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Tax abatement granted for Walgreens expansion

During a regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, May 27, 2008, Ellis County Commissioners approved a tax abatement agreement with Walgreens for an expansion of its Distribution Center, located on Highway 287 at Ovilla Road.

“They will be adding an additional 32,000 square feet and will employ an additional 75 people,” said Special Projects Director Holly Davis. “This will have a positive economic impact on the community.”

The expansion will cost an estimated \$35.5 million and qualifies for a 60 percent tax abatement over a period of seven years under the County’s existing guidelines.

“This includes \$11.4 million in the building and \$24.1 million in equipment,” Davis said. “Currently, there are 810 jobs there, and this will bring them just under 900. Average wages will be \$11.50 an hour. It is a nice sign that they are expanding an existing facility – that they are happy here and enjoy doing business in Ellis County.”

Moving continually forward with the bond project, as approved by voters last May, the Court authorized the County Judge to sign a contract with Apex Geoscience for geotechnical testing services associated with design and construction, pending minor changes in the contract requested by the District Attorney’s office.

“This is about 30 drilled holes and the recommendations that will ensue on the foundations,” said County Engineer Joe White. “We went through the request for qualifications process and looked at several different firms, with Staubach’s assistance.”

The Court adjourned into a short executive session to seek the advice of its attorneys concerning two items posted on the evening’s agenda under Purchasing.

The first was posted as consideration and action to award a bid for #4 Pea Gravel for all precincts. The Court could take no action on the item because no bids were received for the product.

The second item was posted as discussion of multiple awards to suppliers of road materials and the availability of supply to Ellis County precincts.

“Essentially, there is difficulty in getting merchants to bid on our products, and so it would be recommended that the Purchasing Agent seek out other Counties and what they are doing, possibly riding on to their bids for the same products with an interlocal agreement,” said County Judge Chad Adams when the meeting was reconvened. “And possibly examining TXDOT’s purchasing agreements and maybe doing an interlocal agreement with that State agency, to ride along with their bids and use the same vendors.”

Adams said that the County and District Attorney’s office would also do some research in the near future with regard to dealing with situations when no bids are received for materials that are essential to the maintenance of roads and bridges in the County.

Another lengthy discussion centered around a request for a variance to the County’s Rules, Regulations and Specifications for Subdivisions relating to lot size requirement. Homeowners in precinct 4 had obtained a permit to build a shop but instead built a small brick residence, tying it into the existing septic system on the already under-sized lot.

“This is in a subdivision that was platted prior to the County going to full one-acre lots, and this lot is less than 7/10 of an acre,” said Department of Development Director Delton Ake. “The variance today is we have two residences on less than one acre of land, and our regulations will not allow that.”

Ake noted that the County is required under law to consider the potential usage of a septic system, while a sanitarian creating a drawing may only consider the number of persons currently living in a residence.

Rules and regulations regarding septic systems are promulgated by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and are designed to protect public health and safety. The State grants the County the authority to permit septic systems and monitor compliance with the State’s installation and inspection regulations.

Members of the Court listened carefully to input from the homeowners, but voted unanimously to deny the variance.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Approved a proclamation recognizing the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Truevine Missionary Baptist Church in Ferris;
- Approved allowing Waste Management to be financed with industrial revenue bonds, with no financial obligation on the part of Ellis County;

- Appointed Mr. Bart Hundt to the board of Ellis County Emergency Service District #2 – Midlothian, to fill the unexpired term of Mr. Larry Marlow, effective immediately;
- Approved the addition of American Law Reports to the online service (Westlaw) on the three patron access computers, two in the Law Library and one at the District Clerk's office, under the Law Library's existing budget;
- Approved work orders under interlocal agreements with the City of Milford and the City of Ovilla;
- Agreed to allow the Midlothian ISD to place a sidewalk on the Ellis County right of way on Sudith Road at the District's expense, both for installation and maintenance;
- Approved a final plat for Rockett Ranch, contingent upon receipt of new drawings showing additional right of way as requested by TXDOT and in keeping with the County's Thoroughfare Plan;
- Approved the purchase of one New Holland Backhoe from Landmark Equipment at a cost of \$36,150 for precinct 4;
- Declared one Terex double drum vibratory roller as surplus in precinct 3 and approved of its disposal at auction.