FREESTONE COUNTY
GOOD GOVERNANCE
COUNCIL

Freestone County Good Governance Council
Independent research. Informed citizens. Accountable government.
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HAND DELIVERED

October 23, 2026

Freestone County Commissioners Court
The Honorable Lloyd L. Lane, County Judge
Commissioner Andy Bonner, Precinct 1
Commissioner Will McSwane, Precinct 2
Commissioner Richard McGowan, Precinct 3
Commissioner Clyde Ridge Jr., Precinct 4
Freestone County Courthouse
118 East Commerce Street
Fairfield, Texas 75840

Re: Recommendation to evaluate and improve Freestone County's public website

Dear Judge Lane and Commissioners:

I am writing to recommend that the Commissioners Court consider a full review of Freestone County's website and set an ambitious goal: making county information easier to find, easier to understand, and kept current.

I write as the founder of the Freestone County Good Governance Council, a nonpartisan citizens' effort now forming to support efficient, transparent county services. My approach is to look at what other Texas counties already do well, learn from them, and build something even more useful for Freestone County. Each recommendation below includes real examples the Court can review and choose from, so it does not have to start from a blank slate.

Freestone's website already does several things well. It lists Commissioners Court dates and posts agendas on the Public Notices calendar. It links to recorded meetings on YouTube and provides a Public Comment form. It lists email addresses for the County Judge's office for public comments and agenda requests. It also posts budgets, tax-rate notices, and annual financial statements. These suggestions are meant to build on that foundation.

When I reviewed the site on October 22, 2026, I noted the following:

- **Outdated information.** The Elections page still shows "Registered Voters as of 03/25/2024." Several pages give no date showing when they were last updated.
- **Broken links.** On the Elections page alone, many document links return "page not found." These include the ballot-by-mail applications in English and Spanish, the Federal Post Card Application, and the polling location and precinct documents.
- **No minutes.** Agendas are posted and meeting video is on YouTube, but I could not find approved minutes of Commissioners Court meetings on the county site.
- **Contact gaps.** The "Contact Us" button at the top of every page leads to an error page reading "403 – Forbidden: Access is denied," so residents cannot reach the county through it. The Commissioners Court page lists mailing addresses and phone numbers for the commissioners, but no email addresses.
- **Smaller items.** On the Commissioners Court Dates page, some dates fall outside the stated 1st and 3rd Wednesday schedule. Most are marked "rescheduled" without a reason, and at least one (July 14, 2027) has no note. The page footer shows placeholder text: "Copyright {{YEAR}} {{COUNTY}} {{STATE}}." The same footer appears on at least one other county site provided through the Texas Association of Counties (Cass County), so a single request to the platform provider may fix it.

A detailed list of these items is attached as Exhibit A. I ask the Court to consider the following improvements:

1. Name a website contact and give residents a way to report problems.

Provide a public "Report a website problem" contact for broken links, outdated information, or accessibility issues. Identify a central website coordinator or vendor contact, and ask each county office to designate someone responsible for reviewing and updating its pages.

Examples: Parker County offers an online "Report an Issue" form. Residents choose the problem, such as a pothole, road damage, a damaged or missing sign, or overgrown grass or brush, and then describe the location. Ellis County's RequestTracker lets residents report concerns such as potholes or streetlights that are out, and then log in to check on their existing requests.

Acknowledge public emails. The website invites residents to email the County Judge's office at [redacted] and [redacted] When I emailed those addresses on October 14 and October 21, I did not receive a reply confirming receipt. A short acknowledgment, even an automatic one, would be very helpful to residents in this process and reflects good customer service.

2. Create a complete county directory.

For the County Judge, commissioners, elected officials, department heads, and departments, list each office's name, role, direct phone number, public email address, mailing and office address, hours, and relevant services or forms. Where appropriate, include a photo and short biography, a precinct map, and a page for each commissioner's precinct.

Examples: Parker County's Commissioner Precinct 4 page offers road and bridge updates, recycling hours, and a link to the issue-report form. It also explains which roads the county does not maintain, and gives the TxDOT phone number for those roads. These include private roads, roads inside city limits, U.S. and state highways, and farm-to-market roads. Kendall County lists contact information for the County Judge and each commissioner and links to a county organizational chart.

3. Make meeting records easy to find and search.

Consider one meeting archive where the public can find agendas, amended agendas, minutes, packets and attachments, and video recordings. Records should be organized by date and county body, with search, clear labels, and a permanent archive.

Examples: Navarro County keeps an online archive of approved Commissioners Court minutes by year, which shows that a PDF archive is a practical starting point. Caldwell County lists the agenda, minutes, and video together for each meeting. Taylor County offers an agenda center and a public comment form that can be submitted online. Denton County's archive can be searched by keyword from 1998 to the present, plays meeting video alongside the documents, and offers email notice when new agendas are posted. Kendall County's "Notify Me" service offers email and text alerts for agendas and other county notices. Fort Bend County lets the public search individual agenda items and minutes. It also notes that if there is any discrepancy, the official record kept by the County Clerk prevails.

4. Make financial information easier to understand.

Organize these items in one clearly labeled section: adopted and proposed budgets, audits, annual financial statements, tax-rate information, purchasing and bid notices, contracts, debt, and major projects. Show the reporting period and last-updated date for each item.

The Texas Comptroller's Transparency Stars program offers a ready-made checklist. It awards stars in six areas: Traditional Finances, Contracts and Procurement, Economic Development, Public Pensions, Debt Obligations, and Open Government and Compliance. Freestone County does not currently hold a star. Cass County has earned stars for Traditional Finances and Debt Obligations. It has about 28,600 residents and uses the same Texas Association of Counties website platform as Freestone. Its transparency section includes check registers, a page for records requests, and a five-year summary of revenue, spending, property taxes, and debt

per resident. Kendall County earned its Traditional Finances star in April 2019. The City of Bellmead, near Waco, holds four stars, including Open Government and Compliance. I ask the Court to consider using these criteria to evaluate our website and, when ready, to apply for recognition.

5. Improve access to everyday services.

Organize the site around common resident needs, such as paying taxes, obtaining records, finding court information, applying for permits, reporting a road concern, or checking election information. Make sure pages work well on phones and are accessible to people using assistive technology. Post a short accessibility statement explaining how to request help, as Kendall County does. A regular check of links and phone display would catch problems like the broken Elections documents.

For election information, the League of Women Voters of Texas periodically reviews county election websites for accurate, timely, and accessible information and publishes each county's results. The Elections office could use Freestone's most recent result and the League's criteria as a guide.

6. Establish a regular review schedule.

Each office could review its pages at least once a year and after major changes. Pages with figures, notices, forms, or deadlines should show a clear "last updated" or "information as of" date. Superseded notices should be archived or clearly marked so residents can tell which information is current. The Transparency Stars program models this kind of accountability: Comptroller staff regularly review each awardee and may revoke a star if the information no longer meets the criteria.

For reference, state law already sets minimums. Counties must post meeting notices and agendas online (Government Code 551.056). Political subdivisions that have taxing authority and maintain a website, including counties, must post certain information (Government Code 2051.201). This includes contact information with an email address and each elected officer. Counties with a population of 10,000 or more must also post meeting notices and records of meetings. Tax rate and budget information must be posted as well (Tax Code 26.18). Some of the gaps above, such as the broken Contact Us page and the missing minutes, may bear on these requirements, and the County Attorney can advise on that. My other suggestions go beyond the minimums to make information easier to find.

I am not suggesting that every feature be added at once. I ask that the Court consider directing the appropriate county website or IT contact to take three steps: inventory what is already available, compare it with these examples, and bring back options, estimated costs, and a proposed order of priorities. The Court could then choose which improvements make the most sense for Freestone County and its budget.

Attached as Exhibit A is a checklist in two parts. The first lists the broken links and errors I found, which staff can correct and initial. The second lists the larger improvements, which the Court can mark Approve, Defer, or No. I respectfully request that this matter be placed on a future Commissioners Court agenda for discussion and possible action, and that this letter and Exhibit A be included in the agenda packet. Please send any reply to **robert.sharpe@freestonegoodgov.org**.

A clear, current, and well-organized website would help residents, county staff, businesses, and people considering a move to the county. Thank you for considering this recommendation and for your service to Freestone County.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert P. Sharpe

Robert P. "RancherRob" Sharpe
Founder, Freestone County Good Governance Council (forming)

Attachments: Example websites referenced; Exhibit A – Website Action Checklist
cc by email: [redacted]

Example websites referenced

County or agency	What to look at	Web address
Navarro County	Minutes archive by year	co.navarro.tx.us/page/Commissioners.Court.Minutes and navarro.easydocs.us/minutes
Caldwell County	Agenda, minutes, and video per meeting	caldwellcounty.texas.gov/meetings
Taylor County	Agenda center and online public comment	taylorcounty.texas.gov/734/Agendas-Minutes
Denton County	Searchable archive with video	dentoncounty.gov/agenda
Fort Bend County	Search by agenda item	fortbendcountytx.gov/government/commissioners-court/commissioners-court-online
Kendall County	Email and text alerts	co.kendall.tx.us/list.aspx
Kendall County	Financial transparency and directory	co.kendall.tx.us/171/Financial-Transparency
Kendall County	Accessibility statement	co.kendall.tx.us/accessibility
Cass County	Financial transparency	co.cass.tx.us/page/cass.texas.transparency
Cass County	Records requests	co.cass.tx.us/page/cass.RecordsRequest
Parker County	Report an Issue form	parkercountytx.gov/forms.aspx?fid=64
Parker County	Commissioner Precinct 4 page	parkercountytx.gov/103/Commissioner-Precinct-4
Ellis County	RequestTracker	elliscountytx.gov/RequestTracker.aspx?CID=3
Texas Comptroller	Transparency Stars	comptroller.texas.gov/transparency/local/stars
League of Women Voters of Texas	County election website reviews	lwvtexas.org/find-your-county-election-website

Exhibit A: Website Action Checklist

This checklist is attached to the October 23, 2026 letter from the Freestone County Good Governance Council about the county website. All items were checked on www.co.freestone.tx.us on October 22, 2026.

How to use this checklist

1. **Part 1** lists broken links and errors. These are routine corrections that the office maintaining each page, or the website contact, can make at no new cost. Staff initial and date each item when it is fixed.
2. **Part 2** lists larger improvements. For each one, the Court marks Approve, Defer, or No and names who is responsible and a target date.
3. Staff report back to the Court at a future meeting with the completed checklist.

Part 1: Broken links and errors

Items 1–6 were confirmed to return an error on October 22, 2026. Ballot-by-mail applications for the November 3, 2026 election were due October 23, so items 2–4 should be fixed before the next election.

#	Problem	Where on the site	Suggested fix	Fixed (initials / date)
1	"Contact Us" button returns "403 – Forbidden: Access is denied"	Top of every page	Restore the page with phone, email, and mailing address	☐ _____
2	Ballot-by-mail application (English) returns an error	Elections > Ballot by Mail	Upload the current Secretary of State form	☐ _____
3	Ballot-by-mail application (Spanish) returns an error	Elections > Ballot by Mail	Upload the current Spanish form	☐ _____
4	Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) returns an error	Elections > Ballot by Mail	Upload the form or link to FVAP.gov	☐ _____
5	"Your Commissioners and Precinct Addresses" document returns an error	Elections, top of page	Re-upload the current document	☐ _____
6	"And Other Important Phone Number" document returns an error	Elections, top of page	Re-upload the current document	☐ _____
7	Voter Registrar email link [redacted] points to an empty web address instead of an email address. The Election Administrator email link works.	Elections, contact block	Make it a working email link	☐ _____
8	The "Dew School Bond" link in the official results list is empty	Elections > November 4, 2025 Constitutional Amendment Election	Link the results document	☐ _____
9	"Dew Order of Election English" and "Dew Order of Election Spanich" point to the same file, which returns an error	Elections > November 4, 2025	Upload and link each version separately; correct the spelling	☐ _____
10	"Offical Canvass 2024" opens a file in the 2022 folder named for the 2020 Democratic canvass	Elections > November 5, 2024	Link the 2024 canvass; correct the spelling	☐ _____
11	J. Swinburn campaign finance report link is missing its folder path and returns an error	Elections > Campaign Finance	Correct the link	☐ _____
12	A "Cumulative AV & EV" turnout link goes to Leon County's website	Elections > May 24, 2022 Primary Runoff	Remove or replace the link	☐ _____
13	A ballot-by-mail report date reads "10/21/2029"	Elections > November 3, 2026	Correct to 10/21/2026	☐ _____

#	Problem	Where on the site	Suggested fix	Fixed (initials / date)
14	"Registered Voters as of 03/25/2024"	Elections	Update the count or add a "last reviewed" date	☐ _____
15	File names shown as link text, such as "J. SWINBURN.pdf"	Elections, several sections	Replace with plain document titles	☐ _____
16	Many links still use the old address newtools.cira.state.tx.us (they work today)	Elections, many sections	Update to co.freestone.tx.us	☐ _____
17	Footer shows "Copyright {{YEAR}} {{COUNTY}} {{STATE}}"	Every page	Ask the Texas Association of Counties platform provider to fix	☐ _____
18	The Elections page holds hundreds of links back to 2022; only some were tested	Entire site	Run a free link checker on every page; archive old elections by year	☐ _____

Part 2: Improvements for the Court's decision

Each item matches a numbered recommendation in the letter. The examples are other Texas counties that already do it.

#	Improvement	Letter rec.	Example	Court decision	Assigned to	Target date
1	Post a public email address for each commissioner and office (Gov't Code 2051.201 requires a county contact email)	2	—	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
2	Post approved minutes in an archive by year	3	Navarro County	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
3	One meetings page with agenda, minutes, and video for each meeting	3	Caldwell County	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
4	Email and text sign-up for agendas and county alerts	3	Kendall County	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
5	Online form to report road and other problems, linked from each precinct page	1, 2	Parker County	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
6	Name a website contact and a page owner in each office	1	—	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
7	"Last updated" date on every page, with an annual review	6	—	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
8	Short accessibility statement and a phone-display check	5	Kendall County	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
9	Add check registers and a records request page to a Financial Transparency section	4	Cass County	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
10	Apply for the Comptroller's Transparency Stars, starting with Traditional Finances	4	Cass County	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		
11	Explain court dates that differ from the 1st and 3rd Wednesday schedule	Observations	—	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		

#	Improvement	Letter rec.	Example	Court decision	Assigned to	Target date
12	Acknowledge emails sent to the County Judge's public addresses (automatic or short reply)	1	—	☐ Approve ☐ Defer ☐ No		

Reviewed by the Commissioners Court on _____

Completed checklist returned to the Court on _____