

**City Business
Updates**
by Michael Leamons

Thanks are due all the citizens who engaged and helped preserve Hico's Senior Citizen Program: to the fifty who showed up for the strategy session at the Senior Citizens Center, to the couple of dozen who made the trek to Lampasas and were able to secure a reprieve from HCCA's plans to close the Center, to the local churches which have expressed concern and pledged their support, and to the County Commissioners Court, Senior Citizen Foundation and City Council for coming through with the additional funding required to keep operations at their current level. The whole endeavor is a testimony of what can happen when we work together for the good of our community.

There is one piece of news to be met with mixed emotions. While everything was so uncertain, Director Peggy Forrest applied for and secured another job closer to home. Congratulations are due Peggy on her new job, but her concerned care for all those associated with Hico's Senior Citizen Program will be sorely missed.

Even though the program has been kept intact for another year, there is yet much work to be done. It is hoped Hill Country Community Action (HCCA) will hire a new director who will work aggressively to expand the program. Different possibilities need to be explored to improve the meals provided through the program. More of our citizens need to be made aware of HCCA's energy assistance program. If participation in these various programs is increased, less local funding will be required. Due to participation levels and management techniques, the City of Goldthwaite's Program actually runs a surplus.

Although it's not as close to resolution as the Senior Citizens Program, progress is being made regarding Hico's Law Enforcement Plans. This Tuesday (after this article goes to press), the Council is scheduled to consider and possibly act on several Law Enforcement related matters: dispatch arrangements, whether to set up a Police Department or a City Marshal's Office, the adoption of the Ordinance(s) necessary to pursue one of the above options, the adoption of a set of law enforcement policies and hiring someone to help do the leg work needed to obtain TCLEOSE certification and secure the equipment and personnel needed to deliver law enforcement services in Hico (no one can be hired as a Police Chief or Marshal until Hico obtains TCLEOSE certification, but a prospect for those offices could be hired in an administrative capacity).

The City was surprised when making arrangements for dispatch services bogged down. Prior to becoming part of the Joint Law Enforcement Contract, the City had been provided dispatch services by the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office at no additional charge (over and above what citizens pay in the way of county property and sales taxes). It was assumed such would continue to be the case, especially since the cost of providing dispatch service hadn't been included in the Joint Law Enforcement Contract. (The City of Hamilton will be paying for law enforcement services under the new contract Hico chose not to accept, but none of the dispatch related costs are included in that contract. Those costs are included in a different part of the Sheriff's Office Budget.) What's more, every other emergency service agency in the County, all the VFD's and EMS's, are

provided “free” dispatch services. Sheriff Bewley, however, explained how he was reluctant to provide full dispatch services to Hico because of his concern that law enforcement activity under a Hico Law Enforcement Agency might increase and might create too heavy a work load for his dispatchers.

After much discussion between Sheriff Bewley and representatives of Hico, the following arrangement was tentatively agreed upon (pending Council approval): the Sheriff’s Office will dispatch all 911 calls 24/7; the City will re-establish a local, non-emergency, law enforcement phone line; during the regular workday when both of the ladies at the front desk in City Hall are in attendance, calls on the local line and officer-originated activity will be handled in Hico; when one of the ladies is out, the Sheriff’s Office will handle full dispatch operations during the day; and, after hours, the local Hico line will be forwarded to an officer’s cell phone.

Although many of our daily exchanges are not formally recognized as such, life is full of negotiations. Such is the case with much of what transpires at City Hall. May God bless the City of Hico.