of this decade. Waller County has put together a strategic plan, Duhon said, which will add green spaces, trails and bike paths to serve these new residents. “That is now the challenge – ramping everything up

and streamlining processes,” he said. Duhon described how the county’s tax base had increased 22 per cent, with over \$1 billion in new value on the ground, including residential and commercial.

The county’s proposed budget, which will be voted on in the county commissioners court meeting on September 6, will add 19 new employees to the county payroll will provide a five percent salary increase for employees and will absorb the cost increases for county employees’ health insurance. Elected officials will also see a salary increase. If the budget passes, Duhon said, it will lower the tax rate another 2.5 cents.

Duhon also reported that Waller County is trying to build a new courthouse, and that in the interim, the county offices will temporarily move into a property that the county purchased on FM 1488.

The judge also discussed Waller County’s first-ever mobility bond, which will appear on the November ballot. The bond will address traffic capacity and safety issues, Duhon said, and “will allow us to address a lot of programs at once.” He said that \$108 million of the bond was tagged for projects in Waller County Precinct 4, which includes the Sunterra subdivision immediately north of old Katy. Duhon concluded his remarks by mentioning broadband development, which he described as a high

priority and he also acknowledged the need for continued commercial development in the area, through the Waller County EDC.

Fort Bend County Commissioner Vincent Morales, who serves the county’s Precinct 1 in the northern part of the county, highlighted the development of the county’s new multi-purpose center – The Epicenter, which opened in mid-August at 28505 Southwest Freeway in Rosenberg, adjacent to the Fort Bend County Fairgrounds. The 230,000 square-foot facility has an annex of 17,700 square feet; a 17,000-square foot conference center; and a 36,000-square foot pavilion which can be used for livestock, equestrian or agricultural events. The facility has 10,000 seats, Morales said – 8500 permanent seats and 1500 seats which can be added to the floor. “This is an asset to the county which will serve for many years to come,” Morales said. He said that a top-ranked ESPN boxing event will be broadcast live nationally and that the program would also feature a segment on Fort Bend County for the nation to see. He said wrestling was coming to the facility as well as a gun show and other events. Morales said that the Epicenter would also give a home to area school districts who need a place to hold their graduation ceremonies, and that Fort Bend ISD and Lamar CISD will be holding

their 2024 graduations there.

Morales also spoke on Fort Bend County’s upcoming mobility and parks bonds, which are on the November ballot. “This bond will create a more mobile and safe Fort Bend County,” he said. Morales gave a brief history of past mobility bond issues and stated that it is important to continue to have a mobility bond every two to three years in order to keep up with growth. It takes about three years to design a project, to acquire the right of way, and to relocate utilities before a shovel ever hits the ground, he said. The proposed bond package contains road maintenance and traffic safety projects in each of the Fort Bend County precincts, Morales said. The bond would also fund “smart signal” technology which would help to adjust the timing of traffic signals for optimum vehicle flow, he said.

The \$153 million parks bond would add new amenity programs and would improve existing park facilities throughout the county, including the addition of fields for soccer, football and pickleball. Morales described the “disc golf” course at Jones Creek Park which he said is attracting a lot of attention from the Houston area. Proposed park improvements include improved lighting, improved public restrooms, and improved parking facilities, as well as an assortment of additional trails.

KISD

from page A1

members signed up to speak during the public comments section of the meeting; in a session lasting over four hours, about 80 actually spoke on the parental authority/gender fluidity policy and another five spoke on other non-agenda items. About 15 of the speakers during the public comments session supported the measure while the remainder of the participants opposed it.

Pro-policy speakers included parents and community members who commended the board for their actions, as well as local physician Dr. Steven Hotze, who said that the policy would “put a stop to Katy schools promoting and propagandizing the trans philosophy.” Opponents speaking against the measure included former board trustee George Scott, who expressed his concerns on the legal ramifications of the policy; Texas State Representative John Rosenthal, who was also “deeply concerned” about its legality and the policy’s impact on schools; two clinical psychologists who described high rates of depression, suicide and homelessness among LGBTQ students; several current and former teachers who were concerned about the trust between teachers and students; and many present and former KISD students and other community members.

The board went into closed session for about an hour following the public comments but returned to vote on the consent agenda and then to discuss and vote on the “parental authority/gender fluidity” policy.

Voting for the measure

were board president Victor Perez, and trustees Morgan Calhoun, Amy Thieme and Mary Ellen Cuzela, all recently elected to the board; voting against the policy were veteran board members Rebecca Fox, Dawn Champagne and Lance Redmon.

Board president Victor Perez pulled the policy from the consent agenda so that board members could discuss the measure. He prefaced the discussion by saying he wanted to clarify some misunderstandings and mischaracterizations about the policy, stating that it does not “out” anyone. “We are here to educate,” he said. The biggest area of disagreement surrounding the policy, he said, was the role of parents. “We should not err on the side of concealing things from parents.”

Champagne said she had been contacted by many teachers and she had not heard one teacher who wants the burden of reporting this information to parents. While she said she supported the majority of the policy, she questioned how the process would work among all district staff personnel including bus drivers and other district employees. Perez responded that the details of the implementation are up to the district administration to define, not the school board. Champagne also talked about the possibility of child abuse as a result of this policy. She also described She also said that the legal citations in support of the policy “were not strong” and “none were about pronouns.” Gender fluidity should not be taught in schools, she added.

Thieme recommended solutions that could take the burden off teachers, including the hiring of district chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. She said that she supported the policy because “the problem is here.”

Fox said she was concerned about putting an additional burden on teachers in the implementation of the program. She moved to table the policy until more information could be gathered, recommending a focus group to obtain the feedback of community stakeholders and requesting a comprehensive legal brief that could be reviewed by all seven board members. Fox was concerned with potential legal liability for the district.

Board member Lance Redmon stated that “Good policy takes time” and also recommended that the policy be tabled pending further study. Redmon reiterated concerns with the potential legal ramifications of the policy.

Cuzela said the district could be at legal risk if they did not enact the policy.

The motion to table the policy was defeated 4-3, with Perez, Cuzela, Calhoun and Thieme voting against and Redmon, Fox and Champagne voting for it.

After further discussion, including heated exchanges among Calhoun, Champagne and Fox, the policy was approved by the 4-3 vote.

Similar policies have been approved elsewhere in Texas by school boards in Keller ISD and Grapevine-Coffeyville ISD, both near Dallas. According to an article in the June 29,

2023 edition of the New York Post (<https://nypost.com/2023/06/29/keller-text-as-schools-ban-lgbtq-pronoun-bathroom-accommodations/>), Keller ISD’s policy, enacted in late June 2023, is already facing a legal challenge from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Grapevine-Colleyville’s policy was adopted in August 2022, according to the Dallas Express (<https://dallasexpress.com/education/local-school-board-adopts-new-gender-policies/>)

In other action, the consent agenda approved unanimously by the board included a resolution to declare a “good cause exception” for HB 3, which requires an armed security officer at each campus by September 1st. The “good cause” exception request would be based on two factors: the lack of staff to fill the security officer positions and the financial impact of the requirement. At the August 24th work

study meeting KISD General Counsel Justin Graham said that the district did not currently have these officer positions staffed – needing about 40 to 50 more officers -- and would not be able to meet the deadline. The district plans to use Level 3 security guards at some campuses in order to meet the state mandate.

The next meetings of the KISD board will be a work study meeting on September 18th and a regular board meeting on September 25th.

Water District Notice of Public Hearing on Tax Rate

The Brookshire-Katy Drainage District will hold a public hearing on a proposed tax rate for the year 2023-2024 on September 11, 2023 at 7:00 PM at 1111 Kenney Street, Brookshire, Texas 77423.

Your individual taxes may increase at a greater or lesser rate, or even decrease, depending on the tax rate that is adopted and on the change in the taxable value of your property in relation to the change in taxable value of all other property. The change in the taxable value of your property in relation to the change in the taxable value of all other property determines the distribution of the tax burden among all property owners.

Visit [Texas.gov/Property Taxes](https://www.texas.gov/Property-Taxes) to find a link to your local property tax database on which you can easily access information regarding your property taxes, including information about proposed tax rates and scheduled public hearings of each entity that taxes your property.

FOR the proposal:	ARNOLD ENGLAND, PAT KEELING, DAVID WELCH, BLAKE BECKENDORFF, JOHN CHISUM
AGAINST the proposal:	None
PRESENT and not voting:	None
ABSENT:	None

The following table compares taxes on an average residence homestead in this taxing unit last year to taxes proposed on the average residence homestead this year.

	Last Year	This Year
Total tax rate (per \$100 of value)	<u>0.065430</u> /\$100	<u>0.060420</u> /\$100
	Adopted	Proposed
Difference in rates per \$100 of value	\$ <u>-0.0050</u> /\$100	
Percentage increase/decrease in rates(+/-)	<u>-7.66</u> %	
Average appraised residence homestead value	\$ <u>392,034</u>	\$ <u>458,428</u>
General homestead exemptions available (excluding 65 years of age or older or disabled person’s exemptions)	\$ <u>0</u>	\$ <u>0</u>
Average residence homestead taxable value	\$ <u>329,034</u>	\$ <u>458,428</u>
Tax on average residence homestead	\$ <u>256.51</u>	\$ <u>276.98</u>
Annual increase/decrease in taxes if proposed tax rate is adopted and percentage of decrease	\$ <u>20.47</u>	<u>-7.98</u> %

NOTICE OF TAXPAYERS’ RIGHT TO ELECTION TO REDUCE TAX RATE

If the district adopts a combined debt service, operation and maintenance, and contract tax rate that would result in the taxes on the average residence homestead increasing by more than eight percent, the qualified voters of the district by petition may require that an election be held to determine whether to reduce the operation and maintenance tax rate to the voter-approval tax rate under Section 49.23603, Water Code..

The 86th Texas Legislature modified the manner in which the voter-approval tax rate is calculated to limit the rate of growth of property taxes in the state.

COUNTRY CLEANERS

SAME DAY SERVICE

IN BY 9 – OUT BY 5!

Pickup and delivery available

On Site Alterations

Lowest Prices in Town!

SUMMER SEASON

SALE

10% OFF

with prepaid orders

LIMITED TIME ONLY!
Not valid with any other offers.
Expires 8/31/2023

281-391-8700

6193 Highway Blvd.
In Tiger Square * Katy

Mon-Fri 7 am to 7 pm • Sat 8 am to 5 pm

Family Owned & Operated
OVER 25 YEARS EXPERIENCE

BEST of KATY OFFICIAL PICKUP AND DELIVERY SERVICE