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Prepared by: Ellis County Communications
101 W. Main Street
Waxahachie, TX 75165

Contact: Diana Buckley, 972-825-5087, Diana.Buckley@co.ellis.tx.us

Renewal of emergency medical services contract with East Texas Medical Center proposed
CareFlite contract approval rescinded

In a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, August 25, Ellis County Commissioners voted unanimously not to enter into a contract with CareFlite for Emergency Medical Services. The contract had been authorized in the August 11 meeting of the Court, pending legal review.

In its place, the Court authorized review of a new contract with East Texas Medical Center.

Jack Dineen, president of Ellis County Emergency Service District #6, commended the Court on its action.

“It is good to see our Commissioners, when new evidence or points are brought forward, that they can change their minds and change their course,” Dineen said. “That really is to the benefit of not only the firefighters but certainly the citizens that are involved in ambulance service.”

Charles Walker, a member of the Telico Volunteer Fire Department, told the Court that the Ellis County Firefighters Association recommends the creation of an advisory board to provide input and support negotiations for emergency services in the future.

“We are here to help you, the County, and each citizen,” he said.

Commissioners had hoped the proposed contract with CareFlite would augment emergency services in unincorporated areas of the County, particularly the northeastern and southwestern regions, by adding two ground ambulances with helicopter back-up to the 5 ½ ambulances already stationed in the County under contracts between East Texas Medical Center and several cities within the County.

“When we went out for bid, we created some competition, and we got some information out to the people that wasn’t necessarily received well,” said Commissioner Heath Sims, pct. 3. “But it created the questions and the thought process which is now recommending that this board be created.”

Ron Schwartz, director of operations for East Texas Medical Center, said talks have included stationing two additional ground ambulances in the County as the CareFlite contract would have done – one in Italy and one in Palmer. Additionally, improvements will be made in terms of holding regular meetings, reporting to the Commissioners’ Court annually, adding better communication with the Sheriff’s dispatch center, improving educational opportunities for first responders, and providing technical expertise regarding interoperable radio communications systems.

The County’s current contract with East Texas Medical Center is set to expire on September 30.

Following recent heavy rains, the Court also voted unanimously to rescind its ban on outdoor burning. A statement from Fire Marshal Investigator Jim Pharr indicated that the Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) had dropped to 462, which is below the mark of 500 at which the Court generally enacts a ban.

After hearing from Elections Administrator Jane Anderson that she had certified the signatures on a petition "TO LEGALIZE THE SALE OF BEER AND WINE FOR OFF-PREMISE CONSUMPTION ONLY" and another petition "TO LEGALIZE THE SALE OF MIXED BEVERAGES IN RESTAURANTS BY FOOD AND BEVERAGE CERTIFICATE HOLDERS ONLY" within the City of Waxahachie, Commissioners ordered that an election be held on those two propositions on November 4, 2008.

Moving forward with the annual budget process, Commissioners discussed the tax rate for fiscal year 2008-2009 and took a record vote to place a proposed tax rate to be voted on at a future meeting. That rate, which essentially represents a tax rate ceiling, was proposed at 0.393599 cents per \$100 of property valuation.

"What I am proposing as a motion is a decrease in the overall tax rate, though very slim," said County Judge Chad Adams.

Under the proposal, the tax rate for Interest and Sinking would decrease from 0.069596 to 0.065089 cents per \$100 of property valuation, while the tax rate for Lateral Roads (Farm to Market) would increase from 0.029009 to 0.033508 cents. This would increase funding for lateral roads by approximately \$590,000 in the coming year, while still allowing for a very slight incremental decrease in the overall rate.

Statutes dictate that each member of the Court must record his vote individually in setting this proposed tax rate. Commissioner Dennis Robinson, pct. 1 and Commissioner Ron Brown, pct. 4 joined Adams in voting for the proposed rate. Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2 and Sims opposed it.

Two public hearings will be held regarding the tax rate before a final vote is taken. Those hearings were set for September 8, 2008 and September 15, 2008 at 10 a.m. in the second floor courtroom of the Historic Courthouse in downtown Waxahachie. A public hearing regarding the proposed budget for fiscal year 2008-2009 will also be held on September 8, 2008 at 10 a.m. in the same location.

A schedule of salaries, expenses and allowances of elected officials for the upcoming budget year, which included a four percent salary increase, was also approved by the Court, with Robinson casting his vote in opposition.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Took no action on a request to create a Fresh Water Supply District in the Grand Prairie ETJ, after a public hearing in which no member of the public spoke;
- Re-appointed Gary Bassett of Waxahachie as Ellis County's representative on the Lakes Regional MHMR Board of Directors for a two-year term;
- Approved the operations and maintenance plan for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program structures to be constructed in Ellis County;
- Accepted donation of 0.6354 acres of land by George Kent for extension of a road right-of-way;
- Approved continuation of an intergovernmental cooperation contract with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for funding of the Low Income Vehicle Repair Assistance, Retrofit and Accelerated Vehicle Retirement Program;
- Accepted a grant from the TCEQ to reimburse Ellis County \$8,905 for the purchase of a Durapatcher by Road and Bridge Precinct 1;
- Approved the 2008-2009 Payroll Schedule, Holiday Schedule and Commissioners' Court Schedule;

- Renewed a contract with the Texas Department of State Health Services that allows the County Clerk's Office to print Birth Certificates for anyone born in the State of Texas;
- Awarded the bid for demolition of the 1929 Jail to Lindamood Excavating for the firm lump sum price of \$69,750;
- Authorized purchase of one 2007 Dodge Truck for the Extension office for \$16,711.13;
- Allowed a request to purchase two vehicles for the Weights and Measures division of the Sheriff's Office to fail for lack of a motion;
- Approved a one-time variance relating to the fire hydrant requirement and an accompanying simplified plat for Tre Vasca Estate, three lots, in Precinct 2.