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BIG SPRING WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

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Comanche Trail Lake at capacity



HERALD photo/Lyndel Moody

Recent rains have blessed Comanche Trail Lake, which is now at capacity again. According to the National Weather Service in Midland, the Crossroads area has a 20 to 30 percent chance of rain today and Thursday with temperatures reaching the high 80s. On Thursday night, the area has a 50 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms with northeast wind gusts reaching 5 to 10 miles per hour.

Woman's death not a homicide

By STEVE REAGAN
 Staff Writer

Autopsy results on a Big Spring woman have ruled her death was not the result of a homicide.

Sonya Michelle Drake White, 56, was originally believed to be a shooting victim when her body was found at her home on 423 Westover shortly before 9 p.m. on Aug. 14.

"The Criminal Investigations Division investigated this incident as a homicide under suspicious circumstances, based on the scene and interview of family and friends who were close to Mrs. Drake," a Big Spring Police Department news release stated.

"After analyzing information, processing the scene and receiving a final autopsy report, along with a toxicology report, it has been determined that this was not a homicide," the statement added. "Although we understand why initial reports to dispatch indicated Mrs. Drake had been shot, this has been found to not be accurate."

Officials have now ruled that Drake died

See DEATH, Page 3

Council approves city budget for new fiscal year

By STEVE REAGAN
 Staff Writer

Big Spring City Council approved the municipal budget for the coming year and tentatively OK'd a tax rate to finance it during their Tuesday night meeting.

Faced with an anticipated drop in tax revenues, the new budget is \$ 1 million leaner than the previous year. It's key provisions include:

- Personnel — City employees will not receive a raise, although Darden promised to revisit that idea as soon as economic conditions improved. In addition, staff vacancies will not be filled for the time being, although the vacant positions won't be eliminated.
- Employee insurance — Health insurance costs are on the rise, and the city will pass at least some of that increase on to employees. City work-

ers with family coverage will see an increase of \$23.87 a month in their premiums. Employees purchasing insurance for themselves only will not pay any premiums.

- Capital outlays — "Big ticket" item purchases will be slashed by more than 30 percent. Among the items the city will buy this coming fiscal year are police vehicles (\$108,795), a "one-arm" trash truck (\$250,000), filter upgrades for the water department (\$1 million), distribution lines (\$600,000) and a water truck for the landfill (\$108,000).
- Infrastructure projects — Streets and water and sewer lines projects will be reduced for the coming fiscal year. Under the proposed budget, \$513,000 will be spent on sealcoating, fog sealing, and striping on selected streets, \$160,000 will go toward sewer

line upgrades at the airpark, along FM 700 and at the Western Container building, and the city will spend \$900,000 upgrading water lines on Bluebonnet and 16th and 17th streets, placing a 20-inch line from Johnson to 11th and Donley and replacing 33 valves on Avion Street.

- Hotel/motel fund projects — Despite decreased hotel and motel tax receipts, that fund will still provide money for improvements at the municipal auditorium and renovations at the historic spring.

To finance the budget — and to make up for an anticipated plunge in sale tax revenue — council members gave tentative approval to a 2-cent increase in the property tax rate. Officials estimate that would increase the tax on a \$100,000 home by \$19.

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'High-end' users to see increase in water bills

By STEVE REAGAN
 Staff Writer

Local water rates are going up, but only for those who use a lot of water.

Tuesday, Big Spring's city council approved a 9.5 percent increase for "high-end" water customers — those that use more than 11,000 gallons a month. The increase is expected to bring in an additional \$175,000 in revenue for the city this fiscal year.

Customers using less than 11,000 gallons per month will see no change in their water rates.

John Medina, human resources director for the

city, said officials investigated what other area municipalities were charging water customers, and discovered that Big Spring was charging its high-end customers significantly less than neighboring communities.

"Even with this increase, (high-end users) will still be paying less than those in Midland or Odessa," Medina said. "And this should not effect any of our low-income or fixed-income customers."

The new rates must pass a second reading before the council later this month

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To reach us:
 Please call 263-7331. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Area sales tax receipts keep declining

By LYNDEL MOODY
 Staff Writer

Monthly sales tax revenue still continues to slide downward for the Crossroads area according to figures released by the Texas Comptroller's office.

The following figures are

sales tax collected in July 2016 and percentage of net gain or loss compared to July 2015. The monies were disbursed to taxing entities in September by the state. Information is provided by the Texas Comptroller's office.

Abilene: \$3 million, -6.73 percent

Ackerly, \$2,868.07, -54.12 percent

Big Spring, \$620,180.39, -14.53 percent

Coahoma, \$7,329.50, -30.90 percent

Colorado City, \$46,250.43, -35.74 percent

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