

# THE OBSERVER/ ENTERPRISE

*Serving Coke County*



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## New Robert Lee officials face numerous challenges

Robert Lee City Council met Memorial Day evening, May 28, 2018. The meeting required a two page agenda detailing what has been discovered since Mayor Allyson Crenshaw took office earlier that month. Council members present included Roger Alexander, Janie Munoz, Brandi Brosh, Billy Williams and Ricky Green.

The Council voted to rescind the portion of Ordinance 1277 raising the mayor's salary from \$300 per month to \$700 per month. A prior council had also voted to make the mayor's position full time. Mayor Crenshaw pointed out how, by law, no elected official could set the hours or manner in which another elected official performs his or her duties. She said that currently the mayor's position was full time plus, but hoped problems at City Hall would be resolved after the new City Secretary came on board full

time in June and a City Superintendent was hired. Bronte City Secretary Crystal Blevins has been helping the new council this month after hours and on weekends and accepted the position of Robert Lee City Secretary. She will divide her time equally between Bronte and Robert Lee June 1 - 15 and begin full time in Robert Lee after that.

It was discussed how bills incurred by the City of Robert Lee and Robert Lee Volunteer Fire Department this year were either not paid at all or not in a timely manner. The current council apologized to the RLVFD for the past bad bookkeeping practices. Mayor Crenshaw told the council of many seriously delinquent accounts on invoices the city should have paid and that several of these had been turned over for collection and the city was having to pay many late fees



**City Council Meeting!** Sheriff Wayne McCutchen addresses the Robert Lee City Council during their meeting held on Monday, May 28, 2018.

and collection charges in addition to the amount originally billed to the City.

Crenshaw also discussed how sales tax payments collected from water/sewer/trash customers had not been made to the Texas Comptroller's office. A representative of the Comptroller's office came to Robert Lee's City Hall in February demanding payment. Crenshaw stated later that officials from the City of Robert Lee failed to attend a court hearing where the Comptroller wanted to revoke the city's sales tax permit. Fortunately, the permit was not revoked but the bank accounts of the City of Robert Lee were frozen for several days and approximately \$7,500, an estimated amount required to satisfy the outstanding balance owed by the city at that time, was removed by the Comptroller's office. In April, the Comptroller's office withheld the sales tax rebate the city should have received. This amount, approximately \$15,000, is the city's portion of the sales tax collected on everything sold in Robert Lee. Crenshaw believes the Comptroller will continue to withhold the city's rebate checks until all delinquent reports have been filed and payments made. She also pointed out that this affected not only the City of Robert Lee, but also the 4a and 4b Economic Development funds.

In addition to not filing reports with the State Comptroller, the City of Robert Lee had failed to file required

reports with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). The state agency had sent many certified letters to City Hall since December demanding these reports. The reports when the new council took office in the middle of May 2018 had yet to be filed. With the numerous violations resulting from the failure to comply with these laws, the City was facing fines of over \$100,000. Fortunately, City Attorney Jeff Betty was familiar with TCEQ officials and was able to negotiate a 30 day extension period. If all reports and required information are received by TCEQ within this period, all fines will be waived. Blevins told the council that all but one report had been completed and sent in as of May 28, 2018.

The Council discussed the many problems with Robert Lee's billing and reporting practices regarding the water bills. It was noted that the water bills had not been sent out reliably for several months and due to computer network problems, some of the bills sent out were incorrect. Also discussed in this agenda item were the past due accounts and the consolidation of individual's accounts into one bill. In the past if someone moved to a new location, a completely new account was opened for that person and the water would be connected without requiring the previous account to be paid. These accounts will be consolidated and all water

accounts with past due balances must be completely paid no later than August 31, 2018, to avoid disconnection.

Coke County Sheriff Wayne McCutchen addressed the council on questions they had regarding enforcement of city ordinances. He explained that his deputies did not have the jurisdiction to enforce Robert Lee city ordinances. He explained that the City of Bronte contracted with Coke County for \$1,000 per month to grant the deputies the right to enforce ordinances and write tickets for violations within the city's boundaries. Robert Lee does not have this 24 hours a day / 7 days a week service. They had been paying one certified peace officer \$750 per month for this service. That arrangement with the officer ended a couple of years ago. Upon hearing this, one Robert Lee resident in the audience remarked that people complained that the Sheriff's Office didn't take care of issues in Robert Lee when in fact, the city officials had tied the deputies' hands. The council approved a motion to begin the process to use the Sheriff's Office for this enforcement.

Members of the audience expressed their appreciation to the council upon the completion of the meeting for the transparency with which the information was provided. Complete minutes of this meeting will be in a future issue of *The Observer/Enterprise* following the minutes' approval by the Council at their next meeting.

## WEEK AT A GLANCE

### Monday, June 4

Ladies Water Aerobics, 6:15 pm,  
Bronte Pool

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Bronte Evening Lions Club Meeting, 7 pm,  
First United Methodist Church, Bronte

### Tuesday, June 5

Robert Lee - Silver Lions Club Meeting, 6:30 am,  
Old Jail Annex, Robert Lee

### Thursday, June 7

Ladies Water Aerobics, 6:15 pm,  
Bronte Pool

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