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### County facilities planning milestone reached

A vote during a regular meeting of the Ellis County Commissioners' Court on Monday to seek bid proposals for the construction of a juvenile center and a small storage center to be built on the County Farm property marked a significant milestone.

"Commissioners, this puts everything in a plan as far as facilities are concerned," said County Judge Chad Adams. "For the first time in six years, with you, as this Court, sitting here providing guidance, and taking action – we have brought this County to a plan as far as facilities. I want to recognize this moment and say thank you."

County Engineer Joe White noted that a site plan, specifying where on the County Farm property the buildings would be constructed, will be brought back before the Court at a later date.

"This will just give us authorization to go out and talk with contractors and get some plans in place," he added.

Additionally, the Court approved a contract with Architexas for professional architecture and drafting services at an hourly rate for work on the buildings associated with but not included in the Ellis County Bond Program.

"Some of these things, where we know what we want, I can work out floor plans, and they will make necessary changes and stamp them," White said. "They will be the architect of record."

Another milestone worthy of recognition was the Certificate of Compliance received by the Wayne McCollum Detention Center following a recent inspection by the Texas Commission on Jail Standards.

"Last year, we did not receive this recognition until we made some corrective changes," said Adams. "This is something to be noted."

A letter from Adan Munoz, Jr., Executive Director of the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, congratulated Sheriff Ray Stewart on this accomplishment.

"This certificate attests, signifies and demonstrates your department's dedication and professionalism in maintaining a safe, secure and sanitary facility," Munoz wrote. "The citizens of Ellis County should be proud of your efforts."

The Court also voted to accept the recommendation of Commissioner Heath Sims, pct. 3, regarding emergency medical services and authorized the County Judge to sign a contract with CareFlite, pending review of the contract by the County Attorney's office.

"In my recommendation, we've found things that will improve our service," Sims said. "We will have two more trucks in the County – one in Italy and one working from the Palmer area -- which is going to help our rural areas immensely."

Under the proposal, CareFlite will provide assurance that an ambulance will reach the location of the caller within 20 minutes and 59 seconds for rural locations and 29 minutes and 59

seconds for remote rural locations at least 90 percent of the time. To ensure this response time, the company will use an automatic helicopter launch provision.

“(This proposal) also includes the opportunity to offer all our employees and their families to be included in the CareFlite ambulance plan – the employee and their whole household,” said Sims. “This is an extra benefit we could provide our employees.”

The cost of the ambulance plan is regularly \$49 per household per year, but has been reduced to \$10 per household per year for the County employees.

“I learned something about Commissioner Sims in this process,” Adams added. “Don’t ever negotiate with Commissioner Sims – you’ll come out on the short end of the stick! This was a team effort that was lead by him that saved the County about \$120,000, because CareFlite presents this contract to us for one dollar.”

Citing concerns about service to the eastern portion of the County, Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2, voted against the contract.

After much discussion Commissioners took no action on a request for variance relating to the fire hydrant requirement for a proposed development in precinct 2. Under the proposal, a system would be constructed that would allow the fire department to fill trucks with water from a pond on the property.

“They are providing fire protection that’s not in that area now, and there are probably other houses in that area that have no fire protection at this time,” said Commissioner Dennis Robinson, pct. 1. “There probably won’t be any in the next 30 or 40 years – the water companies are not going to invest the money.”

Dodson ultimately requested that no action be taken.

“I like the idea of adding the fire protection – I just want to see that it does work when we need it,” Dodson said. “My recommendation would be to leave it up to (the landowner) to make the necessary contact with the fire department.”

Robinson noted that the fire department could then ensure that the system is built correctly and decide whether or not to take responsibility for regular maintenance of the system.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Heard a budget presentation from County Court at Law #1 Judge Greg Wilhelm, for FY 2008-2009;
- Approved polling locations and early voting schedule for the November 4, 2008 Presidential Election;
- Approved the lease of handicap voting equipment to Palmer ISD, Red Oak ISD, Italy ISD and Avalon ISD for a Tax Rollback Election in October;
- Approved a contract election with Avalon ISD and Buena Vista Bethel Special Utility District;
- Approved a contract for services with Meals on Wheels of Johnson and Ellis County to provide 5,000 meals for elderly and disabled persons throughout Ellis County at a total cost of \$25,000;
- Accepted the Low Income Repair Assistance, Retrofit and Accelerated Vehicle Retirement Program (LIRAP) Local Initiative Projects Contract Notice to Proceed for FY 2008;
- Took no action on a Clean Fleet Vehicle Ordinance pending additional education for the Court;
- Took no action on a contract for filming of a television show;

- Authorized the County Judge to sign a drainage easement between Ellis County and Mario and Ligia Mitchell of Pierce Road in Red Oak.
- Took no action on a simplified plat for Tre Vasca Estates;
- Approved a variance relating to the fire hydrant requirement and a replat for lots 5 and 15 in Curtis Farm Estates;
- Took no action on requests to purchase a Toyota Tundra for the Extension Office, a Dodge Charger for Juvenile Services, two Chevrolet 2500 HD's for Weights and Measures Division of the Sheriff's Office, and ten Ford Police Interceptors for the Sheriff's Office;
- Authorized purchase of one Dodge Ram 3500 ST regular cab for Road and Bridge precinct 2.