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FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2026

VOL. 146, NO. 135

\$2

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## Jefferson advancing plans for new jail



Kim Brent/Beaumont Enterprise file photo

Jefferson County commissioners have discussed financing options to fund the construction of a new jail.

### Commissioners have awarded contract to assess needs

By Tessa Noble  
STAFF WRITER

Jefferson County is moving forward with plans for a new jail.

At a workshop last year, the county discussed financing options to fund the construction of a new jail due to the limitations of the current facility, which is more than 30 years old and has 1,200 beds. At the time, Sheriff Zena Stephens said the jail was built to hold less violent offenders.

The Commissioners Court has now awarded a contract to AECOM Technical Services to perform a needs assessment, which includes a facility conditions assessment. The county also appointed a

Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

At a workshop in February, the court discussed the assessment and the committee's role. The advisory committee, also known as a steering committee, will work with the hired company to make decisions and give direction to help drive the next steps for the jail.

The entire assessment process will take 28 weeks, according to the county. Part of the process will look at how many beds are needed at the facility, as well as assess the laundry and cafeteria spaces.

"(We will talk to) whoever is in charge of the kitchen, laundry, intake, housing and security," said Sebastian Simonett with AECOM. "We meet with them to talk a bit

about the quality of their space. How is it laid out today? How is it working for you today? How could it be improved in the future? Ultimately, this informs the spatial program requirements, which tells you we need X number of square feet for these parts, and then we bring that all together, as it then relates to that population forecast of housing, which determines your bed count."

In addition to working with the committee, AECOM will interview stakeholders such as city police departments, judges, the district attorney and public defenders who interact with the jail and can shed light on crime in Jefferson County.

*Jail continues on A5*

## DOJ nears settlement with TPC, lawyer says

Claimants from 2019 explosion could receive additional money

By Mbu Maungo  
STAFF WRITER

Additional funds could soon be heading to Southeast Texans affected by the 2019 plant explosion as a result of a nonprosecutorial agreement between the Department of Justice and TPC, according to a Brent Coon & Associates video update provided to clients.

While documents laying out the final terms and conditions for this resolution have not officially been signed, Coon said March 3 that he was optimistic about the outcome after a year's worth of negotiations by the law firm and other members of the plaintiff council.

"It's not going to be amounts to make you fully whole, but it's going to be significantly more than what we're able to get out of the bankruptcy," Coon said in the unlisted YouTube video uploaded March 3.

*TPC continues on A5*

## State: Families to get answers on vouchers despite ruling

By Isaac Yu  
STAFF WRITER

Officials overseeing Texas private school vouchers say families can still expect to know if they will receive state money in the coming weeks, even after a court ruling this week extended the application deadline.

It's a tight turnaround that appears to contradict what state lawyers argued during a hearing in a Houston courtroom on Tuesday. Attorneys defending acting Comptroller Kelly Hancock's moves to bar Islamic schools from the program over alleged terrorism ties warned that such an extension would "disrupt" the agency's work.

A federal judge granted the two-week extension.

*Vouchers continues on A5*

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## 'Father of Austin Country Music,' Threadgill also known for yodeling

By Megan Zapalac  
STAFF WRITER

On this day in history, the Beaumont Enterprise is remembering country artist Kenneth Threadgill on the 39th anniversary of his death.

He was born John Kenneth Threadgill on Sept. 12, 1909, in Peniel as the ninth of 11 children, according to the Texas State Historical Association website.

Threadgill's family moved to Beaumont and then Austin in 1923, where he attended Austin High School and met his future mentor Jimmie Rodgers, the association said.

While living in Beaumont, Threadgill worked at the Tivoli Theater, where he heard Rodgers sing.

While backstage, Rodgers heard Threadgill imitating his yodeling and was impressed, ac-

ording to the association.

Threadgill then went on to incorporate yodeling into his country singing later in his life.

In 1933 while living in Austin, he began working at an old service station on North Lamar Boulevard. By December, he had bought the station, changing it to Threadgill's Tavern, selling gas and food and operating as the first establishment to

*History continues on A5*



Courtesy of the Texas State Historical Association

Kenneth Threadgill became a good friend of Janis Joplin, who performed at Threadgill's Tavern in Austin.

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