

'Toxic workplace'

Battle over spending cuts, tax hike raises tensions with mayor, council

By Megan Rodriguez
STAFF WRITER

Tensions among City Council members and Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones are boiling over just as they make the city's toughest budgetary decisions in years: raise the property tax rate for the first time in three decades or severely slash spending next year.

Two council members have

taken to social media in the last week to draw attention to the breakdown at the top of city government — after a tumultuous debate over how to pay for land for a new Spurs arena and other projects.

That fight last week came late in an already tense budget season where Jones and the council have fought over how to fill a projected \$158 million deficit over the next

two years.

Council members are still divided over what to keep or cut, and whether to OK a property tax rate increase — which could make for a messy meeting Thursday, when they're slated to vote on next year's tax rate and \$4.4 billion budget.

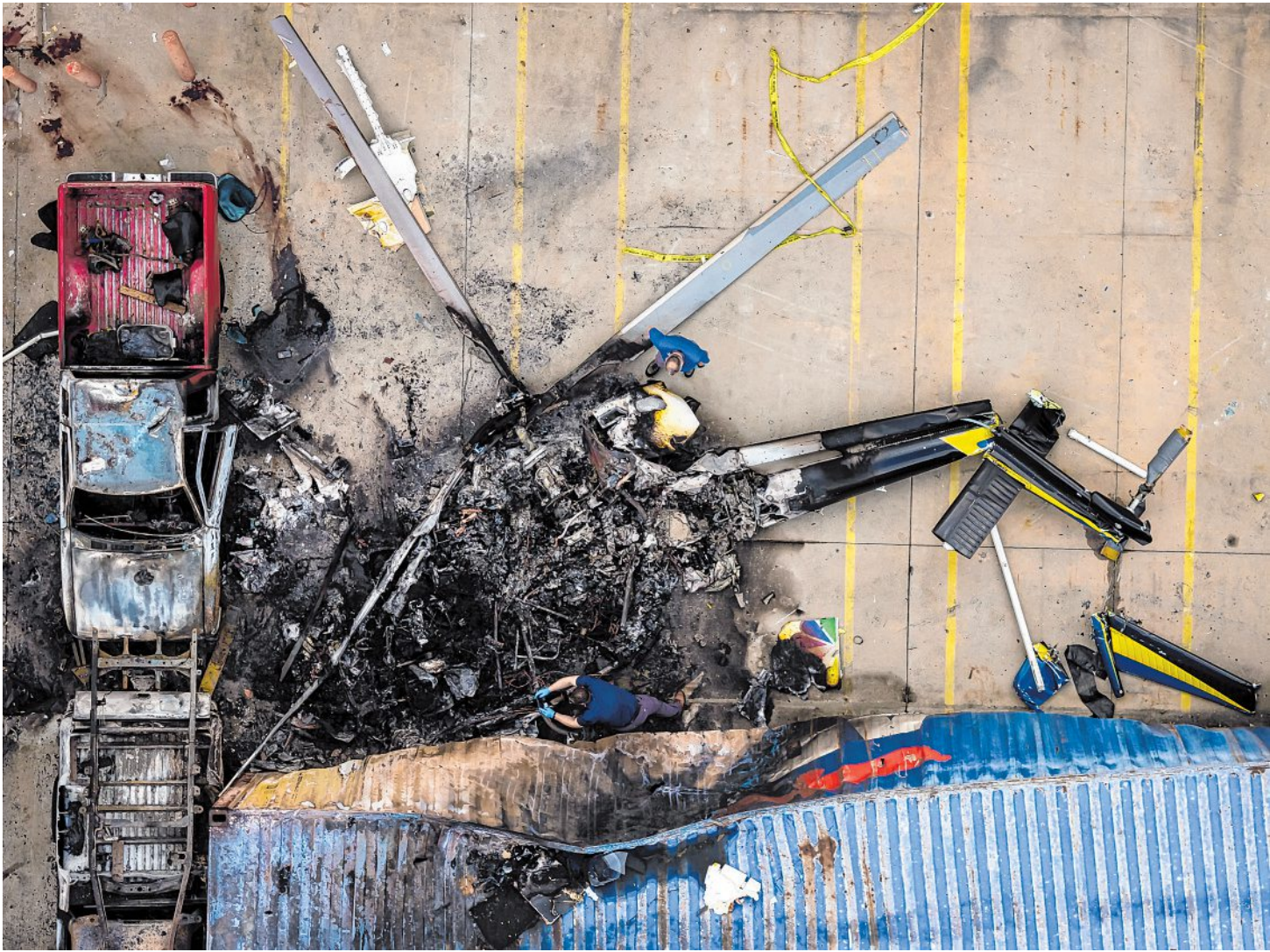
City Manager Erik Walsh has proposed a budget with cuts totaling \$41 million in the upcoming year and raising the property tax rate by 2 cents, to just over 56 cents per \$100 assessed value. That would cost the average

Budget continues on A4



San Antonio Express-News file photo

City Council is considering raising property taxes by 2 cents to help cover the budget deficit. The proposal has split the council.



Ethan Swope/Associated Press

Officials investigate the aftermath of a news helicopter crash in Chatsworth, a neighborhood in Los Angeles, on Wednesday. The pilot and a reporter in the helicopter and a man on the ground were killed.

Driver arrested in string of deadly crashes

SUV collides with bus before news helicopter went down

By Ashley Duong,
Hallie Golden
and Dave Collins
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — A motorist was arrested on murder charges after authorities say she slammed her SUV into a city bus in Los Angeles, killing at least two people and injuring six others in a prelude to a second deadly tragedy: the fiery crash of a TV news helicopter that was covering the collision.

Bailee Lynn Rios, 36, of Simi Valley, was arrested Tuesday night and is being held at a Los Angeles jail with bail set at \$4 million, police said Wednesday.



Ronaldo Bolanos/Tribune News Service

Bystanders watch Tuesday as police and L.A. Metro officials investigate an SUV that slammed into the side of a Metro bus.

day. The case is being forwarded to the district attorney's office, which will decide whether to file the charges in court or pursue different ones. Information on a lawyer who could speak on her behalf was not immediately available.

The helicopter, which was used by NBC and Telemundo, crashed about two hours after police say Rios drove her 2004 Ford Expedition the wrong way down a busy avenue, ran a red light and struck a vehicle before hitting the bus. One passenger was fully ejected from the bus and another was partially ejected, police said.

Rios' mother, Cindy Rios,

Crash continues on A8

NIOSA cancels festival for 2027

Organizers 'pause' event amid revenue, attendance declines

By Richard A. Marini
STAFF WRITER

First it was a "reset," now it's a "pause." Whatever it's called, the bottom line is that A Night in Old San Antonio has been canceled for 2027.

Following a board meeting Wednesday, the nonprofit Conservation Society of San Antonio, which produces NIOSA, announced the four-day celebration will take a hiatus to allow organizers to "review, retool, and reinvigorate the beloved tradition."

In a statement, society President Betty Bueché said, "We are choosing to hit the pause button now so we can protect the long-term legacy of the San Antonio Conservation Society and the funding necessary to carry out our historic preservation mission. Rather than compromising the quality of the experience under shrinking logistical parameters, we are using this intermission to streamline operations, explore potential new locations and formats."

Society officials blame a convergence of factors for what they previously called a "reset" of the event, which they claim is the single largest fundraiser for historic preservation in the county. Among them is an impending 43% reduction in available space at La Villita, NIOSA's home for more than 75 years.

"The La Villita Assembly Hall was sold and is now privately owned, several restaurants are about to go under construction and the patio outside the assembly hall is not available," Bueché told the Express-News in August.

In an email to the Express-News on Wednesday afternoon, city Assistant Director of Communications Brian Chasnoff disputed the claim that NIOSA had lost access to city-owned event space at La Villita.

"La Villita remains available

NIOSA continues on A8

Bexar County sets \$2.6B budget, delays deeper cuts

By Katie Bartlett
STAFF WRITER

After weeks of sometimes fiery debate, a fractured Bexar County Commissioners Court approved a \$2.6 billion budget on Tuesday, pulling back from some of the deepest cuts introduced to help close a large deficit.

The county budget office had recommended cutting 50 positions, but commissioners trimmed the number to 42. The county employs a total of nearly 5,000 people.

The final budget also maintains funding for 49 county positions filled with federal pandemic relief money, which will run out at year's end.

Yet, the spending plan will draw \$68 million from the county's reserve fund. County Manager David Smith, who announced Tuesday that he's retiring at the end of the year, said the budget will be balanced because reserves will cover the gap between revenue and spending.

The court — which controls the county's finances and oversees its infrastructure, facilities

and day-to-day operations — had been debating spending priorities and potential cuts for weeks. Commissioners acknowledged the budget doesn't fully close the county's two-year deficit of \$145 million and warned that deeper cuts may be needed in future years.

The vote was 3-2.

County Judge Peter Sakai and Commissioners Rebeca Clay-Flores and Justin Rodriguez voted to adopt the budget, which is smaller than last year's by \$200 million. Commissioners Grant Moody and Tommy Calvert vot-

ed against it.

Moody criticized \$4 million in last-minute spending additions — about \$2 million beyond staff recommendations — and said budget staff estimated the county would need to find another \$25 million to \$30 million in savings in coming years.

"We have a responsibility, a fiduciary responsibility to the citizens of Bexar County to make tough decisions, and I think we could've done more," he said.

The court also formally approved a flat property-tax rate for fiscal year 2027 — at just un-

der 30 cents per \$100 of valuation.

The budget provides no pay raises for county employees, though the county will absorb an \$8 million increase in employee health insurance costs rather than pass them on to workers.

County continues on A8

