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Commissioners seek citizen input

The greater part of Monday's regularly scheduled meeting of the Ellis County Commissioners' Court was devoted to input from citizens regarding a proposed slaughter house location at the address of 620 Greathouse Road in precinct 3.

"We like to hear from you," said County Judge Chad Adams. "This is the second time that Commissioner Sims has brought this to the Court for discussion because he is very concerned about getting public involvement."

The item was posted for discussion only but is expected to be brought to a vote at the January 12 meeting of the Court.

"At the last Court, neither the person asking for the slaughterhouse nor the public were here, so we felt like it would be better to have an opportunity for people to speak," Sims added. "I was raised in an ag environment, so a slaughterhouse doesn't scare me, but in an area today where the population is changing, demographics are changing – it may be rural according to statute in the State of Texas, but it may not be rural to those of us living here."

Sims invited Carl Myers, the property owner requesting the permit to operate a slaughterhouse, to speak first.

Myers said he plans a small processing plant on his Maypearl-area property of approximately 220 acres.

"I live there, my family lives there," Myers said. "I'm not going to put something there to ruin the value of my own property."

Myers estimated the capacity of the proposed facility at 10 to 20 cattle per day and said that USDA regulations allow processing eight hours a day no more than 260 days per year.

Sims asked a number of questions of Myers, ranging from how many head of cattle he planned to process to what would be done with the hides and how many people would be employed.

After hearing from Myers, the Court heard from a number of other property owners in the area, with some stepping up to the podium to speak and others simply registering their opinions in writing. Other than Myers, all the members of the public in attendance at the meeting expressed opposition to the proposal.

Concerns that were voiced included impact on property values, impact on roads, environmental impact, odor, noise, growth of the operation and whether or not Myers could get the permit in place and then sell the property and the slaughterhouse operation to a less conscientious operator.

According to Assistant County Attorney Lee Auvenshine, the permit would apply to the operator – Myers – and not to the facility. Consequently, a new operator would have to apply for a new permit. Auvenshine also advised the Court that they would not have any authority to regulate the size of the plant's operations.

“There are 220 pieces of property out there, within a mile and a half,” Sims said in summary. “Out of that, there are two that have commercial permits – one is a church and one is that church is going to build a gym. So there is no industrial or commercial type situation. Where I’ve struggled the hardest is that we are in transition. What I remember when I close my eyes, I’ve come to the realization that we are not that same rural area, and to co-mingle in peace is difficult.”

Sims asked Myers whether he still desired to have the item placed on the Court’s agenda for a vote and received an affirmative answer.

“If this agenda item does come before the Court, I will not be supporting it,” said Adams. “I want you to know that in advance.”

In other business, Commissioners:

- Heard an update on the status of the Public Power Pool (P3);
- Heard a presentation from e-Civis concerning its software designed to improve grant performance;
- Approved an interlocal agreement with the Ennis Garden Club and a work order under that agreement, relating to the Bluebonnet Trail Annual Event in Ennis;
- Created a temporary part-time clerk position in Emergency Management in order to correctly classify an individual performing functions that are paid for by grant funding;
- Approved a travel reimbursement policy that will automatically adjust to reflect any changes made by the Internal Revenue Service in mileage reimbursement rates;
- Approved a resolution supporting the creation of a Groundwater Conservation District with Ellis, Johnson, Hill and Somervell Counties as a fee-based GCD during the 81<sup>st</sup> Regular Session of the Texas Legislature;
- Appointed Bernyce Crownover to the Ellis County Women’s Building board for a four-year term;
- Appointed County Court at Law #2 Judge Gene Calvert to the Bail Bond Board;
- Accepted a settlement in the amount of \$36,411.34 and authorized the County Judge to sign a release for damages incurred to the Dale Acres Bridge in precinct 3 on April 30, 2008;
- Contracted with Atmos Energy for relocation of gas pipelines and authorized the County Judge to sign an easement and right-of-way agreement with Atmos Energy as necessary;
- Approved purchase of two 2006 Dodge Ram Trucks from APEX Fleet for a total of \$20,220 for precinct 2;
- Approved the purchase of a 2009 Dodge Charger at a cost not to exceed \$35,000 with 50% paid by the emissions enforcement grant.