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Belton population tops 18,000

By Cedric Iglehart
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A new population figure for the City of Belton was established during a special meeting of the Belton City Council last Thursday night. The council unanimously passed a resolution stating our official population to be 18,277, as of January 1, 2007.

"We took a very conservative approach in determining this," said City Manager Sam Listi. "We used all of the same occupancy numbers from the 2000 Census. We didn't count houses built last December because they aren't occupied yet so we're happy with the number."

The estimate began with the population of 14,623 from the aforementioned census and several other figures were added including new dwelling unit additions through both construction and annexation over the past six years.

"There was no fuzzy math involved other than the fact that I worked on it," joked City Planner Fred Morris during his presentation to the council.

The new population is about 25 percent higher than the 2000 Census, which amounts to about 3,654 new residents. That breaks down to an average of 609 new residents per year since 2000 or annual growth rate of 4 percent.

Listi said the city will make a request to the Texas Department Of Transportation to change the city limit signs to reflect the new population figure.

The council also held the first of two public hearings for the proposed annexation of more acreage into the city limits. The targeted areas consist of a voluntary request by Brandon Fogle to bring in five lots of Belton Lake Estates on FM 439 (Area 1) and approximately 493.6 acres along the Lampasas River Corridor, east from the city limits and south of the river to points east of Armstrong Road (Area 2).

Morris presented the municipal service plans for those areas, which detailed the services to be provided to residents of those areas upon annexation. Should the council decide to bring in the new acreage, residents of those areas are entitled to receive city services including fire and police protection, animal control, code enforcement, water distribution and wastewater collection.

After the acrimonious tone of the comments made during last year's hearings, which resulted in the involuntary annexation of over 1,099 acres, Mayor Jim Covington assured those who signed to speak that your thoughts were appreciated.

"This public hearing process is an opportunity for us to hear your input and an opportunity for you to analyze the service plan we propose to you," he said. "I assure you no decisions have been made one way or another."

He added that following last year's public hearings several adjustments and deletions were made to the study areas prior to their annexing.

Although several signed up, only three people spoke concerning the involuntary annexing of Area 2. The next hearing will be held on March 27 during the regular meeting of the city council, beginning at 5:30 p.m. at the Harris Community Center.

In other business, the council unanimously approved:

The authorization for the city manager to enter into a contract with Architectural Edge Inc. to prepare planning and design services for the renovation of City Hall in the not-to-exceed amount of \$4,300. This is the first step toward utilizing the former police station building in Yettie Polk Park, vacated by the Central Texas Council of Governments last year, to alleviate space issues at the current City Hall building on Water Street.

A revision of the Personnel Policy Manual regarding Severe Weather Policy. This gives the city manager the authority to close city offices during severe weather and charges accrued leave for time missed during severe weather to non-essential/non-emergency personnel.

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