

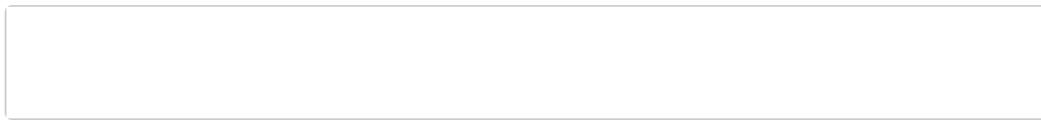
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KERR COUNTY

- TEXAS -

MENU



Leaders, citizens discuss
possible Hotel Occupancy Tax,
future facility improvements

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A majority of those gathered Monday, March 4, for an informational discussion – including all 5 county commissioners and other key stakeholders in the issue – favored a Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) to be paid by visitors staying in short-term room rentals in the unincorporated areas of Kerr County.

Emceed by Kerr County Commissioner (Pct. 3) Jeff Holt, the meeting was hosted by the Kerr County Stock Show Association, Inc. and its president Trey Dittmar said a HOT could help fund much-needed improvements to the Hill Country Youth Event Center, 3785 TX27 in Kerrville.

The facility is very important to the stock show association, local taxpayers and business owners, he said. He provided a brief history of the “ag barn,” noted the symbiotic relationship between the owner of the facility, Kerr County, Texas, and the stock show group and talked about the great opportunity that exists for the indoor arena to become one of the “premiere facilities in the state.”



Kerr County Stock Show Association President Trey Dittmar outlines why a Hotel Occupancy Tax could be vital to the Hill Country Youth Event Center and Kerr County's youths. - Photo by Kerr County Public Relations/Lisa Walter

Following Dittmar, Kerr County Commissioner (Pct. 2) Rich Paces, who leads the county's storage and facilities committee, gave a presentation of his views regarding a possible Hotel Occupancy Tax.

The HOT would be a 7% fee imposed by Kerr County on short-term room rentals in the unincorporated areas of Kerr County. Kerrville and Ingram overnight accommodations already impose a HOT fee, Paces explained.

In keeping with Texas Tax Code (Section 3.52), the 7% HOT would be on those rentals considered "short-term" – 30 days or less. It would *not* affect camps, unless they offer specific cabin or room rentals, he said.

The Texas House of Representatives and the Texas Senate must both pass legislation to enable the HOT here, and the revenue earned by a HOT (estimated to be \$350,000 per year) could only be used by the county to further put "heads in beds", such as site acquisition, construction, improvement, enlarging, equipping, repairing, operations and maintenance of public civic centers, civic center buildings, auditoriums, exhibition halls, coliseums and stadiums, including sports and other facilities that serve the purpose of attracting overnight visitors.



Kerr County Commissioner (Pct. 2) Rich Paces presents facts and clears up misinformation surrounding what a Hotel Occupancy Tax could do for Kerr County, Texas. - Photo by Kerr County Public Relations/Lisa Walter

Kerr County leaders are keen on the HOT as a source of funding for improvements to the HCYEC Indoor Arena. An \$8.1 million bond proposition failed before voters in 2022. In 2024, county leaders pared down the necessary repairs and improvements, and have been seeking additional funding methods to foot that smaller \$2.5 million bill. While the commissioners' court approved \$710,000 to replace the roof and upgrade the electrical system in the HCYEC Indoor Arena this coming year, they view the HOT as a way to generate funds from those who visit from out-of-town and use the facilities that need the upgrades.

Paces said the county budget leaves no room for future capital improvements or unexpected major maintenance. "A HOT avoids the need to raise county property taxes or add to the county's debt to fund

further improvements,” Paces said, adding that Gillespie, Kendall, Bandera, Uvalde and Medina Counties all impose a HOT in their unincorporated areas and all their municipalities impose HOT fees, too.

“With a HOT, visitors help pay the costs of improvements that draw them to Kerr County,” he said. “While the countywide economic benefit is significant (from a HOT), the biggest beneficiaries of the HCYEC improvements are our children who participate in 4-H or FFA.”



Led by Kerr County Commissioner (Pct. 2) Rich Paces, attendees are taken on a tour of the Hill Country Youth Event Center Indoor Arena, where HOT funds could help pay for a remaining \$1.8 in needed repairs and improvements. - Photo by Kerr County Public Relations/Lisa Walter

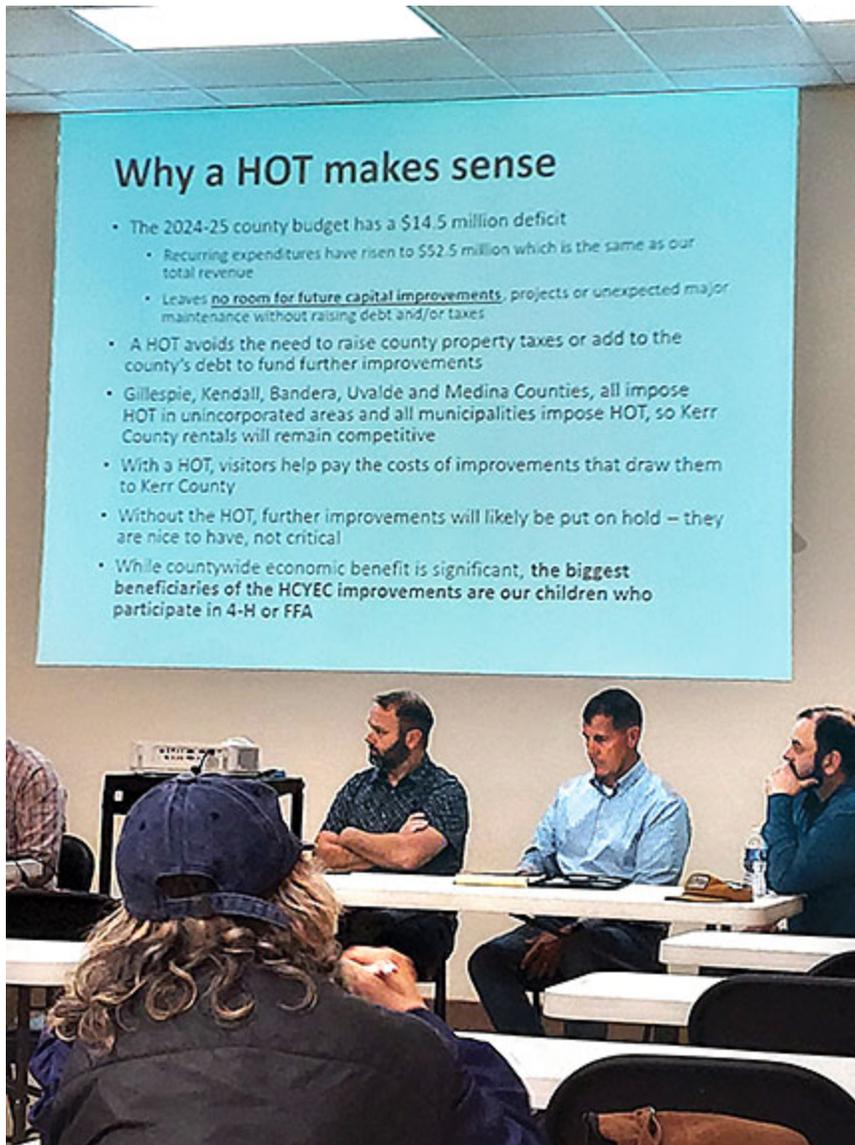
Those who want to see the HCYEC receive the remaining \$1.8 million in needed improvements without raising Kerr County debt or local property taxes are encouraged to reach out to:

- House Representative Wes Virdell, District 53, by calling 512-463-0536 or emailing Wes.Virdell@house.Texas.gov.

And/or:

- State Senator Pete Flores, District 24, by calling 512-463-0124 in Austin or 830-896-9816 in Kerrville. (Emails may be sent using the senator’s website.)

Rep, Virdell was on hand Monday and stated he wanted to hear from all sides of the matter, but that the bill is in the process of going through the House and Senate.



Texas House Representative (District 53) West Virdell (left) attended Monday's gathering to hear from all sides regarding the measure that must be approved by the State House and State Senate before it can be implemented in Kerr County. - Photo by Kerr County Public Relations/Lisa Walter

Jake Williamson, general manager of the Oak View Group which manages the Hill Country Youth Event Center, also spoke in favor of a HOT. Each year, there are rising maintenance costs on the aging center and, “we need to plan every year to maintain this facility for the community.”

While he is constantly searching for new revenue sources (such as obtaining a liquor license recently), a HOT could help the center's ability to recruit groups in and to continue serving as an amazing community center, he said. The economic benefit is far-reaching beyond just the facility, Growth at the Hill Country Youth Event Center has led to growth on the eastern side of Kerrville.

One citizen questioned the revenue earning history of the center and suggested that if the county had to implement a HOT to get things accomplished at the center, then maybe it needs to turn it over to the private sector.

Another citizen noted misinformation surrounding the issue and said the bill itself does not include the language about campgrounds being excluded. While assured the verbiage is detailed in the Texas Tax Code, Rep. Virdell said he would be sure the wording to exclude camps was mirrored in the bill.

One audience member said he feels a HOT would decrease business at local establishments and called on commissioners to rescind their support of the measure, while another said they didn't elect Republican leaders to impose more tax.

Another audience member stated he was in favor. "This building makes a difference, and it is *huge*," he said, pointing to the youths who have gone through 4-H and FFA programs there and who have become productive members of society as adults. "It isn't about us, it's about our kids." He urged the HOT, stating we have to get it through. "It is a big impact on this community for our children."

"This facility is the social center, the political center, the voting center, the recreation center..." added Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly. "For the good of the overall community, we need to take care of this place. It's a no brainer."

Another person said the matter was so much bigger than agricultural advocacy. It had to do with sustainability of the center, and noted that Kerr County is in the minority of counties that do not already have a HOT. "It's a win. It's the right thing to do. It makes sense."



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