

## State and Local

# CS council passes plan to buy computer system

By Mark Gee  
Staff Writer

Luck has been on the side of College Station's city government during its wait for a computerized management system.

Last night, the College Station City Council voted unanimously not to chance disaster when it approved a 5-year, \$3 million plan to purchase reliable computer systems and software for the city's service departments.

"We've been lucky," Public Relations Director Peggy Calliham said, "that we haven't had a major crisis with the city's payroll or utilities billing."

Pushing luck has worked to the council's advantage, Calliham said, because computer prices have dropped in the past several years while the technology has advanced. The wait has also given the council the opportunity to evaluate other cities, she said.

A crisis in utilities billing would mean long lines for the 30,000 students, faculty and employees of Texas A&M who live in College Station.

Linda Piwonka, the utilities billing supervisor, said she can't imagine the long lines if the billing computer was to break during a peak week in May or August when students are requesting utility deposit returns and establishing utility accounts. She said there was a minor crisis when a computer broke the first week in May. Her office wrote all service orders by hand, which took twice as long as using the computer.

"We're lucky the breakdown wasn't the third week in May when students want their utility deposits back," Piwonka said. "That's why we're changing the system now."

The system allows each department to buy the equipment to meet its specific needs. The \$427,000 for this fiscal year will be generated from contingency funds and unap-

propriated interest earnings. Over the next four years, the system will be paid by income generated from the utility department, debt service funds and utility revenue bonds. The council will not raise property tax rates to purchase the system.

The computerized information system will also help College Station plan for growth. Utilities Department Director John Woody said a new computer mapping system will be linked to customer billing.

"With this new system," Woody said, "I'll be able to do a better job of making sure the power system can meet the customer's needs. The quality of electrical supply is important in the computer age."

Currently, Woody's utility department uses a map that has been updated for 20 years with pins. Color-coded thumbtacks mark utility lines. The old system relies on employees in the utility department who remember where the lines were laid.

# Cisneros meets Gorbachev, pushes grassroots politics

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Mayor Henry Cisneros said Thursday night he told Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that grassroots politics would be the key to restructuring the Communist country.

Cisneros was among six leaders from across the nation who met with Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders during a breakfast meeting Thursday at the Soviet Embassy.

Cisneros, Class of '68, is a former member of the Board of Regents.

Cisneros, the past president of the National League of Cities, said he told Gorbachev that the United States' strength lies within its system of decentralized government and

the country's ethnic diversity.

"I suggested to him that most of the big problems that confront the society, like transforming our educational system and dealing with our racial diversity, are going to be settled lower in the federal system," Cisneros said.

"I said if he wanted to accomplish what he wanted to accomplish . . . their total restructuring of Soviet society, that he would have to devise a system where there was more initiative and more vitality at the grassroots level working its way up, instead of a top-down, centralized, planned structure, and that our experience was that that was more ef-

fective," Cisneros said.

Cisneros, who is in his fourth term of the nation's ninth largest city, was invited to the meeting by Vice President George Bush, also attended the breakfast.

Cisneros said the 1½-hour meeting touched on education, technology, trade and energy and that Gorbachev asked good questions.

The mayor also said that Soviet leaders suggested that San Antonio adopt a sister city in the Soviet Union.

"I feel it would be a very good thing to do," Cisneros said. "It would be a contribution in the exchange of peace that currently is under way."

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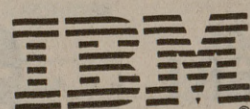
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