



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Lockhart City Council approves 2019-2020 budget, tax rate**

The Lockhart City Council on Tuesday, September 17 approved an annual operating budget for the fiscal year of October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020 that prioritizes the continued improvement of public safety and quality of life for Lockhart citizens.

The \$35,261,216 in planned expenditures from all funds for the fiscal year include updates to Lockhart city parks, the acquisition of additional police and EMS equipment, and improvements to various city streets.

“The primary focus of this operating budget is to fund continuation of existing programs/service levels and properly respond to the increased demand for services from a growing community,” Lockhart City Manager Steve Lewis said.

Park updates include a major facelift at Lions Park and at the youth baseball fields, both of which will receive new playgrounds with unique themes.

Public safety improvements include completing and furnishing a new fire station and the purchase of a new radio system that will improve communication to areas where reception has traditionally been poor.

The new two-way radio system is essential to keeping police, firefighters, EMS and civilians safe in dangerous situations while maintaining optimal public safety and emergency response reliability. Radios can help EMS personnel request police help, can help police request backup and additional help from other first responders, and allow firefighters to communicate their exact location inside a burning structure while trying to help others to safety.

“First responders cannot afford to lose their communication ability during a critical time of an incident. A disruption of communication may put firefighters, police, EMS personnel and civilians at risk. The new radios will have the latest technology and be functional for years to come,” Lewis said.

“In the fire service we always want to know where first responders are within a building involved in fire. The primary source for this communication is through the two-way radio. The new radios will be able to withstand the conditions on the fireground to provide constant accountability of personnel.”

Lockhart’s new fire station, which is slated to be completed in October, will be located at 1911 Borchert Drive. It will allow access to fire administration and be accessible to all, remedying the situation at the current fire station downtown, which has all administrative offices on the second floor with no elevator access. When fully staffed, having a second fire station for the future growth of Lockhart may improve the city’s Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating, and distribute fire resources evenly throughout the city to improve response times and service to citizens.

City of Lockhart/Caldwell County EMS is also receiving a boost with the purchase of a new ambulance that will replace one of its older units under a cost-sharing agreement with the county. Its EMS is one area in which Lockhart leads many cities its size, staffing its ambulances with two paramedics instead of one emergency medical technician and one paramedic, enhancing its ability to save lives.

The ambulances serving the area are listed with the State of Texas as Mobile Intensive Care Units (MICU). The classification is the highest an EMS service can obtain from the state.

“Our medical direction and protocols match the highest standard across central Texas and exceed many national metrics,” Lewis said. “Even with these assets in place, we still need the capability to safely respond to a call for help. Having new ambulances meets this need by providing dependable transport and a safe environment to perform the many delicate tasks associated with providing lifesaving care.”

The city’s spending plan includes a 4-cent increase on property taxes. The 2018-2019 tax rate of .710700 per \$100 valuation decreased by 6.65 cents to an effective rate of .644200 cents per \$100 valuation due to an increase in property values.

The 2019-2020 tax rate will be .684200 per \$100 valuation.

“It was the recommendation of staff to propose an increase for council’s consideration to allow for inflation adjustment to wages and other expenditures that were previously removed during the initial budget preparation,” Lewis said. “It was noted during tax rate discussion that property tax costs for an average home would be reduced by approximately \$40 per year with the tax rate. This increased funding is imperative to the City’s goal of maintaining and improving service levels at the same time we are continuing to experience growth.”

The budget is balanced with revenues exceeding expenditures by approximately \$25,000 in the general fund.

In addition to the budget, there was a general consensus on the city council to use some fund balance resources for street resurfacing and maintenance, and additional sidewalk improvements.

“In recent years we’ve spent about \$400,000 per year in street resurfacing and maintenance. With the action tonight adopting the budget plus the commitment to use unassigned fund balance, we would effectively double the street resurfacing budget next year,” Lewis said.

The full 2019-2020 budget and tax rate can be viewed at <http://www.lockhart-tx.org/page/article/27>.

