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Animal Control committee brings recommendations

During a regularly-scheduled meeting on Monday evening, Ellis County Commissioners heard the recommendations of the citizen-based committee appointed three months ago to study animal control issues. Commissioner Dennis Robinson, pct. 1, headed up the committee.

“We got some good input from citizens,” said Robinson. “We had a lot of different viewpoints, and some areas (of the county) have different problems than others. Our goal was to get recommendations and solutions to bring back to the Court to help provide added animal control that is cost effective to the citizens of Ellis County.”

Committee member JoAnn Livingston was on hand to present the group’s recommendations, as follows:

- The consensus is to keep the ordinance as it is now, but note that there are several committee members who recommend placing “running at large” language back into the ordinance. No one on the committee wanted to return to the September change.
- Develop a written procedure for the disposal of dead animals.
- Have County staff initiate talks with the different cities in Ellis County to explore the possibility of a joint animal control facility; could include holding a workshop in the future, with possible creation of an exploratory committee.
- Negotiate a per-dog fee with the Ellis County SPCA on either a monthly or quarterly pay basis when the contract comes up for its next renewal.
- Have the Ellis County SPCA provide input to the County on a survey to be sent out to vets; the survey will be sent out by the County.
- Leave the committee in place, with the next meeting – unless called sooner – to be after the general election so as to meet with the Sheriff-elect.

In September of 2007, the Court revised its animal control ordinance, removing the phrase “running at large.”

“It basically didn’t have anything in there pertaining to stray animals,” Robinson said. “Then we amended that in January and allowed officers to pick up strays with a complaint call from the citizens. The majority (of the committee members) were pretty well satisfied with the way it has been working in the last three months.”

No action was taken on the item during Monday’s meeting.

Commissioners voted unanimously to approve a proclamation naming the week of May 4-10, 2008 as Moral Courage Week in Ellis County after hearing a presentation from members of the board of the Moral Courage Foundation.

“The Foundation’s sole purpose is to give away at least one \$25,000 scholarship to a Waxahachie High School senior each year, and to give as much as we can,” said founder Gary Bassett. “This year, we are giving one \$25,000 scholarship and a couple of smaller awards.”

Bassett said academic, athletic, or musical achievements do not figure into the award criteria, but rather it is based on character.

“Compassion, unselfishness, service to others – things we want to hold up and honor in our community,” he said. “After having reviewed the 20 or so finalist applications for this year – they are spectacular. We’ve got some great young adults, and their example is one that we will be proud of.”

Former Dallas County Commissioner Roy Orr told the Court that the group hopes it is the first of many such organizations and that other chapters will spring up.

“We know it will be county-wide next year, and we hope statewide,” Orr said. “The genesis of this is that Dean Kilmer wrote a book about moral courage and how much we need to restore it to America.”

The Court also recognized May 1, 2008 as the American Bar Association’s Observance of Law Day in Ellis County.

“The Advisory Board and the Law Library staff thank the Commissioners for allowing us to have such a wonderful Law Library in Ellis County,” said Librarian Leanne Brindle. “This is an annual event, done throughout the nation, and this year’s theme is the Rule of Law.”

A short video on the topic will be shown in the basement of the historic Courthouse at 1 p.m. on Friday, May 1.

“Also we will be having refreshments in the library, so come by and see us,” Brindle said.

Lengthy discussion regarding road maintenance and budget issues concluded with the Commissioners approving a proposal to get input from the Texas Engineering Extension (TEEX), a member of the Texas A&M University system, at a workshop in the near future.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Approved presiding and alternate election judges and the number of clerks for each poll for the May 10, 2008 Local Option Election in the City of Ennis;
- Selected three public members and three alternates for the Elected Official Salary Grievance Committee for FY 2008, drawing names from the Grand Jury List;
- Approved payment to Wray and Willett, PLLC in the amount of \$11,552.09 for legal services performed on behalf of the Ellis Prairie Soil and Water Conservation District in opposition to a petition seeking to create the Maypearl Water Control and Improvement District, in a matter pending before the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality and the State Office of Administrative Hearings;
- Approved a proposal for professional services from Ellis County Associates Surveyors for property surveying required for the acquisition of multiple real properties associated with the downtown bond construction program and a separate contract for surveying associated with the Ennis Sub Courthouse project;
- Approved an evaluation criteria system by which various sites can be ranked for bid purposes related to funding through the NRCS;
- Accepted the resignation of Mr. James Hightower from the Ellis County Rural Rail Transportation District Board and appointed Mr. Joe Pitts to fill his position, effective immediately;
- Approved a contract with Jerry Frank Farr to provide mowing services for pct. 3, effective April 28, 2008 through December 31, 2008;
- Increased the County mileage reimbursement rate from 48.5 cents per mile to 50.5 cents per mile in accordance with changes made by the Internal Revenue Service, effective April 29, 2008;

- Approved construction of the infrastructure of Northeast Meadows, Phase II and released the construction Letter of Credit accordingly;
- Approved one replat and one preliminary plat and took no action on a proposed final plat under the Department of Development;
- Approved payment of \$74,579.82 to John Wright and Associates for seven Arbitrator Camera systems for patrol units, purchased under the State bid contract;
- Awarded the bid to Colwell Oil Company for the 12-month purchase of Convenience Store fuel;
- Declared one 1993 Ford ¾ ton pickup and one 1995 International dump truck as surplus from pct. 4 and authorized their sale at auction;
- Conducted executive session as authorized by the Texas Government Code to consult with counsel regarding the possible sale or lease of real property and to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a public officer or employee.