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Commissioners approve Fiscal Year 2008-2009 Budget

Following a public hearing during which no member of the public stepped forward, Ellis County Commissioners voted unanimously to adopt the fiscal year 2008-2009 budget as filed by County Judge Chad Adams.

"The majority of our budget increases, by far, were petroleum-related increases – gas use in our vehicles and a significant increase for road materials," Adams said. "There are some significant adjustments made in the Commissioners' precincts this year, in some cases a 25 percent increase in the precincts, because of these petroleum cost issues."

Adams noted another issue impacting the budget was the cost of workers' compensation insurance, but said that an aggressive educational program is expected to contribute to a decrease in those premiums over the next two to three years.

A required public hearing on the proposed tax rate, pursuant to announcement in the Commissioners' Court on August 25, 2008, also passed without comment from the public. A second public hearing on the proposed tax rate is scheduled for September 15. The proposed tax rate is incrementally lower than the 2007-2008 tax rate.

Similarly, there was no comment in a public hearing on a proposed archive fee to be collected by the County Clerk.

"This is a good way for the counties to subsidize their expenses on restoring records," said County Clerk Cindy Polley. "We would have to do it one way or another – and this way, the users are the ones that help."

Polley noted that the fee was first implemented in 2001.

Commissioners continued their forward progress on the County's bond project by approving a contract with James R. Bolton Construction Company for removal of miscellaneous steel items in the 1929 Jail.

"We completed the asbestos and lead removal, and we would like to take a few pieces of steel out to put in the Sheriff's Office, in the lobby," said County Engineer Joe White. "We'll put some of them up for an auction if the public is interested in buying those pieces. We want to spend just a little bit of effort."

The Court also voted to contract with Terracon Geotechnical Services for drilling and geotechnical work to determine whether or not additional depth is needed for foundational piers.

After accepting the resignation of Don Watt from the Italy Emergency Service District #3, Commissioners appointed Vincente Guerrero to fulfill the unexpired term.

"Mr. Guerrero is the first candidate to come forward under our new (volunteer) application form," Adams said. "Historically, we have done very little interviewing in this process."

Adams and Guerrero went over the questions from the application form, noting that Guerrero is a registered voter who has lived in Ellis County all his life. He is a former member of the Italy

Independent School District Board of Trustees, and currently serves on the Italy Planning and Zoning Committee as well as the Dunlap Library Board of Directors.

A contract with the H.E.B. Pharmacy approved by the Court is expected to improve delivery of medications to clients of the County Indigent Health Care Program.

"As you know, most of our medications are provided through our contract with Hope Clinic," said Human Services Director Diana Buckley. "Only about 15 prescriptions per month are referred this way, and about a third of those are generics."

The contract will replace a more cumbersome process of issuing "gift" cards to clients to allow them to obtain the discounted generic medications at Wal-Mart, and will prevent clients from having to make additional trips to the county offices.

"At today's gas prices, that's a significant issue for these clients," Buckley added.

A separate contract with H.E.B. will allow county employees to take advantage of the pharmacy's discount prescription service as well.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Accepted an Option to Renew with Correctional Food Services for inmate Food service at the Wayne McCollum Detention Center;
- Accepted contract renewal for inmate medical care with Correctional Health Management;
- Approved purchase of ten police vehicles at a cost of \$36,977 each;
- Approved renewal of the County's salary supplements to the justices on the Tenth Court of Appeals in the amount of \$1615 for 2008-2009;
- Approved a continuing contract with the North Central Texas Council of Governments for the Cities Readiness Initiative project running August 1, 2008 through July 31, 2009;
- Approved renewal of the Interlocal agreement with NCTCOG for the 9-1-1 communication center in the Sheriff's Department;
- Granted a one-time variance to subdivision rules and regulations relating to fire hydrants and approved the associated simplified plat for the Vess Valley Addition in precinct 3;
- Took no action on requests for variances relating to lot size and fire hydrants for a piece of property in precinct 1;
- Granted a one-time variance relating to road frontage for a piece of property in precinct 3 that was once a part of the Superconducting Super Collider project, with Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2, dissenting;
- Declared as surplus a 1992 International Dump Truck from pct. 4 and approved its disposal at auction;
- Approved the purchase of one 2009 Chevrolet Impala for Juvenile Probation at a cost of \$18,722.