

Star-Telegram

West Nile cases hit 30 in Tarrant County

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BY SCOTT NISHIMURA

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FORT WORTH -- Thirty cases of the West Nile virus have been reported in Tarrant County, including five in Fort Worth, Sandra Parker, medical director of Tarrant County Public Health, told Fort Worth City Council members Tuesday.

Last week, the department reported 26 cases.

Parker's report included advice for how people can minimize the risk of infection: Drain standing water, remember that mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk, use insect repellent outside, and wear long pants and shirts with sleeves.

Police reserves

Fort Worth Police Chief Jeff Halstead told the council that the department hopes to "re-engage" 25 to 30 reserve police officers now that the program has been reinstated.

The department had 50 to 55 reserve officers when the program was suspended in March 2011, Halstead said.

"Many of them have chosen to go on to different agencies," Halstead said.

The council will have to vote on each officer. Halstead said he hopes to have a list of proposed officers by October or November.

Rail working group

The council approved a 14-member working group to oversee the city's participation in passenger rail initiatives.

The chair is District 6 Councilman Jungus Jordan.

Other members are Mayor Betsy Price, District 9 Councilman Joel Burns and District 4 Councilman Danny Scarth; T Board members Gary Cumbie, Rosa Navejar, Gary Havener and Steve Berry; Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley; Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce President Bill Thornton; Fort Worth Black Chamber President Dee Kelly Jr.; Michael Morris, transportation director of North Central Texas Council of Governments; and the head of the Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber of Commerce when a new one is named. Navejar is stepping down as Hispanic Chamber head next month.

Dick Ruddell, CEO of The T, briefed the council on the progress of TexRail, a line that will connect southwest Fort Worth to D/FW Airport. Negotiations continue between Fort Worth and Western Railroad on rights of way, he said, and he thanked Price and Jordan, who have taken the lead on negotiations.

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Fort Worth council reviews parking options, approves district map

A. Lee Graham
Reporter

Downtown Fort Worth will see more parking spaces while museum patrons could enjoy a parking lot all their own – at a cost.

Reserving the lot on the northwest corner of Harley Avenue and Gendy Street

solely for museum visitors would cost the city \$175,000 in projected net annual revenue since the museum would retain all revenue.

“To move forward with that, we’ve got to figure out how to replace the \$175,000 of revenue,” said Doug Wiersig, director of the city’s transportation and public works department.

Sharing the proposal at the pre-council portion of the July 24 City Council meeting, Wiersig outlined plans to help meet rising parking needs between downtown and the Cultural District.

“We’re going to lose some parking spaces as part of that expansion, but we have also identified some spaces to replace those,” Wiersig said

Wiersig referred to the 50 spaces planned to open in October 2012 at Sundance Square to help offset spaces lost due to the 55,000-square-foot plaza under construction along Main Street.

Those plans are moving forward. But the museum parking concept hinges on council approval at its Aug. 21 regular meeting.

Jan Orr-Harter, whose Dolly Johnson Antique & Art Show celebrates its 50th anniversary in March, applauded the idea. But she acknowledged that a museums-only lot would provide fewer options for those attending her annual show.

“It does hurt our show to have less parking, but as a local resident, I think it’s very important for the institutions and events in the Cultural District,” Orr-Harter said.

The council also is expected to consider Wiersig’s parking rate recommendation. That would mean a variable rate structure for all Will Rogers Memorial Center lots except the aforementioned Harley-Gendy lot.

The hourly rate would be free up to 45 minutes, \$3 from 45 minutes to one hour and other prices topping out at \$10 for four or more hours.

Special events would require pre-payment and range from \$3 to \$15 based on demand. City transportation officials are recommending that option for council consideration.

For months, officials have stressed the need for a better parking rate structure while meeting rising demand for added parking.

The lot's 240 spaces would be reserved for those visiting the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, the Cowgirl Museum, Cattle Raisers Museum and the Community Arts Center. Anyone can park in the lot today for a \$5 flat fee.

The museums would lease the lot from the city for \$1,000 a month and would be responsible for all maintenance and improvement costs. The museums would retain all revenue generated from lot use, with the city foregoing about \$175,000 in projected net annual revenue.

At least one council member acknowledged public disdain for any parking rate.

"Anything short of free for some of our citizens is going to be unacceptable," said District 7 Councilman Dennis Shingleton.

Meanwhile, months of debate ended as the council approved a final redistricting map that reshapes the city's representative geography.

By 8-1 vote, the council approved a staff draft plan, one of 10 proposals that residents reviewed in six public hearings. Casting the sole dissenting vote was District 2 Councilman Sal Espino, citing a preference for 10 districts to better represent the growing city.

Nine of the proposals were independently submitted, with the staff proposal undergoing some revision in the days leading up to the vote. The Deer Creek and Garden Acres neighborhoods and Spinks Airport in far south Fort Worth shifted from District 8 to District 6, and the South Meadows Crossing and Southgate neighborhoods moved from District 6 to District 8.

Those changes were made to boost minority representation in District 8, according to city officials. After discussing whether to retain the existing eight-district configuration or add two districts, the council stuck with eight but redrew District 8 to reflect its rising Hispanic population.

That wasn't enough for the United Hispanic Council, which said it would challenge the map for minimizing Hispanic voting power in the city.

With the map approved, it now awaits review with the U.S. Department of Justice.

Linking one side with another

Foot bridge construction to temporarily close I-35E

By Rachel Mehlhaff and Bj Lewis / Staff Writers

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The Texas Department of Transportation will close lanes of Interstate 35E in both directions Friday night to accommodate the construction of the University of North Texas' new pedestrian bridge.

The interstate lanes will be closed from 10 p.m. Friday to 8 a.m. Saturday, TxDOT spokeswoman Michelle Releford said.

Motorists will be diverted to the frontage roads in both directions.

She encouraged motorists to plan ahead for alternate routes to deal with an anticipated traffic backup.

The northbound and southbound frontage roads will be closed from 4 p.m. Saturday to 6 a.m. Sunday between North Texas Boulevard and Bonnie Brae Street, Releford said, but the main lanes of the highway will stay open.

Helen Bailey, director of facilities management and construction at UNT, said the pedestrian bridge is being constructed to connect UNT's main campus, which is on the north side of Interstate 35, to Eagle Point, which houses UNT's athletic complex and includes Mean Green Village, Apogee Stadium and Victory Hall residence hall.

The goal of the pedestrian bridge is to keep pedestrian traffic off the North Texas Boulevard bridge, Bailey said.

Releford said the \$2.5 million project, which began in February, is on track to finish by the end of September.

"Right now there is no indication they are behind for weather or anything like that," she said.

While weather days are built into the schedule, Releford said, last-minute weather problems can sometimes delay projects in their final days. UNT has donated the right of way to the land on either side of the highway.

Releford said TxDOT officials took into account the planned expansion of Interstate 35E when planning the project and that the bridge is designed to accommodate the widening of the interstate highway.

The university worked with HDR Engineering on the design of the bridge to incorporate campus motifs, Bailey said, such as eagle head symbols as well as designing the roof structure in an inverted "V" shape to mimic the football stadium design.

UNT also worked with the architect to ensure that the bridge was wide enough to accommodate the number of people who would cross it for the football games, she said.

"It's 20 feet wide for that reason," Bailey said.

The exact date of completion is unknown, she said, but the goal is to have it open in time for the first football game of the coming season.

"Our ideal situation would be to get it done before school, but that isn't going to happen," Releford said. "But the first football game, that is the goal we're shooting for."

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