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Interim Purchasing Agent appointed

After a short executive session during Monday's regularly-scheduled meeting of the Ellis County Commissioners' Court, Commissioners voted unanimously to appoint Hanna McCleary as the interim Purchasing Agent.

"This is somebody we are bringing in on an interim basis to help us out – to make sure we can continue to operate as we need to operate," said County Judge Carol Bush.

McCleary served the County in that capacity from April of 1994 through July of 2003.

A proposed burn ban was not approved this morning.

"The KBDI is 394, that's well below the 500 we normally think about," said Fire Marshal Investigator Jim Pharr. "The 14-day outlook is still not too bad."

Pharr indicated that he would not mind seeing the item on the agenda for every meeting of the Court during this time of year, however.

"In the next few weeks, we are going to dry up, and in the early summer we are probably going to be in a burn ban situation," he said.

Members of the Court did express concern about the potential for disastrous wildfires, due to high winds and a plentiful supply of grasses and other fuels. They urge all citizens to use caution and a good dose of common sense when contemplating outdoor burning.

The Court also voted unanimously to declare the week of April 10 through April 16, 2011 as Crime Victims' Rights Week in Ellis County.

"Thank you for that proclamation to raise awareness," said Suzette Pylant of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. "We have lots of organizations here in Ellis County that help crime victims – MADD is just one of them. There are people here to help you if you become a victim of violent crime."

A short presentation by Casey Ballard, Executive Director of the West Ellis County United Way, also highlighted the many non-profit organizations serving the county.

"In 2011, we were able to distribute \$325,000 to 28 different non-profits throughout west Ellis County," Ballard said. "Every non-profit we support serves Ellis County in some way."

Ballard thanked Ellis County employees for their generosity in supporting United Way and also noted that a new fund has been set up to allow the organization to respond to more immediate, short-term needs, in addition to its annual application process.

The Court devoted much of the meeting to discussions with Constable Terry Nay, pct. 2, Constable Mike Jones, pct. 4, and Judge Jackie Miller, Jr., Justice of the Peace, pct. 2 regarding fine and fee collections, traffic safety programs, and grant coordination.

“I want to tell you I appreciate your efforts,” Bush told Nay. “This is the kind of thing we need as a County – brainstorming about what it is we can do to reduce costs, to increase collections, to do whatever we can to utilize the resources we do have.”

Commissioner Bill Dodson, pct. 2, echoed Bush’s comments.

“You are the one that brought this to our attention, and we have identified some issues that have been improved,” he said. “I am going to give you credit for that.”

Commissioners hesitated, however, to add personnel at this point in the budget cycle, particularly with the state Legislature in session, adding uncertainty in terms of unfunded mandates. Consequently, no action was taken on either of Nay’s proposals.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Approved a contract with LexisNexis for online legal research to be utilized by the Ellis County & District Attorney’s Office, at a savings of approximately \$5,000 annually;
- Approved Amendment One to a grant agreement with the North Central Texas Council of Governments for the Cities Readiness Initiative;
- Authorized the County Judge to sign an AT&T easement for communication lines servicing the County Farm buildings;
- Approved Fisk Electric Company for a project to remodel the remotely controlled security doors and related security devices in the 1990 and 2000 additions of the jail;
- Took no action on an item to select public members for the elected officials’ Salary Grievance Committee for fiscal year 2011-2012;
- Approved a pilot program that will allow the Ellis County inmates to provide laundry services for uniforms for Road and Bridge pct. 3 as a cost-saving measure;
- Approved an interlocal cooperation contract with the City of Red Oak;
- Appointed Commissioner Ron Brown, pct. 4, as the Judge Pro-Tem to serve as presiding officer of the Ellis County Commissioners’ Court when the County Judge cannot act in that capacity;
- Approved payment of invoice #4581 from TROTT Communications Group in the amount of \$9,968.75 under the Professional Services Agreement effective November 15, 2010, having received the specified work product.