

County's bond is the way to go

[By Heber Taylor](#)

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We recommend a yes vote on all three of the propositions on the county's \$135 million bond package. We especially recommend the \$45 million for facilities, including new buildings for the health district, the Galveston County Extension Service and the animal shelter.

The package also includes \$75 million for roads and \$15 million for flood control. We'll give details Saturday about why we support those measures.

If voters approve all three propositions, we'll be looking at 5.5 cents total on the tax rate, or \$55 on \$100,000 of taxable property.

The \$45 million proposition would allow the county to replace some inadequate buildings and make more productive use of its employees.

At least some of the money spent would be offset by savings; some of the money would replace space that is now being rented.

Most of the money — about \$33 million — would be used to buy and renovate the former Wal-Mart store in Texas City.

The County Health District would move its administrative offices and environmental services divisions there, along with its Mainland 4C's and Women, Infants and Children clinics.

The 125,000-square-foot building would also have room for the Central Appraisal District, which is facing the prospect of higher rent on its present leased space.

The proposition includes funds to move the Agricultural Extension Office from its cramped quarters on state Highway 3 in Dickinson to Carbide Park in La Marque.

There's also money to convert the upper floors of the old north jail in Galveston for records storage.

The proposition also would fund construction of a new animal shelter, which is badly needed.

The shelter, 3412 25th Ave. N. in Texas City, was built in 1993 to house 4,500 animals a year. In 2007, it housed more than 8,900.

In 1993, the committee that oversaw the construction of the shelter urged the county to review its operations every 10 years.

It's been 15 years since the shelter was built and the county has experienced rapid growth.

The basic problem is crowding, which is an awful problem when you're trying to prevent diseases from spreading.

But a new center would offer the possibility of other badly needed improvements, including a dedicated space for customers to meet potential pets.

We'd argue that the improvements to facilities for the health district, extension service and animal shelter justify the cost.

But this plan has an extra benefit. The money now spent on rent for the health district and appraisal district offices and for records storage totals about \$900,000 a year.

That money would go toward retiring the bonds.

If you look at just the \$45 million for facilities, you're looking at an increase of 1.8 cents in the tax rate.

Taxpayers should get a half-cent of that back because the new facilities will get some public offices out of rented space.

The cost, in other words, is \$13 to \$18 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

We'd urge the county to manage the construction closely to avoid the overruns it experienced with the new justice center.

But we think the plan offers a lot of benefit for the taxpayer's dollar.