

# Tyler Morning Telegraph

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## County OKs '27 budget process

LEEZA MEYER

Smith County's Fiscal Year 2027 budget process is set.

The commissioners court on Tuesday unanimously approved the new budget process, which will now include line-item identifications in the budget worksheets, some information technology costs moved to individual department budgets and utilizing a new software called ClearGov. The court also approved the ability to add or remove Judge Neal Franklin from the initial review meetings.



Timothy Hollis

"I think this is a solid process and I think it addresses some of the issues from previous budget years," said Timothy Hollis, budget officer for Smith County, appointed in January. "Then also provides a pretty straightforward, streamlined process for accounting."

The process will begin in late summer with final decisions made in September before the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1.

### BASELINE BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

Hollis said the first step in the budgeting process will be the baseline budget.

"How much is it going to cost next year to provide the same level of services we are providing this year?" Hollis said. "Really, the only increases are inflationary costs and pressures."

The baseline budget will include operational costs, inflationary increases and volume-related changes, excluding new initiatives and expanded services.

The budget worksheets will be distributed to the county departments where they will prepare budgets with the oversight from the Budget Office and the county auditor, Karin Smith, to ensure

COUNTY >> PAGE 3A



## TAKING A TOLL



Vehicles travel and signage is pictured on Toll 49. (Tyler Morning Telegraph File Photos)

## Recent Toll 49 fatalities bring safety concerns to forefront; NET RMA to review findings

SANTANA WOOD

After two deadly crashes on Toll 49 in Smith County in a one-week span, local residents are raising concerns.

Tina Loper, 63, of Flint was killed in a multi-vehicle crash on the toll road around 1:45 p.m. March 12. Three other people were injured. The crash occurred

between Highway 31 and Highway 155 around mile marker 19. Less than one week later on Wednesday morning, a driver of an 18-wheeler veered into the wrong lane and collided into another semi truck on the toll road. The wrong-way driver, identified as Tammy Lee Asher, 59, of Beaumont, was pronounced dead at the scene, and the other driver

was minorly injured.

Also in recent months, two women were killed in a two-vehicle crash on the toll road in December.

As the statistics rise, many residents are concerned about the number of fatal crashes that have occurred on Toll 49 and worry about the safety of drivers traveling on the roadway.

Officials with North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority, which maintains the toll road, said Wednesday in a statement to the Tyler Morning Telegraph that the board recognizes the gravity of the situation and noted investigations are underway.

"The NET RMA recognize the

TOLL >> PAGE 5A

## Downtown team celebrates milestone, gives project updates

LEEZA MEYER

The City of Tyler Downtown Department hosted two open houses Tuesday to update the public on the Downtown Improvement Project along the completed portion of College Avenue.

"Ever since this project became an idea, even a dream at its conception, we've had very frequent stakeholder meetings to function as those open houses," said Lindsey Froneberger, downtown specialist for Tyler. "Those

opinions and concerns and people's wants and desires were all very important factors in the design."

The department hosted open houses from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 4:30 to 6 p.m. to allow residents and visitors to see recently completed improvements, ask questions directly to city staff and learn about the work underway. Current digital design renderings were on display for guests to look while enjoying snacks.

The city's \$25.5 million project funded through the

Half Cent sales tax, aims to revitalize downtown with new two-way streets, green spaces, community restrooms and infrastructure. The Downtown Improvement Project began in September 2025 with replacing the downtown's historic red bricks and is set to be completed in April 2028.

The City of Tyler also partnered with Smith County as the construction on the county's new courthouse and upgrades on

DOWNTOWN >> PAGE 3A



Poster board renderings show residents what the completed square will look like as the city's downtown team hosts an open house earlier this week to provide updates and celebrate a milestone on College Avenue. (Leeza Meyer/Tyler Morning Telegraph)

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"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Weather  
High 86 Low 60

Very warm. See the Tyler-East Texas 3-day forecast on Page 5A.

Stocks  
DOW -203.72  
NASDAQ -61.73

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