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Construction figures on target

With the groundbreaking ceremony set for Wednesday, November 12, on the Ellis County Bond Program, members of the Commissioners' Court were pleased to learn that construction estimates are right on target.

"This is a special day," said County Engineer Joe White. "This is our guaranteed maximum price – it is the highlight of what we've been at for almost two years."

Jon Vidaurri of Jones Lang LaSalle agreed. "We started two years ago, and we are really excited and pleased," he said. "It boils down to this – we are within our target budget."

With the approval of the Court, Vidaurri said a "notice to proceed" letter would be sent to Balfour Beatty, the project's construction manager at risk, with construction slated to begin on Monday, November 17.

"To sum it up in laymen's terms, we basically went out for bid, and the bid process is not as simple as going out to buy a pair of socks – it's a complicated two-year process," said County Judge Chad Adams. "But we received a bid back that says 'You made the budget.' This is a maximum cost."

The County's contract with the construction manager at risk puts the risk for cost overruns with that organization, rather than with the County, so long as the County does not exceed the scope of the project, which includes a new courts and administration building, an addition to the jail, and a remodel of about 6000 square feet within the existing jail. A parking garage being constructed by the City of Waxahachie is included in the cooperative project.

"The city is going to be participating with us in that groundbreaking on Wednesday," said Adams. "It is at 5:30 in the evening. We did it that way because we want public involvement. We didn't want to do it in the middle of the day where people had to break off from their work to be involved."

The ceremony will take place at the site of the new facility at the corner of Main and Jackson Streets in downtown Waxahachie and is expected to conclude by 6 p.m.

Other bond-related action items on Monday's regular agenda of the Commissioners' Court included approval of a contract with Terracon Consultants Inc. to provide independent material testing; a contract with MAS-D Environmental & Associates, Inc. to perform an asbestos and environmental survey as required by the Texas Department of Health; and an agreement with Bob's Fence Company for replacement and modification of fencing associated with the construction.

The Court postponed a final decision on a lease for office space for the Adult Probation Department in Ennis to allow for paperwork to be modified extending the length of the lease.

A request for the City of Ennis to formally abandon an old sanitary sewer easement on the site of the Ellis County Sub-Courthouse to be located in Ennis was approved by the Court, along with an accompanying simple plat for the facility. Groundbreaking for that facility was held on October 20.

Commissioner Dennis Robinson, pct. 1, called for approval of an addendum to the County's contract with the Ellis County SPCA, effective January 1, 2009.

"We have a five-year contract which allows us to go back in annually and make adjustments," Robinson said. "This year there was an increase (of five percent) in the per-animal charge, based off the consumer price index for the year. The number of animals we are contracting for this year is a decrease from the previous year."

The decrease in number of animals impounded should reduce the cost under the contract by approximately \$13,000 for the year.

"We won't know the total savings until the year comes to an end, but any funds that have been saved over the year, I would like the Court to consider applying those funds to a spay-neuter program," Robinson added. "It would be a proactive program that would help us control our numbers in the future – it would be a significant saving of dollars in the future."

Robinson headed up a sub-committee that met early in 2008 to discuss and recommend changes to the County's animal control ordinance.

"One of the topics of discussion, and our goal, was not just to cut costs for animal control, but to be able to control the costs," he said. "(Another thing) we discussed was after the first of the year to get the committee back together and look at long-range plans, and come back before the Court."

In other business, Commissioners:

- Adopted a prima facie maximum speed limit of 30 mph on all portions of St. Paul Road, Jennifer Road and Deerfield Road in accordance with applicable statutes and approved installation of two stop signs on Jennifer Road at its intersection with Deerfield Road to protect the public safety;
- Discussed the formation of the Ellis County Emergency Management and Response Advisory Committee with no action taken;
- Approved an amendment to the 2009 Local Initiative Project Grant from TCEQ in order to utilize the total amount of grant funding available, subject to the availability of matching funds;
- Approved a resolution supporting the creation of a Groundwater Conservation District as an alternative to the state-mandated Priority Groundwater Management Area (PGMA);
- Approved retention of attorney Brian Sledge to represent Ellis County in the formation of a groundwater conservation district in accordance with Section 59, Article XVI of the Texas Constitution and Chapter 36 of the Texas Water Code;
- Heard a report from Human Services Director Diana Buckley regarding the Ellis County Employee Health Fair and new health and safety initiatives;
- Approved a variance relating to lot size, a variance relating to the fire hydrant requirement, and a variance relating to the 50-foot set-back rule for an existing vehicle storage facility under the Department of Development.