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Commissioners' Court hears status report on bond program

Ellis County Engineer Joe White and Jones Lang LaSalle Project Manager Jon Vidaurri teamed up once again to provide the members of the Ellis County Commissioners' Court with a solid status report on the facilities being constructed through the bond program during Monday's regularly scheduled meeting.

"This is a narrative of what we have accomplished to date," Vidaurri said. "It is identical to the report that was given to the (Citizens') Bond Oversight Committee two weeks ago. We are under budget and we are holding to schedule."

White narrated a slide show that included photos from the initial leveling of the property through the current status of the buildings, detailing the engineering behind the soundness of the structures and allowances for future expansion.

"Even the mechanical system is designed for future expansion," Vidaurri added. "The chillers – all of that is at grade or below ground so 20 years down the road we don't have to relocate it. It was designed for that."

Both the jail and the courts building are constructed with a cast-in-place concrete system rather than a steel skeleton.

"This is the exact same system we have in (the historic Courthouse)," White said. "It's just a much larger system (in the new facility)."

According to Vidaurri, the cast-in-place concrete system was recommended by construction manager at risk Balfour Beatty two years ago when the firm estimated it would save approximately \$900,000 on the project. To date, the savings is more like \$1.4 million, White estimated, adding that there is "no particular advantage" to one system over the other.

Both White and Vidaurri extended appreciation to City of Waxahachie leaders and staff members for their cooperative spirit and willingness to work hand in hand with the County throughout the entire process.

"I can't say enough about the great relationship we have with the city," said White. "It is easy to work with them."

As work on the county's 2009/2010 budget progresses, a number of related items were approved during the meeting, including:

- A \$25,000 contract with Meals on Wheels to provide services to needy elderly and disabled persons throughout the County, the same amount as in the 2008/2009 budget;
- Funding of \$15,000 for the Child Protective Services Board, also known as the Child Welfare Board, a \$5,000 increase over the 2008/2009 budget, with Commissioner Heath Sims, pct. 3, voting against the increase;
- Funding of \$2,500 for the Ellis County Historical Commission, the same amount as in the 2008/2009 budget;
- Renewal of employee health insurance coverage through the Texas Association of Counties Health and Employee Benefits Pool, realizing a renewal credit of \$313,634, passing along a 3.5 percent increase in the cost of dependent premiums, and extending the new employee waiting period from 60 to 90 days;
- Consolidation of Judge Calvert's and Judge Wilhelm's Westlaw subscriptions in order to gain a cost savings;
- Approval for the Sheriff's Department to apply for \$18,718 under the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program.

County Judge Carol Bush thanked all the representatives of the charitable and non-profit organizations that were present.

"We can't deny the needs are enormous and far outpace the funding most of the time," she told members of the Child Protective Services Board. "We are thankful for your commitment and glad to participate."

The Board also received approval for the appointment of Shree Kent and Don Davis to replace members whose terms of service had ended.

"We do need people from all parts of our county to serve on our board," said Sylvia Smith, later promising to provide a summary of duties to assist Commissioners in making recommendations.

Some time was spent in discussing the merits of different materials as road toppings and laying the groundwork for improved bidding processes for road building materials.

"You will need to put all the specifications into the bid document," said Assistant County Attorney Lee Auvenshine. "Fully articulate what it is you want – size, cleanliness, bonding, you name it – and say that we are going to be taking a primary, a secondary, an alternate, and so on."

Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2, mentioned the cost that is added to road building materials by having to handle them twice, with Purchasing Agent Richard Denniston adding that these costs might be offset by creating a central location for stockpiling materials so that they could be purchased when the market is favorable.

"It will also require ongoing review of the (supplier) we just finished up with," Denniston told the Court. "What was their product, what was their service – we do not want to continue (to contract) with somebody that gave us a product we cannot use."

In other business, Commissioners:

- Accepted the resignation of Mr. Jack Dineen from the board of Emergency Service District #6, effective immediately;
- Accepted the donation of a 1997 boat, a 1997 trailer, and a 1998 motor from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to be used in patrolling Lake Bardwell and authorized acquisition of exempt license plates for the trailer;

- Took no action on a proposal to contract with Shield of Faith Films for filming a scene of a movie at the Ellis County Courthouse;
- Approved a two-year extension to the contract agreement between Ellis County and Comerica Bank;
- Took no action on either of the items posted by the Department of Development;
- Declared outdated law books from the Law Library as salvage and authorized disposal since no bids were received as surplus;
- Approved the purchase of a used 1992 International 4900 Truck with 12 foot bed at a total cost of \$5,000 for precinct 4;
- Declared one 1999 Ford Crown Victoria, located at Constable 4, as salvage that must be destroyed under the terms of an Emissions Enforcement grant from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality that paid half the cost of a replacement vehicle;
- Declared as surplus a 1990 model Mustang located at Constable 4 and authorized disposal at auction;
- Declared as surplus and authorized disposal at auction a 1991 Ford F-150 Pickup, a 1993 Ford F-150 Pickup, a 1994 Dodge ½ ton Pickup, a 1981 International Dump Truck (8 yard), a 1987 Ford F-700 Dump Truck, a 1988 CAT 12-G Motor Grader, and a 1981 Ford 9000 Water truck, 1600 gallon, in precinct 2;
- Adjourned into executive session to discuss possible sale of real property and possible litigation;
- Authorized the District Attorney's Office to file a civil lawsuit against Holly Brooksher for damages resulting from her negligence which caused a collision with a county owned vehicle in 2008.