

EDC

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Charles Morton, Morgan contacted the Texas Municipal League – a group that helps subscribing cities with everything from legal opinions to lobbying efforts – to ask for its legal opinion.

TML attorney Scott Houston echoed Morgan's thoughts.

"He said it would be better to err on the side of prudence, so that's what we're going to do," Morgan said.

The next meeting is 5:30 Wednesday.

At the first meeting, however, Clay Thompson was elected president, Eileen Gottschalk, vice president and Shirley Coe, secretary.

Thompson is market president for the Tyler, Jacksonville and Rusk branches of Franklin Bank, Gottschalk is a salesperson for Clear Channel Communication and Coe works as a paralegal for a Tyler law firm.

Other members include Steve Shaddox, an Athens CPA; the Rev. Donnie Barron, pastor of Bullard Southern Baptist Church; Terry Cowan, a local surveyor and member of Bullard's planning and zoning commission and Sam Vercher, a developer and homebuilder.

"We have a really good mix of professional people in the group," Morgan said. "And I think the council and mayor did an outstanding job picking them for this task."

Meanwhile, Morgan – who will act as a non-voting member and the city's liaison to the group – has some ideas.

"Of course the first goal is to figure out what direction the group wants to go with the money," he said.

BDC is funded through a half-cent sales tax, approved by voters last November.

"I'm hoping to have a roundtable discussion soon and bring in people like Darrell Prcin, president of Jacksonville's EDC; Amanda Nobles, president of Kilgore's EDC and Carlton Swab, executive director of the Texas Economic Development Corporation," he said.

Morgan said Nobles would be great because she was at one time on the legislation committee that dealt with the actual laws of EDCs.

"This would give our members perspective from different areas," he said. "Then they could decide on a direction for the group – whether it be funding for infrastructure, focusing on bringing business to the community or other special projects that EDC could assist in."

Voters approved a referendum on last November's ballot giving the city permission to create an economic development group by passing an additional half-cent sales tax.

Mayor A.W. Hines was pleased with the voters' support.

"This is going to help Bullard's ability to attract tourism and fund infrastructure. And it would effectively put the city on a level playing field when

“Most of us have -- unwittingly -- funded a lot of infrastructure and improvements in other cities. It's about time they reciprocated.”

Bullard Mayor A.W. Hines

it comes to sales tax collection rates," Hines said, in an earlier interview.

The council was unanimous in its agreement to put the issue to voters.

"Every city around us can compete, but without any incentives or proper infrastructure, where does that leave Bullard?" Hines said.

But he hates the word tax. "It's completely consumption based," Hines said. "Most of us have - unwittingly -- funded a lot of infrastructure and improvements in other cities. It's about time they reciprocated."

"Every time we shop in Tyler, we're funding their parks and streets, but we're not doing anything about ours," he said. "The sales tax in Bullard is the lowest in the area - which means every other surrounding city is taking advantage of taxable consumer goods and services to aid growth."

The move follows suit of surrounding cities like Tyler, Whitehouse, Troup and Jacksonville that have had what's commonly referred to as an economic development tax added to local sales tax for years.

According to the state comptroller's office - which oversees the collection and distribution of the tax - use of the money includes: projects for streets, roads, drainage, and other related transportation system improvements, water and sewer facilities and public parks, and park facilities.

But getting the EDC in place has taken time, Morgan said, although planning and collection began immediately following the election.

Morgan said the EDC answers to the council – who, in turn, answer to the taxpayers.

Bullard – until the election – was the only area city not using the half-cent tax.

Prior to the election Tyler, Whitehouse, Troup and Jacksonville charge the state maximum of 8.25 percent. Bullard's rate was 7.75 percent.

"Your citizens are already paying for the economic development of other cities," said John Villareal, from the state comptroller's office, who spoke to the city council last year. "They should see little difference locally in what they spend, but they

will reap the rewards of the investment.

"And tourism dollars, which the city expects to continue to increase, will directly benefit economic development."

Based on sales receipts from 2004, Bullard could generate about \$46,000 more in yearly revenue. But predictions, Villareal said, make the reality much more abundant than what it was two years ago.

"You all know the growth in the area," he said. "This is a major thoroughfare, and Bullard is set up geographically to be in a very advantageous spot." He said the revenue would most likely triple in the next three years.

Since 1979, Texas law has allowed cities to form economic development corporations to attract businesses and create job opportunities.

The 1989 Legislature amended the Development Corporation Act of 1979 to allow eligible cities the option of adopting a dedicated sales and use tax to fund industrial development projects - commonly referred to as a 4A tax. Further legislation in 1991 provided cities with a second form of sales tax to improve their appeal as places to live, work and visit, which is called a 4B tax, which is the one voters approved.

"This is something we were more interested in," said council member Teresa Adams-Wilks.

Generally, 4B expenditures are those available under 4A and projects that contribute to the quality of life in the community. Such projects include building park-related facilities, professional and amateur sports and athletic facilities, tourism and entertainment facilities, affordable housing and any other improvement or facility that promotes new or expanded business enterprises.

The 1999 Legislature added job training, targeted infrastructure, job creation and retention, and educational facilities to the definition of project. This expanded the allowable uses of economic development sales tax revenues.

"We're looking for funding that improves the quality of life for all of us, but allowing others to subsidize it, just like we do when we spend our money outside the city," Hines said.

Vote

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chamber of commerce - especially in a growing city like Bullard - is an essential part of the community."

Alexander said with more and more people moving into the area, the chamber's mission is two-fold: to be a source of information for visitors and prospective residents and to promote a good relationship for members.

And while individual members are welcome, most chambers focus on fostering a strong business climate.

"The chamber is the organization that pulls both businesses and people together through shared information, networking and other programs," Alexander said.

But in a smaller town, it can be more difficult.

"We have no paid staff, so without the dedication of our volunteers, we couldn't function," he said.

This year's election brought more than one change to the roster of those serving.

While Brian Capps will continue to serve as vice president, Sue Hornbuckle is taking over as secretary and Tom McDonald will serve as treasurer.

Also on the ballot was the election of board members.

Four seats were up - one being that of Mayor A.W. Hines - who resigned his seat on the board - with two years left on his term.

"While resigning isn't something I wanted to do, I

felt it best," Hines told the group Thursday. "Being mayor is more labor intensive than I first thought, and I don't want the chamber to suffer for that."

Hines said he believed it better to resign the post than to only be able to serve in a limited capacity.

"The chamber deserves someone who can devote more time to the job than I can, and that's my reasoning behind the decision," he said.

Newly elected board members are: John Alexander, Jay Abercrombie, Teresa Adams-Wilks and Chad Davis.

"This is a good group of people," Alexander said. "And a good mix of professionals

who will - working with the current board members - help guide the chamber and its members in the coming year."

The chamber is holding its annual Christmas parade beginning at 5 p.m. Monday, and the annual banquet is set for Jan. 21 at Eagle's Bluff Country Club.

Members each year nominate someone for the position of Man of the Year, Woman of the Year, Business of the Year and the Cecil Harper Humanitarian award.

Award winners are presented the night of the banquet.

For more information on the parade or the banquet, call the Bullard Chamber of Commerce at 903-894-4238.

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