The Commissioner's Correspondence

News from the office of Jen Crownover, Comal County Commissioner Pct 4

Edition 1: 03.11.15

A note from Jen: Just a few things to chew on...

I have to say, 2015 is off to a big start! So far, I've got my office and website set up, established office hours out in the County in both Canyon Lake and Spring Branch areas, and attended some training conferences, as well as taking care of the day-to-day duties of being your Commissioner.

In the course of the work, conversation frequently starts around two main topics: water and land rights. Lots of questions arise. In this edition, I will give you a few points to consider on both.

On Water: This past week, it was announced that the Groundwater Conservation District (GCD) Bill was filed by both Senator Donna Campbell and Representative Doug Miller. I am personally proud that this is now on the table before the Senate and House of Representatives, because I worked for over 3 years, alongside many other stakeholders, to help draft this bill into something that all of the stakeholders could live with. (*continued*)

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Comal County Recycling

Departmental Highlighter

by James Tart, Director, Comal County Rural Recycling 830.643.3781

Pictured left to right: Rene Perez, Edwin Perez, Omar Guerrero, Mike Taylor, Carlos DeLeCerda, Roland Martinez, Dennis Koepp, and James Tart

Our first main function is to serve the citizens of Comal County in recycling materials that are being called for in the markets today. Comal County Recycling is dedicated to working with our citizens to provide a free, professional recycling collection service that helps with the resource recovery of Comal County and the State of Texas.

Our second main function is to reduce what is actually going to the landfills and reuse the products and materials.

The Comal County Recycling Center accepts trees and brush, grinds it into wood-chip mulch and gives it away to the public at no charge.

We accept large metal items and turn them in for recycling. For a minimal fee, we accept tires (from pick-up trucks and cars) and transfer them to Cemex, where they are used for fuel in their incinerators to produce concrete.

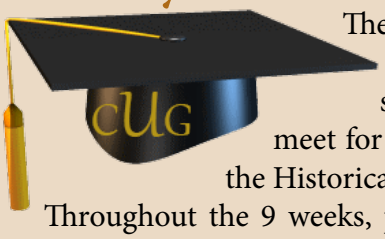
Comal County started recycling approximately 15-years ago, as a small MRF (Material Recovery Facility). Initially, items collected were separated, utilizing the labor of County Inmates and a few county employees. The county had some collection sites that were available, but unmanned and unsupervised. This operation was costly, time consuming, and problematic.

Six years after opening, Comal County purchased a fleet of compacting garbage trucks and went to a single-stream (all mixed together) recycling program.

We have different daily drop-off locations that cover Comal County. The County stations these trucks at these sites, and our drivers assist citizens as they drop off their commodities.

We collect plastic, glass, (*continued*)

County Government University



The 2015 University of County Government course is in full swing! This year's University started on February 19 and will continue to meet for a total of 9 weeks every Thursday evening in the Historical Courthouse.

Throughout the 9 weeks, participants will hear from Elected Officials, Appointed Officials, and various departments of Comal County.

If you are interested in participating in the next University of County Government, please contact Commissioners Court at 830.221.1106 or via email: rulech@co.comal.tx.us.

Other Learning Opportunities in the County:

Did you know? There is also a Citizen Sheriff Academy and a Citizen Fire Academy? All 3 programs are offered annually, free of charge, in the Spring, and open to all County Residents.

For Citizen Sheriff Academy, please contact the Community Resource Team at 830.643.5841, or call the Sheriff Office main line 830.620.3400. For Citizen Fire Academy, please contact the Canyon Lake Fire Department at 830.907.2922.

Departmental Highlight: Comal County Recycling, *continued from page 1...*

tin, steel, cardboard, aluminum, newspaper, white office paper, phone books, regular books, and magazines, and transfer the materials to the MRFs in San Antonio for separation and distribution to different markets of all the recycling materials.

The Comal County Recycling Center separates the aluminum cans collected by staff and bale them to sell in the market.

Comal County Recycling recently started collecting electronic goods, via an "ECS Refining" program through the Alamo Area Council of Governments. Since the introduction of this program, we have been able to secure grants for a dock, dock door, a plastic wrapping machine and have installed them for use. Our E-Recycling program takes about 1,500 square feet of space in our Recycling Center Warehouse for operation and storage of the electronics for shipment.

This year, the E-Recycling Program that Comal County Recycling operates has the gained the full support of Commissioners Court. We have begun marketing the program to educate citizens of our capabilities, and the positive impact that E-Recycling can have on our environment.

This program also follows the Recycling Resource Recovery goals of the State of Texas, by keeping electronics out of our landfills. Our E-Recycling Program has already shipped out over 70 tons of electronics to ECS Refining. We look forward to increasing our E-Recycling capacity, and recycling them in a safe, professional manner, that helps protect our environment.

Our third main function is to continue to educate our citizens in on what is recyclable, which materials have markets that are being reused and closing the Recycling Loop. We also try to inform them about "why" certain items are not recyclable today.

We are committed to finding new markets for recyclables, and always improving efficiency in our program, customer service, and citizen participation.

Feel free to come by anytime and discover for yourself what we do at the Comal County Recycling Center. We are located at 281 Resource Drive, New Braunfels, TX, 78132.

Meet Jeff Kelley, Our New Emergency Management Coordinator

Jeff joined the Comal County team in January. He came to us from Orange County, Texas, where he served as their Emergency Management Coordinator for a number of years. In his experience there, he handled a broad range of emergencies, including chemical plant explosions, chemical spills, and a range of storms, including Hurricane Ike.

He is currently in the process of reviewing and revamping our own emergency plans, and is helping to coordinate a drill, scheduled later this week.

On March the 13th Comal County will conduct a joint exercise with the (USACE) US Army Corps/Canyon Dam as well as GBRA, WORD, the City of New Braunfels and Guadalupe County. The exercise will be designed to test the ability of USACE to rapidly share emerging information with its downstream partners during a crisis situation. Several means of communication will be tested including Web based systems. The exercise has been under development for several months and there is still one planning meeting to take place next Tuesday. Comal County Emergency Management is excited to have the opportunity to work with our Federal partners at the lake and look forward to Friday.

WANTED:

There is an opening on the Board for Emergency Service District #4

Qualifications: Must live within Service District (see green area on the map) and have a desire to serve ESD. Fire/EMS and business experience a plus! Please apply by emailing a letter indicating your desire to serve, accompanied by your resume. See my webpage for more details.

A note from Jen, continued from page 1

In light of recent headlines in Hays County, I'm especially proud of the vision and foresight that my fellow stakeholders showed in drafting this bill. If anything, the stories in our neighboring county have served as a trial for our own bill in how it would hold up in such an environment as they are experiencing. The bill we are proposing would protect Comal County from several of the headaches that our neighbors to the North are currently facing in their unregulated areas. Well owners in Comal County can rest assured, once this bill is passed, that their wells will be protected equally, and that these soft opportunities don't exist for people to capitalize on and sell our water elsewhere.

While this does not solve our thirst for more water, it takes a step to protect what lies beneath our feet. As we move into the future, and welcome new neighbors at an alarming pace, we need to also look to new solutions for our water shortages, which starts with our own personal conservation, but also incorporates bigger visions, such as the potential for big projects, like desalination projects, which could really start to SOLVE the problem of our water shortages, rather than just working for the "now," or kicking the can down the road.

On Land Rights: Another recent challenge faced, specifically in Pct 4, was between the developer of a potential Senior apartment development and neighboring residents. This was a particularly contentious issue, and still is. The developer approached Commissioners Court, well before I took office, to draft a resolution of support for a proposed apartment development. The developer intended to apply to the State for Federal Tax Credits, which is highly competitive, to build the complex at the corner of FM306 and FM3424. The property is approximately 30 acres, and due to the topography of the site and other considerations, the complex would take up a footprint of 6 acres.

The outcry from neighbors and neighboring subdivisions was intense. The developer hosted a meeting before the proposed resolution would be approved to explain the parameters of the proposed development. While a few people walked away from the meeting with an understanding of and support for the proposed development, most walked away still opposed to it. Several turned up the next day in Commissioners Court to express their disapproval.

Instead of moving forward with the resolution, the developer graciously asked the Court to take no action. He said he could not ask the Court to approve the resolution of support after hearing the community "loud and clear" in their opposition to the project. He said he would continue with his application to the State, and would continue to work with the community to earn their confidence and support for his development, which he said was much needed in the community, based on his research of the area.

I have fallen under much scrutiny for not opposing this development outright. And while I have listened to the opposition and their many reasons, I have also seen, first hand, the need for this development, and heard from many in support of it. I have also extensively researched the issue of property rights in the unincorporated areas of our county, and I realize that there is little to nothing we can do, by law as it currently stands, to prohibit such developments from being built.

One such support story lives around the corner from the site. She called my office the other day and was so excited about the opportunity to live in such a place--she asked when she could apply to move in. She currently lives with her daughter and family, because she is on a fixed income and cannot afford a respectable place of her own, and enjoys being close to her family, and active in her grandkids lives. She proudly shared with me that she and her small dog are very independent, she goes to church, she's involved in the community as a volunteer, she shops for her own groceries. She can't afford her own home, but would enjoy living on her own while she is still able. She said she also had several friends who were excited at such an opportunity, and looked forward to living in the apartments.

The bottom line is that this is an unincorporated area of the county. Barring some degree of incorporation, there is nothing we can do to keep developers out or pick what goes into certain pieces of property or others. The only thing we can control is what lies within our own property lines. Regardless of the outcry, or the reasons, the County is simply powerless in this respect (with the small exceptions of automotive junkyards or sexually oriented businesses). This is called property rights, and Texas is a very strong state for such rights.

The resolution that was on the agenda drew a lot of criticism. In all reality, the resolution could neither make or break this development. There is really nothing the County can do to stop it from happening. The developer chose to move forward with the application. If he wins against the other applications in his category (which is exclusively comprised of rural apartment developments in underserved areas with high percentages of fixed income seniors below the median income level), then this development could still move forward.

The developer is hosting another meeting with the community on Monday, March 23, at 6p.m. at the Ty Preston Memorial Library. I hope that this time we have a community of open hearts ready to be part of the solution and help make this a wonderful blessing to our area of the world. Remember, what is being proposed could be far worse. Which would you rather have?

Do you remember why you moved here? Yep...others are taking note...and packing their bags, too.

The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.
~Helen Keller

The LAST DAY to register to vote in the MAY 9 elections is APRIL 9.

WHAT'S ON THE BALLOT? None of the elections in May are County elections. The County contracts with these entities so they don't have to lease equipment and handle the election on their own.

EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT #4 is holding an election for the purpose of authorizing an increase in the maximum ad valorem tax rate not to exceed ten cents ($0.10) per $100 valuation.
For more information: myccesd.com/election-2015

COMAL ISD has an election for trustees for Single Member Districts 1, 2, 5, and unexpired term of 6 and a bond election.
For more information: www.comalisd.org/Board_of_Trustees/Board_Of_Trustees_Election.asp and comalisd.org/bond2015

CITY OF BULVERDE is having an election for a council member and for Home Rule.
For more information: ci.bulverde.tx.us/default.aspx?name=Election_Information

CITY OF NEW BRAUNFELS does NOT contract with the County for their elections, but it should be noted that there are two city council races on the ballot: District 3 and District 4.
For more information: http://www.nbtexas.org/index.aspx?nid=1183

This information is provided as a courtesy.
Any questions regarding the above should be directed to each specific entity.

Need to get in touch with Jen?
It's easy!

EMAIL:
JenCrownover@MyComalCounty.com

PHONE:
830.221.1104

WEB:
www.co.comal.tx.us/Comal_County_Precinct_4.htm

FACEBOOK:
www.facebook.com/ComalCountyPct4

Also, there is a calendar on my website that features my Canyon Lake and Spring Branch hours. Come see me at either location if it is more convenient!

Dates of Interest:

March 10	First day to apply for a Ballot by Mail
March 13	Emergency Training Exercise at Canyon Lake Dam
March 26	James C. Curry Nature Opens! Join us for the "Inaugural Walk" at 5:30p.m.; 1889 Skyline Dr, Canyon Lake
March 28	Comal County Sheriff's office FREE Window Etching Clinic from 9a.m.-1p.m. at the Comal County Goodwin Annex *Contact Sgt. Cardenas, Public Awareness Coordinator with the Sheriff's CRT at (830) 643-5846 or soarcs@co.comal.tx.us*
March 31	2nd Pymt Installments due for Over 65/Disabled Person Exemptions on property taxes
April 3	County Holiday--Good Friday/Founder's Day
April 7	Sheriff's Tax Sale of Properties, 10a.m. in the First Floor Courtroom at the Historical Courthouse
April 9	Last day to register to vote for the May 9 Elections
April 30	Last day to request a Ballot by Mail
April 27-May 5	Early Voting for May 9 Elections
May 9	Election Day; last day to receive Ballot by Mail

Jen's County Hours:

Canyon Lake
Fire Station #1
1074 Scissortail
April 7th & 21st
May 5th & 19th
10a.m.-3p.m.

Bulverde/
Spring Branch
Fire Station #2
2016 Puter Creek Dr
March 10th & 24th
April 28th
May 12th & 26th
10a.m.-3p.m.

Comal County Recycling Schedule ~ For more information: co.comal.tx.us/rec.html

Mondays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Thursdays	Fridays	Saturdays
6:30a.m.-11:30a.m. Spring Branch Fire Station @ 281/311	6:30a.m.-11:30a.m. Garden Ridge City Hall on FM 3009 AND Canyon Lake Fire Station #2 (Oblate/Startzville)	6:30a.m.-11:30a.m. VFW in Sattler River Road @ FM 2673	6:30a.m.-11:30a.m. Mystic Shores Boat Ramp 22100 N Cranes Mill Road	6:30a.m.-11:30a.m. Bulverde at the JP #2 Building	8:00a.m.-noon at the Recycling Center
		Also, you can come by the Recycling Center anytime Tuesday-Friday from 7:00a.m.-noon or 12:30p.m.-3p.m. to drop off recyclables or pick up mulch.			