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Prepared by: Ellis County Communications
101 W. Main Street
Waxahachie, TX 75165

Contact: Diana Buckley, 972-825-5087, Diana.Buckley@co.ellis.tx.us

Tax increase approved

Using language required pursuant to Texas Tax Code Section 26.05(b), Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2, made the following motion to set the tax rate for Ellis County for fiscal year 2011-2012:

“I move that the property tax rate be increased by the adoption of a tax rate of 0.413599, which is effectively a 3.72 percent increase (by which the proposed tax rate exceeds the effective tax rate) in the tax rate. This tax rate includes a General Maintenance and Operations tax rate of 0.380091 (consisting of an Interest and Sinking rate of 0.059754 and an Operations rate of 0.320337), and a Farm to Market tax rate of 0.033508. This will make the total tax rate 0.413599 per \$100 of taxable value. This tax rate is necessary to support the budget adopted by the Commissioners Court on September 21, 2011 for FY 2011-2012, and is pursuant to Texas Local Government Code §81.006 and Texas Tax Code §26.05. The tax rate will effectively be raised by 3.72 percent (percent by which the tax rate exceeds the effective maintenance and operations rate) and it will raise taxes for maintenance and operations on a \$100,000 home by approximately \$20.00, and on an average residential home by approximately \$28.42.”

The measure was approved on a split vote. In accordance with the statute, a record vote was taken, with the votes recorded as follows:

Commissioner Dennis Robinson, pct. 1: No
Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2: Yes
Commissioner Heath Sims, pct. 3: Yes
Commissioner Ron Brown, pct. 4: No
County Judge Carol Bush: Yes

A second agenda item, as required by Local Government Code 111.008(c) ratified the property tax increase of two (2) cents necessary to fund the Ellis County Budget FY 2011-12 that was adopted by the Commissioners' Court on September 21, 2011.

On the lighter side, Commissioners took time out to approve a proclamation designating October 2 – 8, 2011 as National 4-H Week in Ellis County.

“One of the very enjoyable things we get to do as a Commissioners’ Court is to recognize special people and the special contributions that they make,” said Bush. “4-H does a tremendous thing for our community, and we are lucky to have such involved personnel and community members to make this program so successful.”

“Over the years, 4-H has changed a little bit,” said Sims, before reading the Court’s proclamation. “Home schooling has helped that change because it is recognized as an extracurricular activity. Sometime when they have a banquet, go and see the different activities that 4-H offers.”

The Court also heard a presentation from Dr. Mackie Owens, Chief Executive Officer of Hope Clinic, detailing the status of the programs at the Clinic.

“I just wanted to give you a few facts about Ellis County and Hope Clinic today as opposed to 2000,” Owens said. “The cost per patient has gone down from \$3,500 for indigent health care to, this year, \$1,000 – quite a savings I would say, since we took over this contract. In 2000, we were all volunteer, with only three employees. Today, we have eight providers, and a total of 35 employees. We’ve come a long way.”

Owens detailed the Clinic’s services and told the Court that 17,775 patient visits were provided in the last year.

“Most of the indigent clients are complex,” she added. “They have many visits, and we didn’t keep tabs on how many times they came. They often take 40 minutes for an appointment, whereas a regular appointment is 20 minutes. They take many medications and often require diagnostic testing and sometimes surgery. They often need transportation and referrals to other specialists.”

Owens did note that the Clinic’s full time dentist had resigned after only four months.

“However, we only had dental care part time when this contract started, and we only had a full time provider for four months,” she concluded.

“The county has benefitted greatly from our contract,” Bush said.

Following the presentation by Owens, the Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the first installment of the payment for the new fiscal year under the existing contract.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Heard a presentation from Purchasing Agent Alisha Wickens and AT&T Representative David Hardaway regarding potential savings on County cell phones;
- Voted to move the County’s current AT&T cell phone numbers from individual plans to a Pooled Minute Plan under the State’s Department of Information Resources contract, at an expected savings of up to \$17,000 annually, pursuant to legal approval of the contract;
- Took no action on a proposal to fix telephone line items, disallowing transfer of funds from those line items except upon review by the Commissioners’ Court in open session;
- Nominated Jack Walker of Ennis as a candidate to the Board of Directors of the Ellis Central Appraisal District for the term of 2011-12;
- Approved a work order with the City of Ovilla in pct. 4;
- Approved three replats and three variances under the Department of Development;
- Approved interlocal cooperation contracts with the City of Ennis, the City of Bardwell, the City of Garrett, the City of Alma, the Avalon Independent School District, the Ennis Independent School District, and the Ennis Garden Club for the term of October 1, 2011 to September 30, 2012;
- Approved a work order with the Ennis Garden Club for the Bluebonnet Trail annual event;

- Authorized purchase of 15 vehicles for the Sheriff's Office to replace 15 older vehicles being rotated out of service, utilizing funding in the existing budget for that department.