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SATURDAY & SUNDAY - JUNE 29-30, 2024

WEEKEND EDITION

NEW BRAUNFELS Herald-Zeitung

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Tony Garcia casts his line in the Comal River at Landa Park on June 28, 2024 in New Braunfels. BLAINE YOUNG | Herald-Zeitung

Resource replenishment

Comal County groups work to preserve Edwards and Trinity aquifers

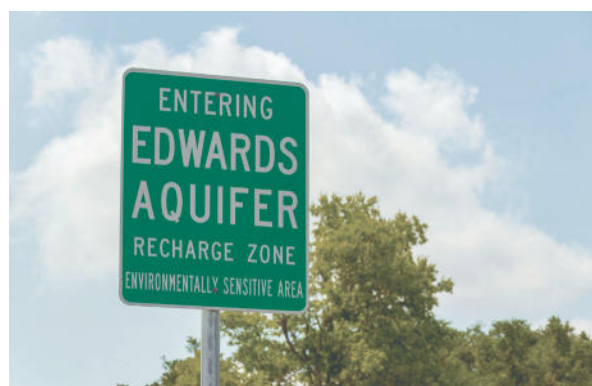
By Theresa Davis

The rivers and springs that flow beneath shady cypress trees in Comal County have sustained residents and visitors for centuries.

Those water supplies — and the cities and businesses that use them — depend heavily on the aquifers underneath the surface.

Comal County groundwater resources are increasingly threatened by drought, development, and pollution.

Local agencies and advocacy groups work to protect the aquifers amid the change.



A road sign on State Highway 46 west of New Braunfels advises residents and visitors of the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone on June 28, 2024. THERESA DAVIS | Herald-Zeitung

The Comal Trinity Groundwater Conservation District aims to protect the Trinity Aquifer, said Assistant General Manager Carl Haack.

“The Trinity — you’re going to have water lev-

els all over the place,” Haack said. “Wells half a mile apart can be different, can be night and day different.”

Based in Spring Branch, the office works to “maintain the Hill

Country way of life” by preserving groundwater resources.

That’s a tall order in fast-growing Comal County.

More new builds come with more asphalt, concrete, rooftops over the land.

That leaves fewer areas for natural aquifer recharge from rainfall.

In most of Comal County, the Trinity Aquifer doesn’t produce much water to begin with.

“A lot of it boils down to knowing you’re only going to get this (limited) amount of water,” Haack said.

See AQUIFERS, page 8A

COMAL COUNTY

Comal ISD adopts deficit budget for 2024-25 school year

By Erica Wilson

School districts across Texas are feeling the strain of unfunded legislative mandates, a lack of state funding increases and rising inflation, causing many districts to work with deficit budgets for the 2024-2025 school year.

The Comal ISD Board of Trustees on Thursday

adopted a \$320 million budget. With total revenue anticipated at around \$301.3 million, this budget represents an \$18.8 million deficit for the district.

Of the \$301.3 million anticipated revenue, \$221.6 million comes from local revenue, \$77.7 million from state aid and \$2 million

See BUDGET, page 3A

COMAL COUNTY

Comal County shelters seeking state grants

By Theresa Davis

The Crisis Center of Comal County and New Braunfels Housing Partners are seeking state funding to help the organizations address homelessness and emergency shelter.

The Comal County Commissioners Court signed off on the organizations’ grant applications on Thursday.

New Braunfels is home to the Crisis Center of Comal County, which re-

cently broke ground on an \$11 million facility on Landa Street.

The organization is an emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

“We are building a 30,000 square-foot shelter to increase our capacity

after a fire, and so we’re looking at larger grants to meet that capacity growth,” said Tiffany Verette, the Crisis Center’s chief development officer.

See GRANTS, page 3A

NEW BRAUNFELS

Downtown restaurant Muck & Fuss set to expand into San Antonio

By Hannah Thompson

Muck & Fuss, a craft beer and burger restaurant in downtown New Braunfels, is working toward an expansion in north San Antonio.

Terry and Celina Muckenfuss opened the original Muck & Fuss location on E. San Antonio St. in 2018.

Before that, Terry Muckenfuss said he had worked for Golden Corral franchisees since 1999 and became a franchisee in 2010.

The Muckenfusses moved from North Carolina to open a Golden Corral location in New Braunfels in 2011, and then bought a San Antonio location in 2013.

“When you franchise, you basically have a handbook; as long as you execute their system, you’re much more likely to be successful,” Muckenfuss said. “If you go out and do a solo project, like Muck & Fuss, it’s much more risky. You don’t know if it’s gonna be successful; you’re starting something brand new. You’re relying on your operational experience.”

Muckenfuss said the New Braunfels restaurant has done “exceedingly well” and has surpassed his expectations.

He credits the success to the team’s operational knowledge, and the menu.

In addition to offering a variety of craft burgers, beers, tacos and sandwiches, Muck & Fuss has live music in its biergarten — offerings New Braunfels residents will soon be able to enjoy during their next trip to the Alamo City.

According to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR), Muck & Fuss at Bitters will be located at 2422 N Loop 1604 W. San Antonio, Texas — around 30 miles from the New Braunfels location.

The estimated \$4.5 million project is slated to be 8,812 square feet.

See EXPANSION, page 3A



The original Muck & Fuss location is shown at 295 East San Antonio Street in New Braunfels. H-Z file photo

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## AQUIFERS

Continued from page 1A

“But if you lay down 50 pallets of sod in the middle of summer and think you’re going to get it going, you’re probably going to have some problems.”

### Drill, baby, drill

Texas operates by the “rule of capture” when it comes to groundwater.

Essentially, that means landowners have a right to pump water on their land, regardless of impacts to other users.

In the past five years, the Comal Trinity district has received more than 700 applications to drill groundwater wells.

Water supplies were a concern even before Comal County’s latest population boom.

The area is a designated priority groundwater management area.

That designation is defined as “an area experiencing or expected to experience quality or quantity issues within the next 50 years.”

Many new Comal County residents have never lived with a water well in a drought-plagued area.

H.L. Saur, the district’s general manager, said residents are quick to realize the importance of the shared resource.

No one wants a well pump to start sucking air.

“I would think that if a person burns their pump up from pumping it too hard when it doesn’t have the water, that would be enough on their part to say, ‘Look, we’ve got to cut back,’” Saur said.

The district’s 22 monitoring wells across the county range from 200 to 1,000 feet deep.

Real-time data helps the district establish a history of groundwater use trends.

“The only thing we monitor is water levels, and we have nothing to do with consumption,” Saur said.

The district visits the site of every drill job before, during and after well drilling to ensure compliance.

“That’s something I think we do that sets us apart from other districts, is we’re out in the field,” Haack said.

Wells drilled prior to the

district’s founding in 2015 operate by the rules from the time of their creation.

### The Edwards

The Edwards Aquifer also supplies much of Comal County with groundwater.

Comal Springs and the Comal River in New Braunfels are fed by the underground water resources.

Annalisa Peace, executive director of the Edwards Aquifer Alliance, said the group aims to educate an influx of new residents unfamiliar with living in drought.

“This area has always been characterized by cyclical droughts and cyclical flooding, and we’re in that flash flood alley,” Peace said. “But those natural conditions are really being exacerbated by climate change.”

Higher temperatures mean increased evaporation rates at local reservoirs and rivers.

Canyon Lake is at a record-low 56% full.

The Guadalupe and Comal rivers are both flowing well below normal.

Extreme droughts for the last several years appear to be preventing the Edwards from recovering as fast as it should.

### Water quantity

Several regional governments signed on to the Edwards Aquifer habitat conservation plan more than a decade ago to preserve aquifer supplies and protect endangered species.

“The pumping limits that are based on the springflows at Comal Springs and San Marcos Springs, that was a huge lift,” Peace said.

When the Comal or San Marcos springs dip below a certain level, that triggers groundwater pumping limits across the Edwards region.

Restrictions are designed to slow aquifer level declines until rains recharge the aquifer.

New Braunfels is one of the cities impacted by the mandatory reductions.

The Edwards Aquifer Authority recently lifted those restrictions after implementing pumping limits earlier this summer.

But sustained droughts could trigger the pumping limits again.

more than 900 citations since voters reinstated the city ban, which made lying down or camping on public property a misdemeanor or punishable by a fine of up to \$500.

Fining those who have nowhere else to go for sleeping outside places more barriers to escaping homelessness, said Matt Mollica, executive director of ECHO, the lead agency of Austin’s homeless system. Someone who can’t afford a place to live likely can’t afford to pay the fine. Often, those charged with misdemeanors don’t show up to court and, as a result, wind up with arrest warrants and criminal histories that make it difficult to land a job and a place to live.

Austin’s camping ban effectively forced people experiencing homelessness out of the city center where they could more easily access necessary services and into neighborhoods and parks, Mollica said.

“I can tell you one thing that hasn’t happened: it hasn’t helped to end homelessness at all,” Mollica said.

## Reusing and recycling

Last fall, the Edwards Aquifer Alliance released a report exploring opportunities for water reuse in Comal County.

Groundwater pumped from the Edwards and Trinity aquifers accounted for about 62% of Comal County’s total water use in 2020.

The county relied on water reuse for just 1.5% of its needs in 2020.

The Alliance sees wastewater treatment and reuse as a “vastly underutilized tool” for the region.

Outdoor irrigation doesn’t require potable drinking water, but remains a thirsty water use sector.

But another sector shows major potential for savings.

Groundwater makes up nearly 90% of supplies for aggregate mining, power, manufacturing and irrigation.

Aggregate mining — production of sand, gravel and stone for construction — uses water to remove silt and clay from products and suppress dust.

The aggregate industry is booming in Comal County.

“If we would recycle more wastewater for those types of uses, it would have two benefits, in that it would really conserve our groundwater and surface water resources, but it would also



The low-flowing Guadalupe River is pictured from FM 311 near Spring Branch on June 28, 2024. Surface water and groundwater are closely linked in Comal County. **THERESA DAVIS | Herald-Zeitung**

keep that water that’s not as high standards from being directly discharged into our streams,” Peace said.

The group recommended the legislature study wastewater reuse for irrigation and aggregate mining in Comal County.

The concept isn’t unheard of in the Hill Country.

Boerne and Fredericksburg both have robust reclaimed water programs for irrigation and construction.

“We’re trying to get to the point where we’re not using potable water for outdoor irrigation — that’s kind of a long ways away, but things are moving in that direction,” Peace said.

### Groundwater quality

In the past decade, dozens of new higher-density

housing developments have popped up across unincorporated areas of Comal County.

Many developers apply for state permits to build wastewater treatment plants.

Groups like the Edwards Aquifer Alliance keep an eye on these applications for potential groundwater pollution problems.

Regional monitoring of the Comal and Hueco Springs shows how wastewater contaminants can impact groundwater supplies.

Data shows spring contaminants such as metabolized drugs — including heart medication, contraceptives and nicotine — that are likely caused by wastewater discharge.

“We have a very good success record of getting the treatment standards improved, so that the water that’s being released into our waterways is of a higher water quality,” Peace said.

As more and more residents move to Comal County, the groups continue to educate about the area’s unique groundwater resources.

The Alliance was instrumental in encouraging local television news stations to include Edwards Aquifer levels in their weather reports.

“It’s all about getting that message out that water is finite here, it’s a shared resource,” Peace said. “It’s really important that everybody is water aware and pitches in to do their part.”

#### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS AND AMENDED PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD TO BE HELD BY THE CITY OF NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS REGARDING SUBMISSION OF THE PROGRAM YEAR 2024 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

The City of New Braunfels, Texas (City) is preparing to submit the annual Housing and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Annual Action Plan and Fair Housing Plan to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Annual Action Plan outlines the projects and programs the City will support with CDBG funds during the 2024 HUD Program Year (PY24) which is from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025, to further the goals of the 2020 - 2024 Consolidated Plan. Funding of the projects and programs comes from the City’s annual entitlement allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds from HUD and additional unallocated CDBG funds. The City’s allocation for Program Year 2024 is \$495,919, with a recommended increase of \$126,827.15, for a total of \$622,746.15 to be used for eligible activities listed below.

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the City of New Braunfels will hold public hearings and a public comment period for the PY24 Annual Action Plan. These actions are undertaken in compliance with federal regulations [24 CFR 91].

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the City of New Braunfels will hold public hearings to solicit input from residents regarding needs and priorities for housing and community development. Location and time of meetings:

June 18, 2024, at 10:00 AM New Braunfels Public Library - Westside Branch 2910 S. IH-35 Frontage Road New Braunfels, TX 78130	July 8, 2024, at 6:00 PM New Braunfels City Hall - Council Chambers 550 Landa Street New Braunfels, TX 78130
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**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the City’s drafted PY24 Annual Action Plan for the Community Development Block Grant program will be available for a minimum of 30 days during an amended public review period beginning June 10, 2024, and now ending on July 11, 2024. The proposed Annual Action Plan will be available on the City’s website at <https://www.newbraunfels.gov/90/CDBG-Program>, and at the following locations in New Braunfels, Texas: New Braunfels City Hall (550 Landa Street), New Braunfels Public Library (700 E. Common Street), and the New Braunfels Public Library - Westside Branch (2910 S. IH-35 Frontage Road).

#### Program Year 2024 Annual Action Plan

CDBG funds are allocated for Administration, Public Services, and Housing and Public Facilities programs and projects. All funds allocated in the drafted PY24 Annual Action Plan directly benefit the low- and moderate-income residents of New Braunfels and will implement the multiple strategies identified in the 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan.

#### Proposed Funding Activities:

PUBLIC SERVICES: \$74,387.85 (15% Cap)		
Big Brothers Big Sisters	\$13,000	Mentoring services for children and youth
CASA of Central Texas, Inc.	\$9,855	Court advocacy for abused and neglected children
Comal County Family Violence Shelter Inc. d/b/a Crisis Center of Comal County	\$10,000	Supportive services for emergency shelter beneficiaries
Family Life Center	\$15,000	Emergency rent and utility assistance
National Church Residences Foundation	\$10,000	Staff salary support, and costs for basic and emergency needs pantry project
San Antonio Food Bank	\$14,532.85	Emergency food assistance
The Salvation Army New Braunfels Corps	\$2,000	Staff salary support for case management of transitional housing program
HOUSING & PUBLIC FACILITIES: \$322,347.35 + \$126,827.15 (unallocated CDBG funds) = \$449,174.50		
City of New Braunfels	\$90,800	Minor Home Repair Program
Comal County Habitat for Humanity	\$20,000	Home Repair Program
Comal County Family Violence Shelter Inc. d/b/a Crisis Center of Comal County	\$125,000	Installation of pet kennels and dog runs at emergency shelter
NB Housing Partners	\$73,756	Installation of pet kennels, and roof and gutter repairs at homeless shelter
New Braunfels Youth Collaborative	\$60,000	Remodeling activities such as HVAC, electrical, and plumbing repairs at youth center
The Salvation Army New Braunfels Corps	\$79,618.50	Purchase and installation of HVAC equipment
<b>Administration (20% Cap)</b>	<b>\$99,183.80</b>	<b>Oversight and Management of CDBG Program</b>

Written and verbal comments may be submitted to Jennifer Gates, Grants Coordinator, until 5:00 PM Central time on July 11, 2024, by writing to City of New Braunfels - Finance Department, ATTN: Jennifer Gates, 550 Landa Street, New Braunfels, TX 78130 or by e-mail to [JGates@newbraunfels.gov](mailto:JGates@newbraunfels.gov); or by telephone at (830) 221-4383. All comments received by this date will be considered and included within the Annual Action Plan.

**Note:** In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, these facilities are wheelchair accessible and accessible parking spaces are available. Requests for special accommodation or interpretive services must be made at least 48 hours prior to the meetings to ensure availability. Please contact the City Secretary’s Office at (830) 221-4010 so appropriate accommodations can be made.

## ENCAMPMENTS

Continued from page 7A

double-digit reductions in street homelessness since 2020. Friday’s ruling won’t help reduce homelessness or address its underlying causes, they said.

“Everyone has a right to access public spaces,” said Kelly Young, CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County. “The problem arises when people must reside in a public space because they have literally no other option. The answer is clear: everyone needs a place to live. Today’s ruling won’t get us there; what we need is adequate funding for permanent housing.”

After Austin relaxed restrictions on public encampments in 2019, voters in that city opted in 2021 to reinstate the ban at the ballot box amid a perceived rise in the number of homeless people on the streets. Gov. Greg Abbott signed into law a statewide camping ban that included penalties for cities that don’t enforce the ban.

Austin police have issued