



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE September 21, 2011

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

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

County Budget Approved for 2011/2012

After two public hearings, one regarding the proposed ad valorem tax rate and another regarding the budget for fiscal year 2011/2012, Ellis County Commissioners narrowly approved a budget that will require a two-cent tax rate increase.

“We’ve talked about an increase – it’s a difficult subject,” said County Judge Carol Bush. “As a taxpayer, I don’t enjoy paying taxes, but I do pay them. As an elected official, there are times when you have to do something that is not popular.”

The proposed tax rate would result in a tax increase of approximately \$28.42 per year, or \$2.37 per month, on the average homestead.

A record vote taken on August 22 essentially set a ceiling for the tax rate at \$0.413599 per \$100 of taxable value, two cents higher than the current tax rate of \$0.393599.

A public notice posted in two local newspapers and on the County website (www.co.ellis.tx.us) states, “The average taxable value of a residence homestead in Ellis County this year is \$136,801. If the governing body adopts the proposed tax rate of \$0.413599 per \$100 of taxable value, the amount of taxes imposed this year on the average home would be \$565.81.”

The notice indicates that the amount of County taxes imposed last year on the average home, then valued at \$136,533, was \$537.39.

During the public hearings, the Court heard from several citizens, most of whom did not desire a tax increase but acknowledged the job facing the Commissioners was a difficult one. Some commended them on the efforts made so far.

Ellis County Sheriff Johnny Brown gave a presentation based on the questions that he has been asked in the last few weeks regarding his budget.

“I have the Sheriff side and the Jail side of my budget – it is the largest budget at over \$17 million,” he said. “There are mandates in place on the jail side, where we are required by law to do certain things, such as medical for the inmates, and climate control.”

Brown said while the majority of the budget for the jail is controlled by mandates, he and his staff have “taken measurements from every angle” to trim costs everywhere possible on the Sheriff side of the budget.

“I was hired by the citizens to do that,” he said. “My budget now is actually less by \$42,000 than the budget in 2008.”

Additionally, Brown said, former County Judge Chad Adams had purchased squad cars for the Sheriff’s office using funds that were returned to the general fund at the end of the fiscal year from all county departments, a practice that no longer occurs, making apples-to-apples comparison of the budget more difficult.

“Now, we buy our squad cars out of our existing budget,” he said.

Brown highlighted a number of cost-saving measures taken by the department, as well as other measures taken to decrease crime and better serve the public, covering everything from charging inmates a co-pay for doctor’s visits to adding a canine unit and an airplane.

“Sheriff Brown, you are the kind of man the Tea Party likes,” said one citizen in attendance.

After conclusion of the public hearings, Bush gave a short presentation that explained the decreases in revenue and increases in costs that contributed to the need for the two-cent tax hike in spite of deep cuts, including cuts in personnel.

Specifically the County is facing approximately \$756,000 in increases to its operating budget, in items like employee health insurance, flood control, and utilities, as well as an expected \$269,000 to meet federal radio narrow-banding requirements. A lawsuit against the Central Appraisal District has resulted in a liability of \$238,000 in 2003 taxes that must be repaid, with a potential exposure in future lawsuits of up to a million dollars.

Nevertheless, Bush proposed a budget of \$52,383,550, which is approximately \$2.4 million lower than the 2010/2011 budget.

The budget was approved in a split vote, with Commissioners Dennis Robinson, pct. 1, and Ron Brown, pct. 4 casting the dissenting votes.

In other business, the Court voted to amend juror pay from \$40 to \$34 per day for each day following the first day of service, in accordance with a change in state reimbursement rates, to avoid absorbing another unfunded mandate.

A vote on the tax rate is slated for Monday, September 26, at 6:00 p.m. The Court must approve a tax rate sufficient to fund its approved budget.