



Message from County Judge Ramon Garcia



Fall is a busy time for everyone in Hidalgo County. Families are growing accustomed to the routine of the new school year. The university is booming with life, activity, and the excitement of a new semester.

For Hidalgo County leaders, the beginning of the fall season brings a critical county responsibility: adopting an annual budget.

A government's budget is a strong indicator of leaders' vision and plans for the future; it shows priorities for the community. For Hidalgo County, the top priority is to continue to maintain the health and safety of our residents in a cost-efficient manner that does not raise taxes.

As Hidalgo County's population continues to grow at a faster rate than most areas in the country, we are faced with the challenge of providing the same high level of service for our expanding community. The commissioners and I continue to meet these growing needs, while staying adamant about not raising taxes.



Commissioners Court unanimously passed the 2017 budget and tax rate on Sept. 27.

I am very proud of the fact that Hidalgo County has not raised taxes for the 15th consecutive year; the 59 cent tax rate will remain the same.

Furthermore, we have been able to develop a healthy "rainy day" fund, or reserve fund balance, despite the unpredictable natural disasters we have faced in recent years.

When I took office in 2003, Hidalgo County's reserve fund balance was dangerously low at \$702,648, even though the county had increased taxes in 2000, 2001, and 2002. Had a natural disaster impacted Hidalgo County then, the results would have been catastrophic.

Today, after 15 years of no tax increases, our "rainy day" fund balance is over \$26 million, or 14.7 percent of the operating budget. With a fund balance of this size, we are in compliance with budget policy that requires us to keep between 10 to 15 percent of our operating budget in our fund balance. The healthy fund balance also helps us secure better bond ratings and interest rates that will be needed for future county projects.

I am proud to say the county is in the best financial position since I first took office in 2003. During my tenure, the county has faced hurricanes, record-setting rainfall, and even a major national economic recession.

However, our priority has not wavered. We will continue to provide services that will better the well-being of our citizens, without incurring additional taxes.

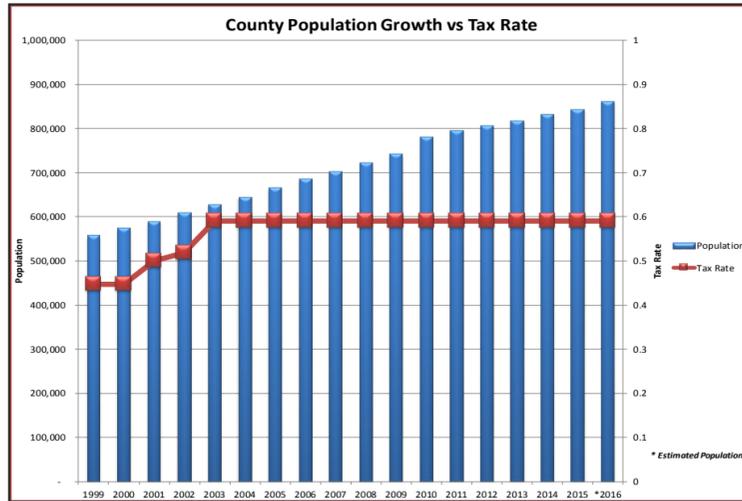
Commissioners Court passes balanced budget: 14.7% in reserve and no tax increase for 15th consecutive year!

After months of meetings, workshops and planning, Hidalgo County has adopted a budget for 2017.

Despite a growth in population and expenditures, county leaders have maintained a 59 cent tax rate for the 15th consecutive year.

County Growth

Hidalgo County has faced an extreme growth in population since the turn of the century. In the year 2000, the county population was 569,463. By 2015, that number had grown close to a million. County officials are faced with the task of meeting the needs of a unique population growth while prioritizing maintaining a static tax rate.



Since 2003, when County Judge Ramon Garcia first took office, Commissioners Court has made it a priority to run county government without increasing the tax rate, even though the population has grown by over 200,000 people during that same time period, according to the U.S. Census.

This includes law enforcement, the jail, juvenile detention, and judicial entities.

A growing population means:
• A larger population in our county jail.

- A rising indigent population.
- An increase of filing and official records maintenance.

"I am proud to say the county is in the best financial position since I first took office in 2003."
- County Judge Ramon Garcia

What does a growing population mean for the county budget?

The largest portion of county funds, roughly half of the budget, is allocated to judicial and public safety.

Furthermore, the county provides other services, like emergency management, holds elections, and provides public health services for the community.

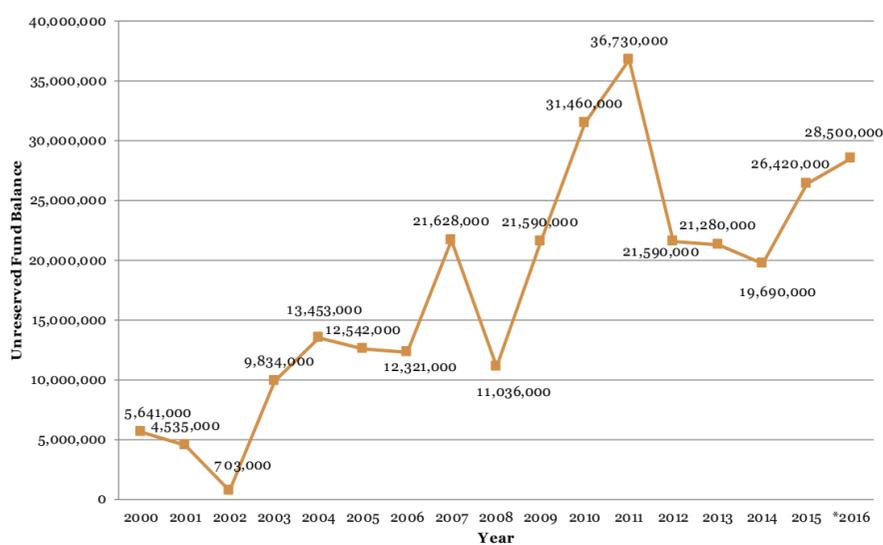
- A heavier workload for our judicial system.
- A need for additional law enforcement.
- A heavier use of roads and bridges.

Meeting these expanding needs, while maintaining a constant tax rate, has not been easy.

However, it has been accomplished, again, for this budget cycle.

Budget cont. on back page.

Hidalgo County Unreserved Fund Balance



2008: Hurricane Dolly
2011-2014: Stagnant Appraisal Value

2009-2011: FEMA Reimbursement and Jail Landmark Settlement

* Projected End Year Unreserved Fund Balance

County Health Dept. offers flu vaccine

Now that we are in the midst of the flu season, the Hidalgo County Health Department advises all residents to take precautions during the flu season.

Take protective measures!

Cover your cough: cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands. Place all tissues in waste basket, and wash hands

with soap and warm water for 20 seconds or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner.

Get immunized!

You or your child can be vaccinated at the doctor's office or your

local health department. For additional information please visit our website.



Hidalgo County Clinics

Edinburg Clinic 3015 Richardson (956) 318-2040

Elsa Clinic 708 E. Edinburg St. (956) 262-1141

Hidalgo Clinic 702 E. Texano (956) 843-7463

McAllen Clinic 300 E. Hackberry (956) 682-6155

Mission Clinic 211 S. Schuerbach (956) 585-2461

Pharr Clinic 300 W. Hall Acres Suite B (956) 787-1531

Weslaco Clinic 1901 N. Bridge (956) 968-7542

Pulmonary Clinic, Edinburg 1304 S. 25th St. (956) 387-0118

Cost of services is based on size of family income according to the most current TDH sliding scale. Medicaid is welcome and services are provided to those who do not have Medicaid as well. A co-pay may be charged for patients with private insurance or those who are self-insured. Clinics are open M-F 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

ANNUAL BUDGET: Hidalgo County's top financial responsibility.

Hidalgo County: Effective, Efficient, Local Solutions

Did you know that Hidalgo County delivers essential services to residents – whether you live in a rural area or in one of our cities?

Like all Texas counties, Hidalgo County is the functional arm of state government and responds to local needs.

There is often a misconception that counties have the same general authority as cities. But that is far from the case. Counties are political subdivisions of the state – basically extensions of state government at the local level.

Unlike cities, counties are not municipalities. Generally speaking, cities have the ability to make their own local laws and ordinances, as long as they do not conflict with state or federal law.

Counties do not have that same authority. Counties can only do things they are specifically authorized to do by the Texas Constitution and Statutes.

Of the 254 counties in the Lone Star State, Hidalgo County is the 7th largest; serving a population of over 900,000.

County government is comprised of a team of locally elected and appointed officials, so they know their communities and work to better serve the needs of its residents.

Commissioners Court is comprised of County Judge Ramon Garcia, and four commissioners, A.C. Cuellar, Jr. in Precinct 1; Eduardo “Eddie” Cantu in Precinct 2; Joe M. Flores in Precinct 3; and Joseph Palacios in Precinct 4.

While the Judge is the presiding officer of Commissioners Court, all five members have an equal voice and an equal vote.

The Court is responsible for adopting the county's budget and setting the tax rate necessary to fund the budget. Commissioners Court also approves all purchases, is responsible for providing and maintaining all county buildings, and has exclusive authority to approve contracts for the county.

Our county works to provide its citizens with a large range of services. Here are some of the services we provide:

- Law Enforcement
- County Jail
- Court Systems
- Emergency Management
- New road and bridge construction
- Road and bridge maintenance
- Elections at all levels of government
- Records Management (Birth, Marriage, Death, Deeds and other records)
- Public Health Services
- Public Assistance
- Environmental and Sanitation Services
- Economic Development
- Parks
- Libraries
- Drainage

In each issue of County Connection, we will take a closer look at some of the services provided by your county government.

The main focus of this edition is the adoption of the 2017 budget.

Budget cont. from front page.

Fund Balance

A major concern of the Commissioners Court has been maintaining a healthy fund balance.

This “rainy day” fund will prepare the county in case of a recession, hurricane, flooding, or any other unpredicted emergency.

Furthermore, a healthy fund balance improves the county's bond ratings and lowers

interest rates. This will be extremely beneficial when bonds are needed for the new county courthouse and other future projects.

For the Courthouse project, it is important to keep in mind that every percentage point of the interest rate equals about \$25 million dollars that the county is required to repay.

A lower interest means less economic pressures on the county and the taxpayer.

Prior to Garcia's first term in 2003, the county's fund balance was at \$703,000.

If an economic, health, or weather-related emergency had hit Hidalgo County in 2002, the fund balance would not have been

sufficient to provide adequate aid.

The community would have suffered insurmountable economic and personal damage. Over the years of Garcia's leadership, the county's fund balance grew healthier.

In 2016, after a rough decade of multiple flooding events, hurricanes, and one of the worst economic

Over the years of Garcia's leadership, the county's fund balance has grown significantly.

recessions to ever hit the United States, Hidalgo

County's fund balance is over \$26 million.

County leaders have stood by their mission of providing for the general welfare of its residents by creating a healthy reserve.

As we find ourselves amid hurricane season, Hidalgo County's fund balance offers a safeguard from the unpredictable and is in better financial shape for future projects that will benefit citizens of Hidalgo County.

County Officials have developed this fund balance without raising taxes. The adopted budget, and the schedule for Commissioners Court meetings can be found at co.hidalgo.tx.us/agendas. We invite and encourage everyone to attend.

Countdown to the Nov. 8 General Election

Time is running out, and with 55 polling stations in Hidalgo County there's no excuse to not participate – every vote counts.

WHEN?

Early voting runs Oct. 24 through Nov 4. Election Day is Nov. 8.

During early voting, registered voters can vote at the polling site most convenient to them. On election day, registered voters must go to their poll location.

WHO?

You can vote if:

- You are a resident of the county;
- You are at least 18 years old (you may register at 17 yrs. and 10 mos.);
- You are not a convicted felon (unless a person's sentence

is completed, including any probation or parole);

- You are not declared mentally incapacitated by a court of law.

Here is a list of the acceptable forms of photo ID:

- Texas driver's license issued by the Texas DPS;
- Texas Election Identification Certificate issued by DPS;
- Texas personal identification card issued by DPS;
- Texas license to carry a handgun issued by DPS;
- United States military identification card containing your photograph;
- United States passport.

With the exception of the U.S. citizenship certificate, the identification must be current or have expired no more than 4 years before being presented for voter qualification at the polling place.

There are other supporting forms of ID that may be presented if the voter has a reasonable impediment or difficulty in obtaining one of the forms of acceptable photo IDs.

Visit voteTexas.gov or the Hidalgo County Election Department website for more information.

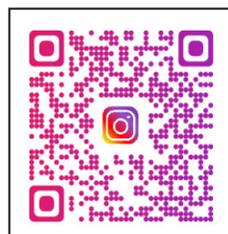


Fiscal Year	Unreserved Fund Balance
2000	5,641,000
2001	4,535,000
2002	703,000
2003	9,834,000
2004	13,453,000
2005	12,542,000
2006	12,321,000
2007	21,628,000
2008	11,036,000
2009	21,590,000
2010	31,460,000
2011	36,730,000
2012	21,590,000
2013	21,280,000
2014	19,690,000
2015	26,420,000
*2016	28,500,000

In 2002, the reserve fund balance was at an all time low of \$703,000. For the first time since 2008, Commissioners Court passed a balanced budget with a projected reserve of \$28.5 million.

Hidalgo County Works For You!
#CountyGovInAction

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www.co.hidalgo.tx.us

COUNTY CONNECTION is produced for County Judge Ramon Garcia by the Hidalgo County Public Affairs Division: Director Julia Benitez Sullivan; Public Affairs Specialist Evana Vleck; Multimedia Coordinator Jacyn Trevino; and Clerk II Jane Lopez. Special thanks to Nestor Lopez in the County Judge's Office and to the Texas Association of Counties. Contact us at public.info@co.hidalgo.tx.us or (956) 292-0726.

VOTE EARLY at any POLLING SITE OCT 24 - NOV 4