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Northeast Tarrant cities recovering from recession

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Officials in Hurst, Euless and Bedford were pleasantly surprised by increases in sales taxes even though construction of the North Tarrant Express caused some businesses to close and others to move.

The cities are making a healthy recovery from the recession, so services aren't being cut and there is money in the budgets for employee pay raises.

The three Northeast Tarrant County cities recently adopted budgets and property tax rates, which take effect Wednesday.

Residents' property tax rates will stay the same or decrease slightly, but their tax bills could go up because of rising property values.

Residents will also see higher water bills because of increasing costs passed on to the cities.


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Hurst

The property tax rate in Hurst is decreasing a quarter-cent from 60.8 cents to 60.6 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

The total budget amount is \$66.4 million, and the city's operating budget is \$32.9 million.

Hurst residents' water bills will go up about \$5 per month because of a 4 percent increase in wholesale water rates. A bill for someone using 12,000 gallons is \$130 a month.

City spokeswoman Ashleigh Johnson said Hurst officials were expecting a 1 percent drop in sales taxes because of construction of the North Tarrant Express, which is supposed to be completed next month. But sales taxes rose 3 percent, a pleasant surprise, she said.

Hurst also had a 3.5 percent increase in property values.

Employees will receive a 2.5 percent cost-of-living raise. Full-time employees will get a one-time \$600 payment, and part-timers will get a \$150 payment.

"As always, we will remain fiscally conservative for any surprises that may crop up, but we are very optimistic for this next fiscal year," Johnson said.

Euless

Sales taxes also rose in Euless, and city spokeswoman Betsy Deck said new stores are coming in and construction is also picking up. The economy is also improving, she said.

In Euless, the property tax rate was lowered from 47 cents per \$100 of assessed value to 46.75 cents.

The total budget amount is \$111.6 million, and the operating budget is \$38.5 million.

Finance director Janina Jewell said the 2014-15 budget includes money for 3 percent merit-based raises for employees. Euless is also restoring money to services that were cut during the recession, such as street repairs and park improvements.

Jewell said Euless is also buying equipment for police and firefighters and fitness equipment for the Euless Family Life Center.

The city is getting \$4.3 million from its portion of a car rental tax at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport. Jewell said the money will be used for day-to-day operations and to help lower debt and avoid issuing new debt.

Water rates are going up by 30 cents per 1,000 gallons, but the increase will be offset by a rebate of 34 cents per 1,000 gallons up to 15,000 gallons, Jewell said.

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Garbage collection rates are increasing this spring from \$8.48 per month to \$8.73 per month.

Bedford

Bedford's property tax rate of 49.4833 cents per \$100 of assessed value is staying the same. The total budget for 2014-15 is \$64.3 million and the operating budget is \$29.3 million.

Meg Jakubik, assistant to the city manager, said Bedford is making a strong recovery from the recession with sales tax revenue 5.23 percent higher than last year.

The sales taxes went up during North Tarrant Express construction, and Jakubik said she is pleased with the results.

"We really weren't sure what to expect. Our development department did really well with helping to retain and relocate businesses," she said.

Jakubik said there are no cost-of-living raises for employees, but money is available for 2 percent merit raises, and the city will also determine whether any salaries are below market value.

She said that the city is adding a special events coordinator position and that money to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Old Bedford School is included in the budget.

Residents' water and sewer rates will rise, which means the average bill will go up \$4.33 a month, or from \$97.90 to \$102.23. Jakubik said the amount is based on a July water bill.

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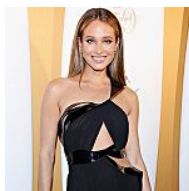
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