

JULY/AUGUST 2024

NEWSLETTER

Office of El Paso County Precinct 2
Commissioner David Stout



HELLO NEIGHBORS!

The Precinct 2 office has been busy this summer. Inside this newsletter you will find an update on the bond proposal that will go to voters this November; new information regarding the modernization of the Bridge of the Americas port of entry; an explainer for the county's recent grant application for Operation Lone Star funds; an update on the El Paso County Budget Hearings and Corbin Sambrano Center and other news around the Precinct 2 and El Paso County Community. As always, please don't hesitate to reach out to my office with anything on your mind.



@CommishStout



@CommStout



Commissioner David Stout



NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

El Paso County Bond Update

Bridge of the Americas Port Modernization Project

Operation Lone Star and State Unfunded Mandates

El Paso County Budget Hearings

Corbin Sambrano Wellness Center

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Precinct 2 Map



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EL PASO COUNTY BOND UPDATE

On Monday, August 12, 2024, County Commissioners Court voted to adopt an Order calling for a Bond Election to be held in El Paso County on November 5, 2024. In September, a series of informational meetings will take place throughout the County outlining each proposition and related projects.

For a full list of project descriptions and project costs, please visit the El Paso Capital Improvement Bond Program website at: **Capital.EPCounty.com**.

The proposed GO Bond package totals \$323.8 million and consists of five propositions:

- A: Parks & Recreation
- B: New Office of Medical Examiner
- C: County Subcourthouses (Annexes)
- D: County Coliseum Renovation & Modernization
- E: New Animal Shelter

The County estimates that a \$323.8 million bond would cause a projected 3-cent tax rate increase, which would cost approximately \$5.02 per month or \$60 per year to a taxpayer with a home value of \$200,956, the average home value for El Paso County in 2024.

Community Input Received

Beginning in February 2024, the County held public meetings to gather input on project priorities. The Commissioners Court then tasked the Bond Advisory Committee, a citizen-led committee, to develop and recommend a project list and financing structure. Commissioners Court and all other County public meetings are recorded and can be watched online at epcounty.primegov.com/public/portal

Precinct 2 Projects

Below you can find a list of projects in Precinct 2:

- Ascarate Park
 - Festival Outdoor Stage
 - Shelter Modernization
 - Pavilion Parking Expansion
 - New Walking Trail
 - Moving Electric Cables Underground
- Revitalize El Paso County Coliseum
- Corbin Sambrano Wellness Center
- Renovate Juvenile Probation Department
- Modernize County Courthouse



El Paso County Tax Rate

El Paso County Commissioners proposed the No New Revenue and Voter Approved Tax Rates for FY2025:

<u>No New Revenue Rate</u>	<u>Voter Approved Tax Rate</u>
\$0.426323/\$100 of assessed property value	\$0.478306/\$100 of assessed property value

The Court has asked county staff to work on maintaining the No New Revenue rate for FY2025 despite the increased mandates by the State of Texas and the reduction in revenue these mandates have caused.

Commissioners are set to finalize the tax rate on August 26th, 2024.

- **FEBRUARY 23rd** - Commissioner Stout sends public letter to General Service Administration (GSA) to remove commercial traffic from Bridge of the Americas (BOTA) and not take the County Coliseum
- **JUNE 14th** - GSA announces they will not take the Coliseum as part of the modernization project
- **JUNE 26th** - GSA presents final options which includes removal of commercial traffic from BOTA
- **JULY 22nd** - Commissioner Stout submits public letter urging GSA to choose Action Alternative 4 which removes commercial traffic from BOTA
- **MID-SEPTEMBER** - Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which will identify a preferred design, scheduled for publication in Federal Register; publication in Federal Register kicks off a 45-day public comment period
- **DECEMBER 31st** - Final decision on design expected



BRIDGE OF THE AMERICAS PORT MODERNIZATION PROJECT

On June 26th, the General Services Administration, responsible for managing the ports of entry into the United States, released its final two proposed plans for the modernization of the Bridge of the Americas. The Bridge of the America, aka Puente Cordova Americas, is the only toll-free international bridge in Texas. In December of last year, the General Services Administration announced the allocation of \$650M-\$700M in funds to modernize the outdated bridge.

The first proposal, known as Viable Alternative #1A, according to GSA:

- Viable Action Alternative 1A- multi-level modernization (high/low booths) primarily within existing port boundaries with minor land acquisition immediately adjacent to the port and additional land acquisition to the east (13 acres). No El Paso County land to be acquired.

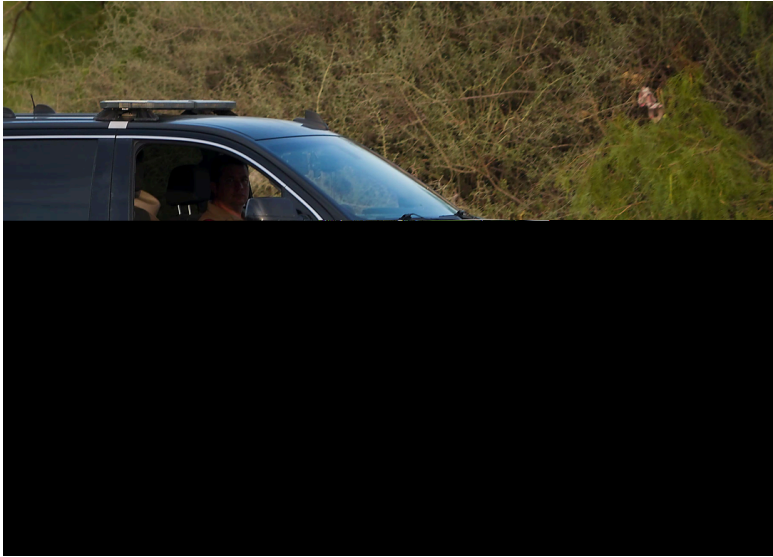
This proposal includes commercial traffic through the bridge. The second alternative, Viable Action Alternative 4, removes all commercial traffic from the bridge:

- Viable Action Alternative 4- multi-level modernization within the existing port boundaries with minor land acquisition immediately adjacent to the port and elimination of commercial cargo operations. No El Paso County or TxDOT DPS land to be acquired.

Commissioner Stout remains committed to public health and removing trucks from the Bridge of the Americas. You can see a detailed timeline with all previous documents here at the GSA website: gsa.gov/about-us/gsa-regions/region-7-greater-southwest/buildings-and-facilities/texas-federal-buildings/bridge-of-the-americas-land-port-of-entry

Once the Environmental Impact Statement is published in mid-September, the GSA's preferred design will be revealed to the public, opening up a 45-day comment period.

We encourage you to submit your comments or protests to bota.nepacommments@gsa.gov



OPERATION LONE STAR AND STATE UNFUNDED MANDATES

For the past three years, the state of Texas has arrested people on immigration related offenses under Operation Lone Star. This has led to a dramatic increase in state inmates in El Paso County jails, along with a dramatic increase in costs. These costs are known as “State Unfunded Mandates” because the county is mandated to pay for them without reimbursement from the state.

On July 22nd, El Paso County made a Declaration of Disaster to apply for state grants to help mitigate the budget disaster caused by Operation Lone Star.

Commissioner Stout said in an article by the [Texas Tribune](#), “There’s no crisis, there’s no emergency, there’s no disaster” on the border. “It’s more of political rhetoric than anything else.”

We have seen what works on the border when it comes to meeting and processing new arrivals, and what works for interior destination communities - coordination among various levels of government, and with civil society. This is the type of support we need for effective border management and for receiving cities and towns. This approach presents a practical solution to the reality of migration and benefits both new arrivals and American communities with values of welcome and optimism.

Commissioner Stout celebrates the binational culture of El Paso County and hopes to maintain El Paso’s status as a welcoming beacon to all travelers, rather than one that intimidates and punishes people.

You can read the disaster declaration here: epcounty.com/documents/OLS-Disaster-Declaration-7-23-24.pdf

Operation Lone Star by the Numbers

Latest data published by the Texas Tribune as of Newsletter publication date

- Since March 2021, approximately 2,000 people have been booked into El Paso County Jail because of Operation Lone Star.
- El Paso County has lost \$11.7 Million in revenue from the federal government.
- State Unfunded Mandates make up roughly 70% of El Paso County’s budget.
- Since 2021, El Paso County has spent over \$10 million for processing and holding state inmates.



EL PASO COUNTY BUDGET HEARINGS

El Paso County held public hearings on its proposed FY2025 budget, totaling \$600,205,703, on Tuesday, August 13th, 2024.

The proposed budget emphasized community-based initiatives and sustainable funding sources. The tax rate adoption for the budget is set to be finalized on August 26, 2024. It is important to note the impact of unfunded mandates from the Texas Legislature, which make up roughly 70% of the county's budget, increase costs for the County and local taxpayers.

All Commissioners Court Special Sessions and other public meetings are recorded and available for online viewing at epcounty.primegov.com/public/portal

Community members are encouraged to participate in public comment. To sign up for public comment, visit epcounty.com/public-comment.htm

Meeting agendas are posted online 72 hours before each meeting. For past budgets, visit epcounty.com/budget/archives.htm

Attend meetings in person at the Alicia Chacon County Commissioners Courtroom at the Enrique Moreno County Courthouse, 500 E. San Antonio, Room 303. On meeting day, complete a form with Commissioners Court Coordinators Jessica Dominguez or Cesar Nava before speaking.

Call 1-888-835-7276 to participate by phone. Leave your name, number, address, and the item you wish to speak about. You will be placed in a queue for the meeting.

State Unfunded Mandates

Here is a non-exhaustive list of some of the services Texas counties are mandated to pay by the state

- Judicial System
- Juror Pay
- Bail Bond Boards
- County Jail
- Inmate Health Care
- Adult & Juvenile Probation
- Elections
- Medical Examiner Services
- Indigent Defense
- Indigent Burials
- Child Protective Services Attorneys
- Collection Improvement Programs
- Collection of Motor Vehicle Fees
- Veterans Assistance Offices
- Cost of Open Meetings
- Support for DPS

Texas Chapter 59

The property where the Corbin Sambrano Wellness Center will be built was seized by the District Attorney's office in 2014 after 10 years of litigation. El Paso County District Attorney Jaime Esparza donated the property to the County under Chapter 59 in the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, which requires the following uses for the site:

1. Mental health, drug, or rehabilitation service, or
2. Services for victims or witnesses of criminal offenses or instances of abuse, or
3. The provision of training or education related to the first two.



CORBIN SAMBRANO WELLNESS CENTER

Commissioner Stout has led work with the community for the past several years to transform the former Valley Theater, which most recently was an adult oriented business, into a place of healing and service. The building was seized by the El Paso District Attorney and given to the County in 2020. Several designs for the Corbin Sambrano Wellness Center have been proposed.

Because the property was seized by the D.A. and conveyed to the county, there are certain requirements for how the building may be used under Chapter 59 (see explainer above).

After several years and many meetings with community stakeholders, including the Corbin Sambrano and San Juan neighborhood associations, El Paso County representatives proposed three new designs for the wellness center to the neighborhood associations and other stakeholders.

The three proposals incorporate sustainably designed construction and air-conditioning, plants native to the Chihuahuan Desert, and a mixed-use format that will be able to host a variety of programs and events, that is inviting to all members of the community.

Commissioner Stout is committed to transparency and including the community in the design process, and will look to open the Wellness Center by August 2026.





AGRILIFE EXTENSION & COMMUNITY GARDEN

Commissioner Stout visited the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension- El Paso at Ascarate Park in July to learn more about the horticulture and community education programs like the El Paso Master Gardeners. The community garden is one of the great resources in our county and is open to tours, classes, and field trips and they are always looking for volunteers.

Texas A&M AgriLife is a great partner in promoting community health and sustainable farming and Commissioner Stout looks forward to working with them more in the future. You can learn more about the EP Master Gardener Program at txmg.org/el Paso

TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION



El Paso County Master Gardener Program

Thursdays, **In-Person** Training

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

September 5th, 2024 through November 14th, 2024

Orientation: August 29th, 2024

Join other gardeners for this **12-week** volunteer training program. Class topics include xeriscaping principles, lawn care, trees and pruning, soils, identifying pests, propagation principles, and more.

Complete the **in-person** classroom requirement, then use your new knowledge by volunteering 62 hours at approved sites in order to become a **certified** Extension Master Gardener.

To register and to get more information contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at (915)-273-3502 or visit <http://txmg.org/el Paso> to download application. Apply online at the QR Code location.
Program Fee:
\$215.00
(includes all materials)



Application Deadline: Friday, August 16th, 2024.

The members of the Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunities. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas.



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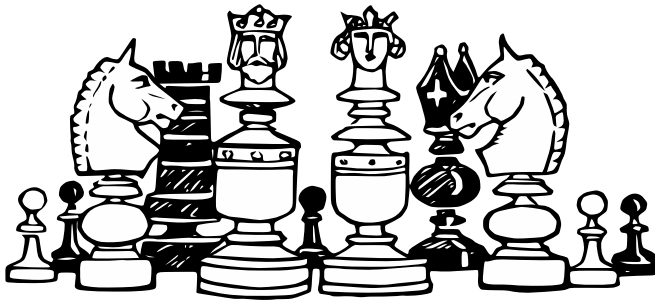
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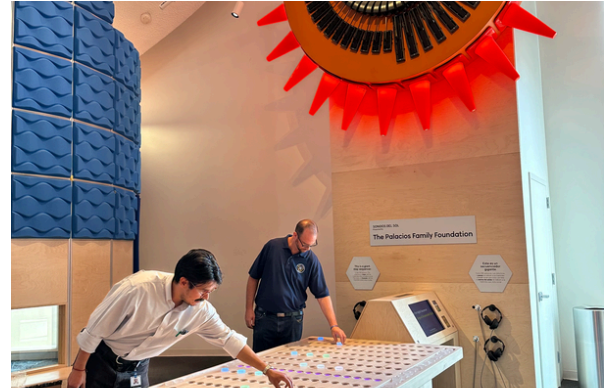
COMMUNITY PROJECTS

EP COUNTY CHESS TOURNAMENT

Commissioner Stout was proud to co-sponsor the El Paso County chess tournament which pitted local teens against local attorneys. The teens proved their mettle as they dominated the attorneys. Special thanks to Commissioner Holguin and her staff for helping plan and co-sponsor the event.



LA NUBE TOUR



In July, Commissioner Stout was excited to tour La Nube with El Paso County staff. The new downtown interactive museum opened August 10th. Find more info at: la-nube.org



Conferences and Travel

NALEO

In Las Vegas at the National Association of Latino Elected Officials Conference, Commissioner Stout participated in the NALEO Workforce Innovation Forum: Advancing the Economic Future of Latinos to bring back ideas for economic mobility to the Paso Del Norte Region.

NACo

Commissioner Stout sat on the Leadership Advisory Council helping shape the Counties for Economic Mobility initiative at the National Association of Counties conference in Tampa, gaining valuable connections and ideas to bring back to the borderland.

Resolutions

JUNE 3rd - Urging President Biden to use his executive authority to grant work permits for long-term undocumented immigrants who have significantly contributed to the U.S. economy, raised families, and embodied the “American Dream,” and urges Congress to pass immigration reforms.

JUNE 10th - Declaring June 12, 2024, as "Women Veterans Day" in El Paso County, Texas.

JUNE 17th - Declaring June 19, 2024, as “Juneteenth,” in El Paso County, Texas.

JUNE 17th - Commending artist, philanthropist, Christian hip-hop artist, motivational speaker, actor, and three-time best-selling author Dr. Aulsondro L. Hamilton for his contributions to education and cultural enrichment in El Paso

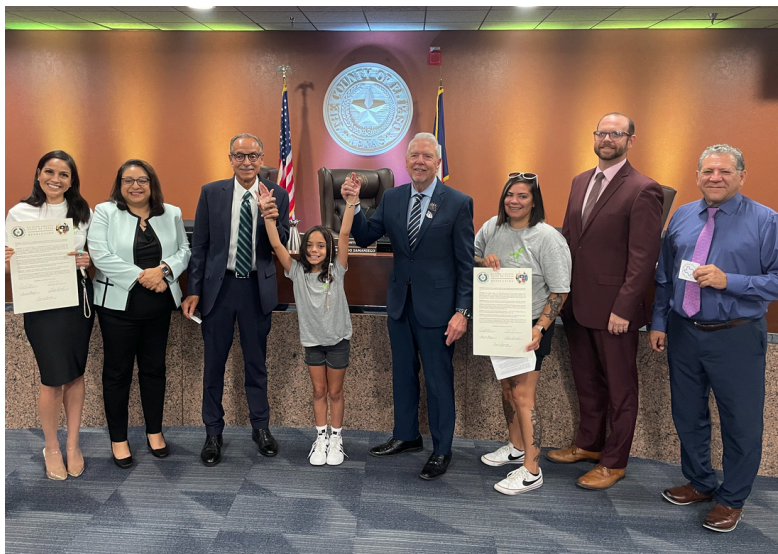
JUNE 24th - Encouraging toy donations for children waiting for their wishes to be fulfilled and recognizing July 2024 as "Make-A-Wish Month" in El Paso County, Texas.

JULY 22nd - Designating the week of July 22-27, 2024, as Pretrial, Probation, and Parole Supervision Week.

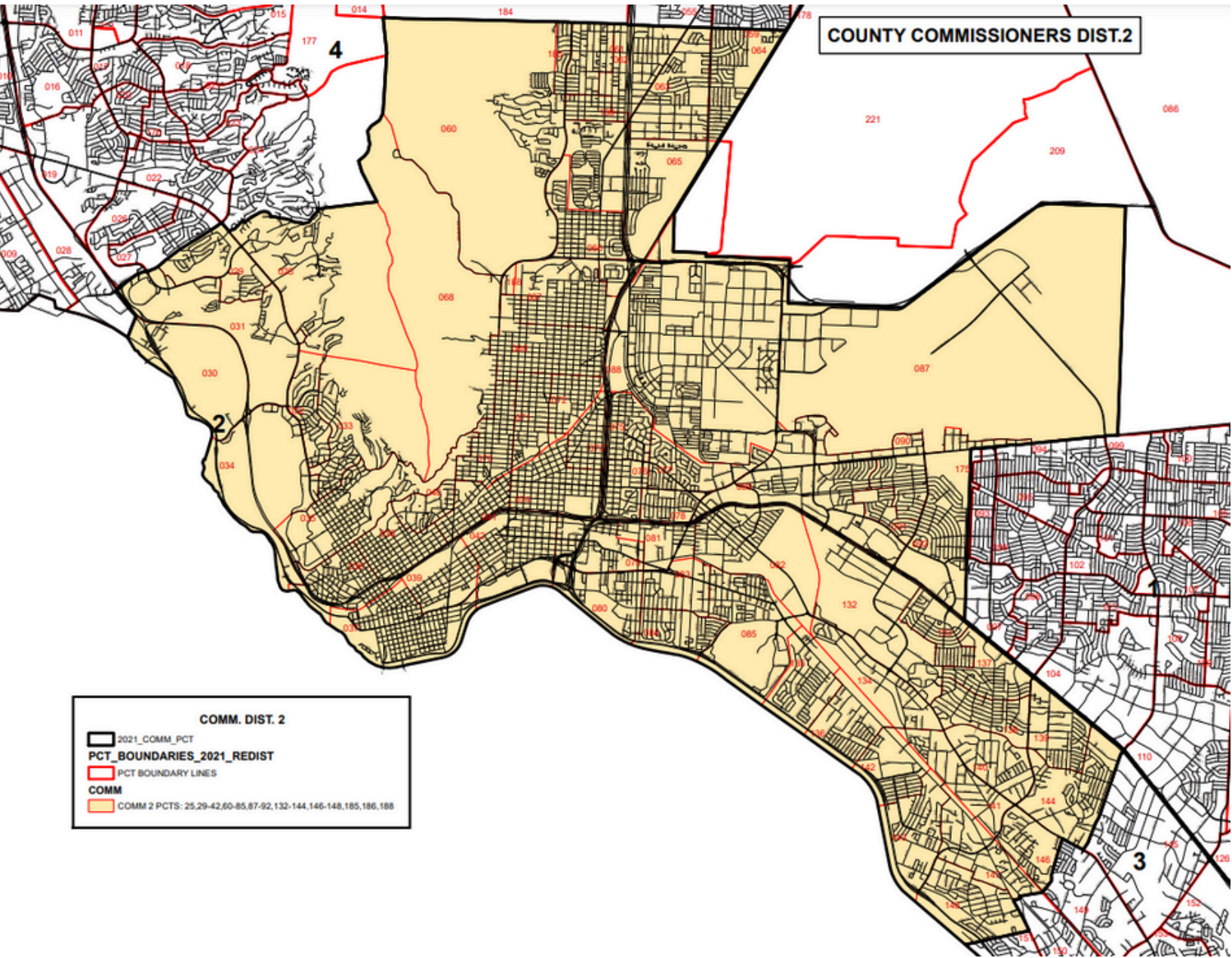
JULY 29th - Naming Tuesday, July 30, 2024, Gastroschisis Awareness Day in El Paso County, Texas, recognizing the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce 2024 leadership class Bordered By Change, and honoring Laela Flor Martinez and all of those who deal with life-altering conditions.

AUGUST 5th - Recognizing August 2024 as Black Business Month in El Paso County, Texas.

AUGUST 12th - Declaring August 17, 2024, as El Paso Branch NAACP Day in El Paso County, Texas.



PRECINCT 2 MAP



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