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Commissioners invite public testimony

Ellis County Commissioners called on the public to provide input Monday night during a regularly scheduled meeting of the Court. The topic was 9-1-1 address display format standards as described in House Bill 2665, passed in the 81st Texas Legislative Session. The bill amends the Transportation Code by authorizing the Commissioners' Court to adopt and impose standards for design and installation of address number signs to identify properties located in unincorporated areas of the county.

"My personal feeling in putting it on the Court's agenda was that it was something where we needed to give people an opportunity to voice their opinion," said Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2. "I appreciate all the people here tonight. Myself, I think it should be a voluntary issue, and I just wanted to give folks a chance to speak."

Both sides of the issue were represented. Those in opposition cited a desire to remain anonymous, the cost of obtaining and posting the signs, personal responsibility, difficulty of enforcement, and unnecessary government intervention in private lives as reasons for objection.

"I am here in two capacities tonight – one as a private, taxpaying, rural citizen of Ellis County, and one as an official responsible for law enforcement action in the County," said Constable Terry Nay, pct. 2. "I am sworn to uphold the law, peace and dignity of the State of Texas, and that's real difficult when I can't find you. It is much more real when precious moments count. I am asking professionally that the court consider this."

"I can see this is important to law enforcement, but I cannot see us mandating people to do this and putting a fine on people who don't do this," said Commissioner Ron Brown, pct. 4, noting he would certainly encourage every property owner to post clearly visible address information for emergency responders.

The legislation does not require the court to adopt a statute, but rather only authorizes them to do so. The item was posted for discussion only and no action was taken on the issue.

Another no-action item on the agenda was a report from the Human Services Department on the 2009 employee health fair.

“I want to be sure that I thank you for having the foresight to recognize the value of this type of program,” said Human Services Director Diana Buckley. “It all starts with you.”

Buckley said participation in the fair was good, with 231 employees receiving flu shots, 56 receiving cholesterol screenings, 43 obtaining glucose screenings, 34 calculating their body mass index, and 21 undergoing screening mammography.

“We have recently learned that only about 32 percent of women who should have mammograms are currently compliant with that recommendation,” Buckley said. “So we are thinking of ways to highlight the importance of mammograms, and we have already scheduled the mobile mammogram unit for next year’s health fair.”

Buckley thanked Midlothian Energy LP, Wal-Mart of Midlothian and Waxahachie, Oak Farms Dairy, Subway Sandwiches, Baylorworx, and the Ellis County Expo Board for their cash and in-kind donations to the fair.

“I can’t say enough about our partnership with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service,” she added. “This partnership is right behind your support in terms of importance to the initiative.”

Extension agents provide the department with health-information handouts fondly dubbed “payroll propaganda” and teach a variety of classes throughout the year, as well as assisting with the health fair.

County Judge Carol Bush commented on the success of the event and recognized individual members of the Human Services staff for their work.

“It was very well attended, and everyone that I observed was having a good time,” Bush added.

Commissioners approved the establishment of the Ellis County Local Data Advisory Board per the Code of Criminal Procedure Chapter 60.10 as amended by the 81st Legislature.

“The initial meeting will be held following training that Cindy Polley and I will attend,” said District Clerk Melanie Reed. “The board will make recommendations no later than June 1, 2010, and we have until 2013 to make the implemented changes to be in compliance.”

The ordinance applies to counties that have “an average disposition completeness percentage, including both juvenile and adult dispositions, of less than 90 percent, as reflected in the first report the Department of Public Safety submits under Article 60.21(b)(2) on or after January 1, 2009.”

“They were going back to 2006 figures, and we were less than 90 percent then, but our 2007 numbers are already up to 80, 85 percent,” Reed said, noting that the most likely cause of the low disposition rate is duplication, with more than one tracking number assigned to an individual case.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Agreed to allow J & K Excavation to blade and adequately maintain approximately 1,000 feet of Sandtown Road immediately south of Highway 34 during the commencement and operation of a wash plant by J & K Excavation at no charge and subject to revocation by the County;
- Approved an interlocal agreement between Ellis, Johnson, Hill and Somervell Counties and the Prairielands Groundwater Conservation District wherein the counties agree to loan monies to the District for maintenance and operation of the District on a short term basis, to be repaid beginning in 2013;
- Approved the purchase of certain voting equipment, totaling \$48,250 and funded through the Help America Vote Act;
- Declared specific ammunition as surplus and authorizing use of the surplus ammunition as a trade in for new property of the same general type in the best interest of the county;

- Approved purchase of one 2005 Ford F250 pickup for precinct 3 from Lloyd Ford.