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County to evaluate roads

A comprehensive assessment of county roads, integrating soil composition, paving thickness, smoothness, drainage, right-of-way, traffic counts, and global positioning system (GPS) coordinates was approved by the Ellis County Commissioners' Court during a regular meeting on Monday, June 8, 2009.

"This would take us about a year, and we will probably have 1500 different sample locations," said County Engineer Joe White. "We want to take a very common-sense approach. If we combine this data all together, we will look back and say it was a good move."

White said he preferred to tackle the project in-house rather than to hire a consultant, citing both cost and effectiveness.

"The other option would be to hire a consultant – that would be several hundred thousand dollars, and most consultants are not set up to do it for counties, where we have some roads with chip seal, some with gravel, and things like that," he said.

Engineering staff will work with representatives from each road and bridge precinct to determine the proper locations for measurements – such as locations where water stands after a storm.

"Drainage is about a third of the cost on a construction project – we are no different," White said. "We know what our drainage problems are, and how valuable would it be if all the places you know you have water are marked on the map."

In addition to approving the project, the Court authorized purchase of a soil testing apparatus for the survey at a cost not to exceed \$20,000. A truck already owned by Road and Bridge Precinct 3 will be assigned to the Engineering department for the duration of the project as well.

The Court also took an incremental step toward hiring an assistant engineer, directing White to begin developing a recommendation for both qualifications and salary.

"I'm not sure I know many people that would have pneumonia and come to work every day," County Judge Carol Bush said to White. "You go above and beyond, and it's only taken a very, very short time being here to recognize that."

“Everyone at this table here knows you well, Joe, and how much you are committed to your job,” said Commissioner Heath Sims, pct. 3. “Joe would stay up here 24 hours a day if that’s what it took to complete the job.”

White demurred, saying instead that he felt an assistant engineer would allow him to “bring a higher level of service” to the citizens of the County.

“I think engineering has the opportunity to pay for it,” he added. “There is an old axiom that the art of engineering is doing well for one dollar what others might be able to do for two. We have the ability to sharpen a pencil and find a more efficient, better way to do something. I think you can see that in structure.”

The Court took time out to recognize members of the Italy High School Gladiators Baseball Team, Softball Team, Track Team, and Power Lifting Team.

“Thank you to you guys and girls in Italy for all your hard work, stepping up and putting Italy back on the map as far as athletic competition goes,” Sims said.

A short public hearing was held concerning a road name clarification for Jack Eastham Road.

“This road was named for an outstanding citizen of this County,” said Dinah Weable of Waxahachie, who attended the meeting on behalf of Eastham family members who could not be present. “Every one of us treasures our own name, and this man deserves to have his name spelled correctly on this road and on all records from hence forth.”

Current road names are spelled several different ways, including Jack Easom Road, Jack Eason Road, and Jack Easham Road. Commissioners voted unanimously to make the correction.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Approved a work order under an interlocal agreement with the City of Alma;
- Authorized the County Judge to sign an agreement with Wilbro Construction concerning the use of county roads during the laying of a 28 mile gas line across precincts 2 and 3;
- Approved a memorandum of understanding with the North Central Texas Council of Governments for the Tire Remediation/Recycling Pilot Project to collect illegally dumped passenger vehicle tires and transport them to a processing location for use in TxDOT construction activities;
- Granted a variance from development rules and regulations relating to road frontage for Edwin Lee Haskovec, pct. 2, allowing him to place a home on family land;
- Awarded the contract for limestone chip seal for all precincts to Hanson Aggregates for the period 6/1/09 to 5/31/10, at a 14% price reduction when compared to 2008.