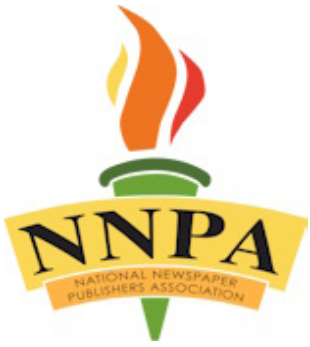




The Villager was founded by T. L. Wyatt in 1973, here, in East Austin, Texas.

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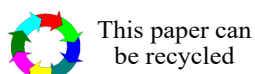


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October 2, 2026



RAPPIN'
THOMAS WYATT

CONGRESSIONAL
LAUGHING
STOCK

Sen. Eric Schmitt’s attempt at a high-profile “gotcha” moment during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing this week instead became a national punchline, after the Missouri Republican confused the NBA’s Atlanta Hawks with the University of Iowa Hawkeyes — two teams separated by 650 miles and entirely different leagues.

Schmitt pressed former special counsel Jack Smith on whether he had attended an Atlanta Hawks game on February 3, 2024, implying the trip connected Smith to Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis amid scrutiny of her relationship with a prosecutor. Smith repeatedly denied being in Atlanta or attending any Hawks game, prompting Schmitt to accuse him of perjury and call him a “total dirtbag.”

The supposed evidence — a poster board of text messages held briefly behind Schmitt — did not mention Atlanta at all. When Smith finally saw the excerpt, he recognized it referenced a women’s college basketball game he attended in Maryland: the Iowa Hawkeyes versus the University of Maryland, featuring star Caitlin Clark.

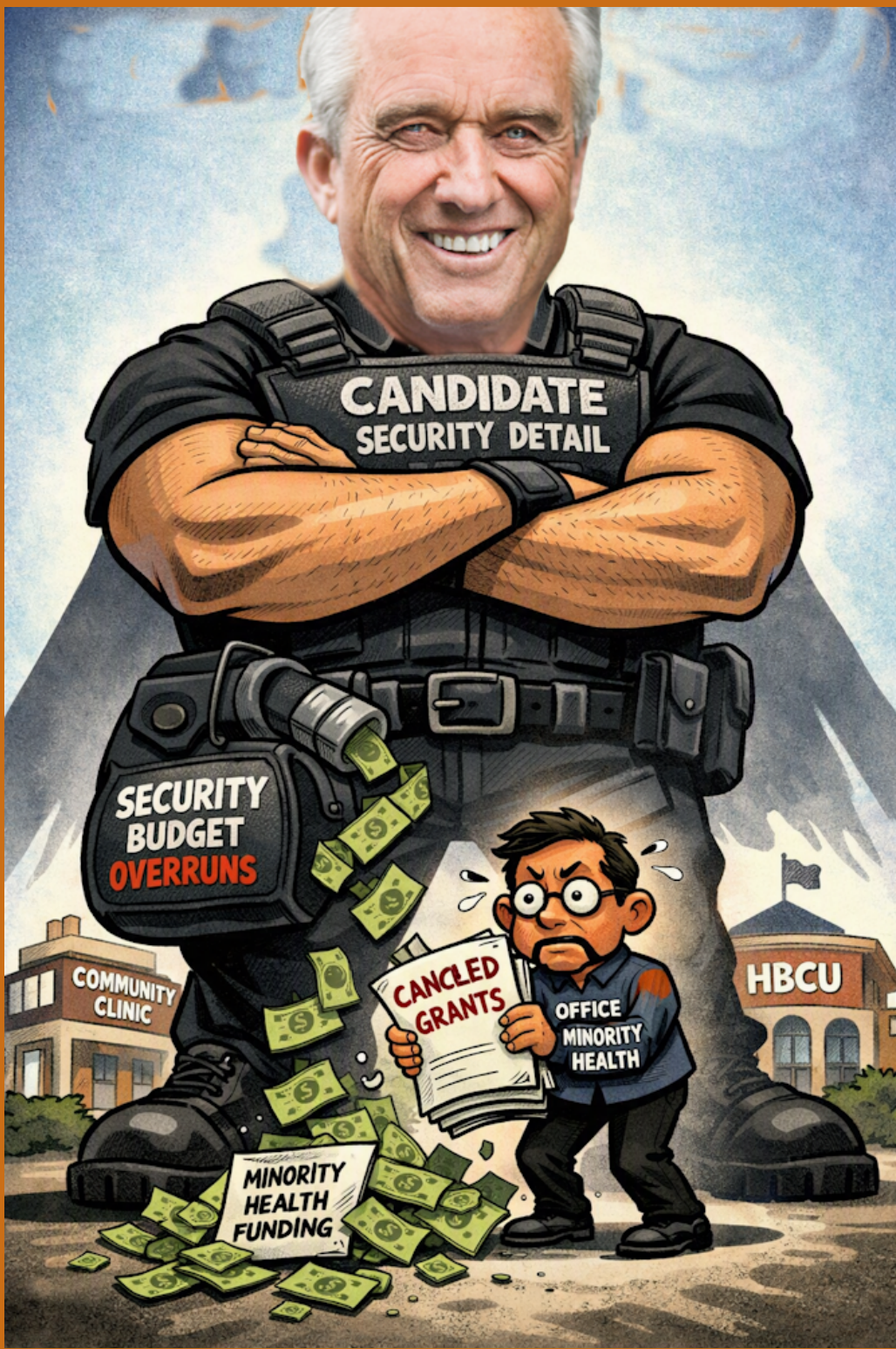
Sen. Amy Klobuchar stepped in to clarify the obvious mix-up. “Could it then be that the University of Iowa is the Hawkeyes?” she asked, noting that Iowa played Maryland that same day. Her correction underscored Schmitt’s error and the shattered foundation of his accusation.

The blunder ricocheted across social media and political news outlets, with commentators highlighting Schmitt’s confident posture moments before the mistake unraveled. What was meant to be a sharp interrogation instead became an instant viral misfire — one likely to shadow Schmitt as he seeks to elevate his national profile.

To be clear, this is why your vote matters in the upcoming November elections. The current senate, led by republicans, is a complete disaster. If they can’t tell an NBA team from a collegiate one, then what the hell are they good for?

\$12M Cut from Minority Health Budget to Pay for RFK Jr. Security

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager



(VILLAGER) - The Department of Health and Human Services’ decision to reduce the Office of Minority Health’s budget and redirect those funds to cover security costs for independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has triggered a wave of criticism from civil rights leaders, public-health advocates, and members of Congress. The transfer, totaling roughly \$12 million, represents one of the most consequential mid-year reallocations within HHS in recent memory, both for its political implications and for its impact on longstanding efforts to reduce racial health disparities.

The Office of Minority Health, established in 1986, has historically served as the federal government’s primary vehicle for addressing inequities in health outcomes among Black, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous communities. Its annual budget—approximately \$74 to \$75 million—supports community-based health initiatives, research partnerships, and grants to institutions including HBCUs and minority-serving organizations. Earlier this year, HHS notified congressional appropriators that OMH’s budget would be reduced by about \$12 million. According to multiple outlets, including The Wall Street Journal, The New Republic, and Word In Black, the department acknowledged that the reallocated funds were needed to meet the sharply rising cost of Kennedy’s federally mandated security detail.

Kennedy’s security expenses have escalated dramatically since his entry into the 2024 presidential race. After receiving Secret Service protection—an unusual step for a non-major-party candidate—his security budget reportedly increased from roughly \$10 million in FY 2025 to an estimated \$17 million in FY 2026. HHS, which houses the Secret Service’s administrative funding line for certain election-related security obligations, informed lawmakers that the agency needed to identify internal offsets to meet the new requirement. The Office of Minority Health became one of the sources for those offsets.

The consequences were immediate. Sixteen minority-health grants were canceled or suspended, affecting programs focused on maternal health, chronic-disease prevention, mental-health access, and community-based research. Several HBCUs reported

receiving notices that previously approved awards would not be funded due to “limited resources” and “programmatic reprioritization.” Although HHS spokespeople insisted publicly that the cuts reflected internal assessments rather than a direct tradeoff with Kennedy’s security, the department’s own communications to appropriators made clear that the reallocation was tied to covering the increased protection costs.

The political reaction was swift and pointed. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Hispanic Caucus, and Asian Pacific American Caucus condemned the decision as an unacceptable diversion of funds from communities already facing disproportionate health burdens. One lawmaker described the move as “taking money from babies to beef up an entourage,” a sentiment echoed across several public-health organizations that argued the cuts undermined decades of work to close racial health gaps. Advocacy groups also noted the symbolic weight of reducing minority-health funding during a period of widening disparities in maternal mortality, chronic disease, and access to preventive care.

HHS has not indicated whether the Office of Minority Health’s budget will be restored in future cycles or whether additional offsets may be required as the election season continues. Congressional oversight committees have requested further documentation, and several members have signaled plans to pursue legislative protections that would prevent minority-health funds from being used for unrelated security obligations in the future.

What remains clear is that the reallocation has introduced a rare collision between public-health equity and the financial demands of federal election security. For communities served by the Office of Minority Health, the loss of \$12 million represents not only a reduction in services but a troubling precedent: that critical health-equity programs can be disrupted by political contingencies far outside their mission. As the election cycle advances, the debate over this decision is likely to intensify, raising broader questions about federal priorities, administrative discretion, and the protection of vulnerable communities in an era of heightened political volatility.

INSIDE

Historic East Austin Neighborhoods host forum for City Council, AISD candidate! See [page 2](#) for details.

Resident of Converse said to be fed up with direction of country, planned to “shoot up” the state’s capitol. See [THREAT](#), page 2

Central Texas law enforcement reportedly testing AI-assisted police draft reports. What could go wrong? See [POLICE](#), page 3



Austin may soon have a major Data-Center hub in its own backyard without residents being made aware. See [COSMOS](#), page 3

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THE COUNTY BUDGET AS A MORAL DOCUMENT

Travis County’s \$2.3B plan shows who we are — and who we’re trying to become

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Travis County’s newly approved \$2.3 billion budget is more than a spreadsheet of allocations. It is, in every meaningful sense, a moral document. Budgets reveal priorities, expose blind spots, and clarify what a community refuses to ignore. This year, county leaders sent a clear message: the old approach to mental health, public safety, and basic access to services is no longer enough.

The most consequential shift is the county’s investment in crisis care and behavioral-health infrastructure. For decades, families across East Austin and the eastern crescent have lived with the fallout of a fractured system — loved ones cycling through emergency rooms, neighbors arrested for behaviors rooted in untreated illness, and people experiencing homelessness pushed from one jurisdiction to another without long-term care.

By funding new psychiatric beds, expanding crisis services, and laying groundwork for a future Mental Health Crisis Center, the county is finally moving from triage to transformation. It is an overdue acknowledgment that the cost of inaction

is measured not only in dollars, but in human suffering.

Of course, the budget carries a tax increase — about \$36 more per year for the median homeowner. For some, that’s manageable. For others, especially longtime residents in historically Black and working-class neighborhoods, every uptick adds pressure in a city where affordability erodes month by month. Critics argue that Austin-centered programs dominate the spending and that smaller communities in western Travis County may not see proportional benefit. That tension is real. But it also reflects a deeper truth: the county’s greatest needs are concentrated where decades of underinvestment intersect with rapid displacement.

This budget reframes public safety not as enforcement, but as stability — the stability that comes from treatment, crisis intervention, and reducing the number of people forced into jails or emergency rooms because no other door was open. The county’s alignment with Austin’s “No Wrong Door” initiative signals a growing consensus: safer streets require safer systems.

For East Austin, the stakes are personal. Our

neighborhoods have carried the weight of overlapping crises — housing insecurity, behavioral-health gaps, and the erosion of community institutions. Investments in crisis care, disaster response, and transportation studies matter here because they shape whether families can stay rooted, whether elders can access care without crossing the city, and whether young people inherit a community that supports them rather than penalizes them.

A budget cannot reverse displacement. But it can slow the forces that accelerate it. It can stabilize families who are one crisis away from losing everything. It can build the infrastructure that keeps communities whole.

This \$2.3B plan is a beginning, not a victory lap. Its success will depend on transparency, equitable implementation, and sustained pressure from the communities it claims to serve. Western Travis County deserves meaningful outreach. Eastern Travis County deserves measurable outcomes. And all residents deserve a system that treats mental health as a public good, not a private burden.

Travis County has taken a step toward a more humane future. Now the work — our work — is to ensure that step becomes a stride.

Planned Mass-Shooting Threat at the Texas State Capitol Foiled

Swift action by DPS and the FBI prevents a potential tragedy in Austin

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - State and federal authorities say they stopped a credible plan to carry out a mass shooting at the Texas State Capitol, arresting a 40-year-old suspect in the early hours of Wednesday morning. According to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), officers received a tip Tuesday night about an individual threatening a violent attack on the Capitol scheduled for **Oct. 1**. Within hours, DPS SWAT moved on the suspect’s residence in **Converse, Texas**, just northeast of San Antonio, and arrested **Benny Caldera Jr.** at approximately 3 a.m.

Caldera was booked into the **Bexar County Jail** and charged with **felony terroristic threat against a public servant**, a charge that reflects the seriousness of the alleged plot. Investigators say Caldera had been **collecting guns and ammunition** and had made explicit statements about “shooting up” the Capitol. According to arrest documents, he told a friend, “I love you, if you don’t see me again... I am going to the Capitol and I am going to shoot it up.”

People close to Caldera had recently reported growing anger, erratic behavior, and signs of potential violence. Authorities say he had voiced rage over political issues and the direction of the country, and investigators are now examining his devices to determine whether he had accomplices

or was acting alone. Both DPS and the FBI emphasize that the threat was **credible**, prompting an immediate multi-agency response.

The alleged attack date — Thursday, Oct. 1 — raised alarm among state officials, who were notified of the threat and arrest early Wednesday. While the Capitol remains open, DPS has increased its security presence and says that heightened patrols will continue as the investigation unfolds. Governor Greg Abbott publicly praised the rapid response, stating that Texas “will NOT tolerate threats of violence against our Capitol.”

Caldera was initially held on a \$75,000 bond and later transferred to federal custody for additional charges. Court records show he had a prior weapons charge in 2023, though authorities have not yet indicated whether that history played a role in the alleged plot.

For Austin residents, the foiled attack is a sobering reminder of the volatility surrounding political institutions and the importance of rapid, coordinated law-enforcement response. DPS officials stress that while the immediate threat has been neutralized, the investigation remains active — and the Capitol will operate under enhanced security until authorities determine there is no ongoing risk.

Circle C Rezoning Clears Council Hurdle, Igniting Southwest Austin Debate

A 1,000-unit plan tests the balance between growth, neighborhood safety, and environmental stewardship

By Villager staff

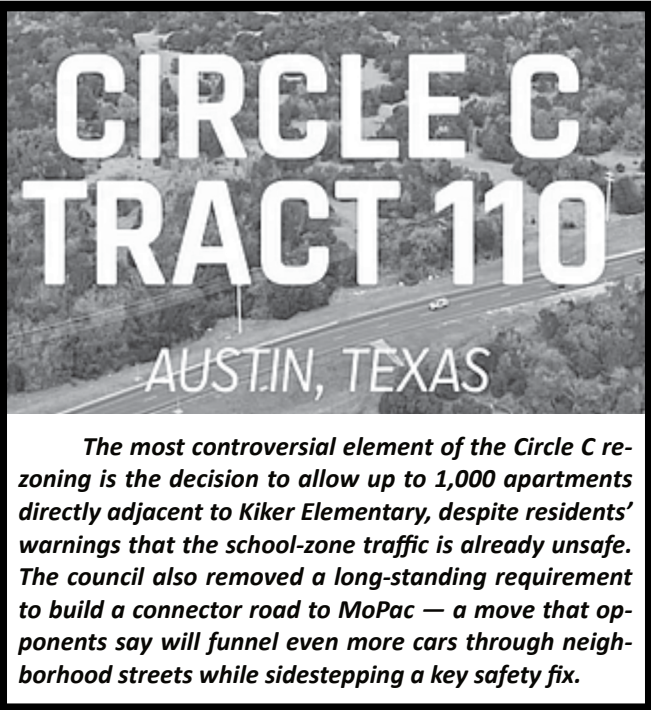
(AUSTIN, TX) - The Austin City Council has approved one of the most consequential land-use changes in Southwest Austin in more than a decade, voting to rezone a 67-acre tract in Circle C Ranch to allow **up to 1,000 multifamily units**. The decision — unanimous among participating members, with Council Member Marc Duchen abstaining — reshapes what had long been envisioned as an office-focused site and places new housing pressure on a part of the city already strained by traffic, school capacity, and environmental limits.

The land, known as **Tract 110**, sits near South MoPac and Kiker Elementary School. Under a 2002 development agreement, the property was restricted to office and limited commercial uses. The new zoning opens the door for dense residential construction, including **100 income-restricted units**, though the future developer remains uncertain as Stratus Properties, the longtime landholder, has announced plans to dissolve.

A Neighborhood at the Breaking Point

Circle C residents turned out in force, filling City Hall with testimony about daily gridlock, dangerous school-zone backups, and fears that funneling apartment traffic through Kiker Elementary’s frontage would heighten risks for children walking or biking to class. Parents described morning drop-off as “already a near-miss waiting to happen,” urging the council to delay approval until a full traffic analysis could be completed.

A flashpoint in the debate was the removal of a requirement that the developer build an extension of South Bay Lane to connect Circle C directly to MoPac. Some residents argued the connection



would disperse traffic more safely; the Circle C Homeowners Association opposed the extension, citing neighborhood impacts. The council ultimately sided with staff recommendations to drop the requirement.

Environmental Stakes on the Edwards Aquifer

The tract lies within the **Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone**, a sensitive environmental area that has historically limited development intensity. Conservation groups warned that dense construction could threaten water quality and undermine decades of aquifer protections. Only about 16 of the 67 acres are actually buildable, with the remainder constrained by easements and environmental buffers — a fact that both complicates the project and heightens scrutiny.

Historic East Austin Neighborhoods host forum for City Council, AISD candidate

African American Cultural Heritage District Neighborhoods to hear from candidates

Barbara Spears-Corbett

The neighborhoods of the African American Cultural Heritage District—including Robertson Hill, Swede Hill, Homewood Heights, Rogers Washington Holy Cross Historic District, Chestnut, Blackland and other neighborhoods—will hold a candidate forum for AISD Trustee District 1 and At-Large candidates and District 1 City Council candidates **on Saturday, October 3, 2026. The forum will begin at 1 p.m. and will be held at the Yellow Jacket Conference Center, 900 Thompson Street (Eastside ECHS at L. C. Anderson Campus).**

The forum will begin with the AISD Board candidates, followed by the District 1 Austin City Council candidates. Candidates will each have 15 minutes to introduce themselves and their platform and then take questions from the audience with the remaining time.

THE LAST DAY TO REGISTER TO VOTE IS OCTOBER 5TH!

Housing Pressure Meets Neighborhood Resistance

Supporters of the rezoning framed the vote as a necessary response to Austin’s housing shortage, noting that Southwest Austin has few remaining parcels capable of delivering meaningful supply. Council Member Paige Ellis, who represents the district, acknowledged the community’s concerns but said the city must “take opportunities where they exist” to add housing in high-demand areas.

The vote reflects a broader tension playing out across Austin: how to add housing without overwhelming neighborhoods that lack the infrastructure to absorb rapid growth. Circle C, with its winding streets, school-zone chokepoints, and environmentally sensitive terrain, is a case study in that challenge.

Future Outlook

A traffic impact analysis will be required before construction begins, though residents pushed unsuccessfully for that study to precede the vote. With Stratus dissolving, the project’s timeline — and the identity of the eventual developer — remains uncertain.

What is clear is that the council’s decision will reverberate across Southwest Austin. For some, it represents long-overdue progress toward easing the city’s housing crisis. For others, it signals a future of heavier traffic, greater safety risks, and increased pressure on an already fragile aquifer.

As Austin continues to grow, the Circle C rezoning stands as a defining example of the city’s struggle to balance **housing needs, neighborhood stability, and environmental responsibility** — a balance that will only become more difficult as land grows scarcer and demand intensifies.

AI-Assisted Police Reports Are Already Being Tested in Central Texas

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Law enforcement agencies in Central Texas have quietly entered a new phase of policing: the use of artificial intelligence to help draft police reports. What began as a limited pilot has grown into an emerging practice, with departments experimenting with tools that promise faster documentation, clearer narratives, and reduced administrative strain. The reality, however, is far more complicated.

The Hays County Sheriff’s Office is among the agencies testing Axon’s Draft One, an AI system that generates first-draft police reports from body-camera audio. After an officer plugs in their camera, the system transcribes the footage, asks a few clarifying prompts, and produces a narrative that the officer must review and correct. The tool is powered by a large language model similar to ChatGPT, and its output can vary widely depending on background noise, officer speech patterns, and the complexity of the incident.

Early tests have revealed both promise and pitfalls. Officers report that the system can reduce

hours of paperwork to minutes, freeing them to return to patrol or complete other tasks. But the technology has also produced errors and occasional “hallucinations,” including one widely circulated example from Utah in which an AI-generated report claimed an officer “turned into a frog” because The Princess and the Frog was playing nearby. Agencies testing the system emphasize that officers remain responsible for verifying every detail before signing their names to a report.

The trend is not limited to Central Texas. A national case study from the Council on Criminal Justice confirms that departments across the country are experimenting with AI-drafted reports built from body-camera data, voice notes, and officer transcripts. Vendors are racing to meet demand: Axon’s Draft One uses OpenAI’s technology, while Truleo’s Field Notes relies on Amazon Bedrock. Both companies market their tools as efficiency boosters, but both acknowledge the need for careful oversight.

Federal guidance is beginning to take shape.

The National Artificial Intelligence Advisory Committee has urged agencies to conduct real-world field testing, implement accuracy safeguards, and ensure that officers understand the limitations of AI-generated narratives. Civil-rights advocates warn that errors in police reports can have serious consequences, especially in communities already facing disproportionate policing. They argue that any technology capable of shaping official narratives must be scrutinized for bias, reliability, and transparency.

For now, AI-assisted report writing remains in a testing phase, but its trajectory is clear. Departments are looking for ways to streamline operations, and vendors are eager to supply tools that promise speed and consistency. Whether these systems ultimately strengthen or undermine public trust will depend on how they are deployed, monitored, and corrected.

What is certain is that the future of police documentation is already being written—and increasingly, the first draft is being written by a machine.

Northwest Austin’s Project Cosmos Quietly Emerges as a Major Data-Center Hub, Raising Neighborhood Alarm

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(AUSTIN, TX) — Months after SB Energy assured Northwest Austin residents that the redevelopment of the former 3M campus would be an engineering and research facility, newly surfaced financial filings and construction activity now point to a very different reality: **Project Cosmos is becoming one of the region’s largest high-performance data centers**, with a power demand approaching 50 megawatts and a long-term lease valued in the billions.

The 1-million-square-foot campus at **6801 River Place Boulevard**, tucked between River Place and Four Points, has been under renovation since early 2024. For much of that time, SB Energy representatives described the project as an R&D hub anchored by Graphcore, the AI-chip company SoftBank acquired last year. But recent disclosures filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission tell a more expansive story, listing the Cos-

mos Technology Campus among SB Energy’s **active data-center developments** and identifying the site’s primary use as **data-center operations and office space**.

A separate filing details a **\$999 million financing package** for what is explicitly labeled a “high-performance computing data center,” along with a **15-year lease agreement** expected to generate **\$2.5 billion in rent**. Together, the documents confirm what neighbors long suspected: the redevelopment is not merely an engineering headquarters but a large-load digital infrastructure project with regional implications.

That revelation has intensified frustration among residents who say they were misled during early community meetings. Concerns now center **on noise, vibration, light pollution, water consumption, and the strain of a 50-megawatt facility on Austin’s electric grid**. Several residents have also questioned whether the city has adequate

oversight, noting that the former 3M campus was already zoned for research and development — a designation that allows data-center construction without triggering Austin’s newer regulatory framework.

City officials acknowledge that Cosmos falls outside recently drafted data-center rules, which were designed to address the explosive growth of high-capacity computing sites across Central Texas. Because SB Energy secured its permits before the rulemaking process began, the project is effectively grandfathered in.

SB Energy has maintained that Graphcore will anchor the campus and that the company is committed to environmental stewardship. But filings suggest Graphcore represents only one component of a much larger operation, and residents say the company’s reluctance to use the term “data center” has eroded trust.

Construction continues across the site, with heavy equipment visible from River Place Boulevard and a steady flow of contractors entering the property. More community meetings are expected as residents push for clearer disclosures, environmental safeguards, and independent monitoring of noise and utility impacts.

For now, Project Cosmos stands as one of the most consequential — and contentious — technology developments in Northwest Austin, a project whose true scale is only now coming into focus.



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Travis County to Operate Historic Number of Polling Sites for 2026 Midterm Election

Travis County Clerk’s Office

(TRAVIS COUNTY, TX) – Travis County will offer more than 200 Election Day polling sites for the November 3, 2026, general election—the largest number of Election Day sites available in recent county history. The County Clerk’s Elections Division has added 40 polling sites since the March primary, expanding access for voters as Travis County prepares for potentially historic voter participation in the upcoming midterm election.

The expansion reflects both the continued growth of Travis County’s registered voter population and County Clerk Dyana Limon-Mercado’s commitment to making voting more accessible and convenient for Travis County voters.

“Opening more than 200 Election Day polling sites is a historic step for Travis County,

and it reflects our unwavering commitment to ensuring that every eligible voter can make their voice heard,” said Travis County Clerk Dyana Limon-Mercado. “The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy, and our office will do everything we can to ensure every voter has a clear, accessible path to the ballot – whether voting in-person, curbside, or by mail. Our greatest responsibility to the community is to plan carefully, protect the integrity of the process, and administer elections that are free, fair, safe and secure. When voters can participate with confidence our entire community is stronger.”

In addition to the expanded number of Election Day sites, voters will have access to at least 45 early voting polling sites. Seven designated early voting sites will be open for ex-

tended hours on the last two days of early voting, until 10:00 pm. The Clerk’s Office introduced extended hours at certain early voting sites three years ago, and their use continues to increase as voters take advantage of additional opportunities to cast their ballots. Sunday voting hours during the early voting period have also been expanded from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., to 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Expanding access to polling sites and hours is one part of the Clerk’s broader effort to make voting as accessible, clear, and reliable as possible. Over the past year, County Clerk Limon-Mercado has worked to address changes and operational challenges that could affect voters’ ability to participate in elections, including advocating for voters in court and raising concerns about the

state’s election technology.

Preparing for a changing election environment

Travis County and County Clerk Limon-Mercado recently joined a federal lawsuit challenging proposed federal requirements governing how the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) handles ballot by mail. The Clerk raised concerns that the proposed changes could create confusion for voters and significant operational challenges for local election officials, particularly given the timing of the changes so close to the November election. The U.S. Supreme Court has since blocked the USPS rule from taking effect. The Clerk’s Office will continue monitoring developments and providing voters with clear, accurate information about the election and ballot by mail procedures.

County Clerk Limon-Mercado has also continued to raise concerns about the Texas Secretary of State’s TEAM 2.0 system and its impact on election operations. The Clerk has been vocal about operational issues with the system for over a year, as county election officials continue to rely on the state’s system to support the administration and reporting of elections.

The Clerk’s Office will continue working to anticipate challenges, address operational issues, and provide voters with the information and access they need to participate in the November election with confidence.

Travis County voters can find current election information, including polling sites, key dates, voter lookup tools, and ballot by mail information at **Vote-Travis.gov**.

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JOERIS GENERAL CONTRACTORS, LTD.,
Joeris General Contractors will be accepting competitive Proposals from Subcontractors and Suppliers for **Texas State Esperanza Hall Phase 2**, until **2:00PM on Thursday, October 29, 2026**. Proposals will be received by email at bidsAustin@joeris.com or by fax.

Pre-Bid Meeting: TBD – Information will be available through Building Connected. Please visit our website at Joeris.com for access.

Project Description: This bid package includes the finish-out of Levels 2 and 3. Additional project information is available on our website.

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Participation by S/M/W/DBE firms & Certified HUB firms is encouraged. Joeris General Contractors is an equal opportunity (EEO) employer.

PAXTON TRAILING TALARICO ACCORDING TO POLLS

By Villager staff



TALARICO

(AUSTIN, TX) - James Talarico currently leads the Texas Senate race, according to the most recent verified public polling. Across multiple reputable surveys conducted in September 2026, Talarico holds a consistent—though modest—advantage over Republican nominee Ken Paxton.

The RealClear-Polling average, drawing from polls conducted between September 8–22, shows Talarico at 47% and Paxton at 45%.

The Texas Politics Project’s poll tracker, updated through September 23, reports similar results. In the latest NPR/Marist poll (Sept. 17–20), Talarico leads 50% to 44%. Other verified polls from TSU/YouGov, Emerson College, ReconMR, and Mason-Dixon also show Talarico ahead by 1 to 6 points, depending on methodology and sample.

Additional aggregation from 270toWin finds an average of six late-September polls placing Talarico at 48% and Paxton at 44.7%, reinforcing a narrow but stable lead.

While margins vary, the consensus across verified polling organizations indicates that Talarico is leading the race, though the contest remains competitive and within reach for both candidates.

The Green Door Boutique: Austin (TX) Chapter of The Links Supports Huston-Tillotson Students Dress for Success

By Jeanne M. Spencer

(AUSTIN, TX) - For several years, the The Green Door Boutique at Huston-Tillotson University has provided students with access to professional attire and accessories to help them prepare for job interviews, career fairs, internships, presentations, and other professional engagements. The Austin (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated continues its support of this valuable campus resource by

contributing professional clothing, jewelry, and accessories for students.

Chapter members donated new and gently used professional attire, including suits, dresses, blazers, blouses, skirts, slacks, and accessories. The collection also included quality designer garments, giving students additional choices for creating polished and professional looks for a variety of career settings. The Links pro-

vided more than clothing. Members also shared practical tips on professional dress and presentation, including selecting appropriate interview attire, coordinating clothing and accessories, and understanding how professional appearance can contribute to making a positive first impression.

The Green Door Boutique reflects The Links, Incorporated’s commitment to enriching the lives of individu-

als and communities through transformational programming. Through its emphasis on educational advancement and the development of young people, the organization supports opportunities that help students prepare for academic, career, and life success. By continuing to support The Green Door Boutique, the Austin (TX) Chapter is helping ensure that Huston-Tillotson University students have ac-

cess to resources that can assist them as they transition from the classroom to the workplace and other professional environments.

For the Austin Links, The Green Door Boutique represents more than professional clothing on a rack. It is an investment in students by helping them prepare, present themselves with confidence, and step through the door to their next opportunity.

AISD Faces \$14M Hit as Enrollment Falls Again

By Villager staff



(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin ISD’s budget outlook has grown increasingly strained as enrollment continues to fall, eroding the state funding that underpins the district’s operations. This year, AISD enrolled 65,951 students, more than 2,000 fewer than projected, and more than 6,400 students who finished last school year did not return for 2026–27. The district estimates that this en-

rollment decline alone could cost \$14 million in lost revenue, deepening an already-fragile financial position.

The drop is part of a long-term trend. AISD now serves just over 69,000 students, down more than 14,000 from a decade ago, with this year marking one of the steepest declines. District leaders say immigration enforcement fears, rising housing costs, and expanding

school-choice options have accelerated the losses, particularly at campuses serving newly arrived students.

Enrollment decline has compounded other pressures — falling property values, rising operating costs, and delayed real-estate revenue — pushing AISD’s projected deficit for the upcoming year to \$181 million. Even after closing 10–11 schools in recent years and imple-

menting more than \$200 million in cuts, the district ended last year with only half the reserves required by board policy and now expects to borrow \$140 million this fall just to meet payroll, incurring more than \$2 million in interest.

To close the gap, AISD leaders have proposed significant reductions, including adjustments to staffing ratios, larger class sizes at

some campuses, cuts to stipends, and a 15% reduction to non-staffing budgets. They are also exploring new revenue sources such as naming rights and philanthropic partnerships.

District officials emphasize that without meaningful state funding reform, enrollment-driven revenue losses will continue to force difficult decisions — with classrooms, staffing, and student services increasingly affected.