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Prairielands Groundwater Conservation District Report Heard

During the regularly scheduled meeting of the Ellis County Commissioners' Court on Monday, February 28, 2011, two members of the board of directors of the Prairielands Groundwater Conservation District and the organization's executive director gave an update on their progress.

"We have done a lot of work in the last year," said Randy Kirk, who represents Ellis County on that board. "We have had some very heated discussions and some good discussions, heated or not."

Executive Director Joshua Grimes reported that the district, which is fee based and not tax based, has set a rate of 20 cents per 1000 gallons, which will be charged to users of non-exempt wells beginning July 1, 2011, payable by March 1, 2012.

"All existing or new wells of any size used solely for domestic, livestock, poultry, or agricultural use are exempt, and existing or new wells used for any other purpose but not able to produce more than 25 gallons per minute as equipped are also exempt," Grimes told the Court.

Registration of non-exempt wells will begin on April 1, 2011, but Grimes noted that permits will not be required for new wells until the district has adopted its final rules.

"When we do our final rule making, that's when we want all the public involvement we can get," said Board President Charles Beseda.

Beseda also said the district would encourage all well owners to register their wells, whether required or not, in order to help provide the district with accurate information.

"The benefit of registering is for protection," added Grimes, noting that accurate information would help prevent wells from being drilled too close together or large new wells from causing damage to existing small wells.

Commissioners voted to approve a resolution to request that a third District Court be created in Ellis County during the current legislative session, to become operational in 2014 or later. Commissioner Ron Brown, pct. 4, cast the lone dissenting vote, saying he would prefer to wait on the request.

Following up on a discussion in the February 14 meeting of the Commissioners' Court, the Court also approved the number of members for the soon-to-be-appointed Ellis County Citizens Advisory Committee for the redistricting process. Specifically, each member of the Court may appoint no more than three members, with the entire committee having no fewer than 10 members.

The members of the Court will submit the names of their appointees to Special Projects Director Kathy Eriksen or to Assistant District Attorneys Ann Montgomery or Lee Auvenshine prior to the next meeting of the Court.

“As a side note, remember we want to make sure that we have a good demographic representation – that’s what redistricting is all about,” said County Judge Carol Bush. “We want to be gender represented as well.”

Appointees should be announced at the next meeting of the Commissioners' Court on March 14.

The Court also voted to execute a Letter of Credit #697 on City Bank of Texas for Rockett Ranch in pct. 1 to complete the public improvements that have not been completed by the developers.

“We have been working with the owner of the project for the last two years to try to get these items taken care of, and we have reached the point that we are not able to go any further with them,” said Department of Development Director Delton Ake. “He has sold some lots in the development, and these people want to build their homes, but we cannot issue permits until these things have been done.”

In other business, Commissioners:

- Granted a one-time variance from County of Ellis Rules, Regulations and Specifications for subdivisions relating to the fire hydrant requirement for lots 5 and 6 of Boren Acres in pct. 2 and approved a replat of the same two lots;
- Approved a contract with the Texas Department of Transportation to prohibit the registration of motor vehicles owned by individuals that owe the County money for a fine, fee, or tax that is past due as one tool to assist the County with collections and at the discretion of the Tax Assessor/Collector;
- Adjourned for a short executive session to consult with counsel regarding the possible sale or lease of real property and to consult with counsel regarding Cause No. 66,519, Holnam Texas Limited Partnership v. ECAD et al and all other related cases, all of which are pending in the 40th Judicial District Court of Ellis County, Texas, with no action taken following the executive session.