

County may hire election administrator

Complicated voter registration is cited as reason

BY GLORIA JENNINGS, Cherokeean Herald

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Prospects for creating an election administrator position was discussed by Laverne Lusk, county clerk, and Linda Little, tax assessor-collector at the Monday morning meeting of the commissioners court.

"One of Linda's employees would go with this office," Mrs. Lusk said. "We are asking that you create the position and applications will then be taken."

One of the women in the tax office spends 85 percent of her time working in voter registration.

"We will help train the new person," Mrs. Lusk said. "Doing voter registration is not a snap anymore."

"I don't think I can get along without any of my deputies," Mrs. Lusk continued. "Each voting box uses three pieces of equipment. We are actually dealing with approximately 100 pieces of equipment."

"I will be available to help the new office and to train personnel," Mrs. Lusk said.

"We are coming to you early." County Judge Chris Davis said, "We have heard some good ideas and have some information on this matter, but the money will have to be in the budget."

The new office will need two computers and internet access.

This year Mrs. Lusk's office is preparing for the May city and school elections. The county gets \$250 from each entity to lease the voting machines. There will be an election in November also.

Mrs. Little and Mrs. Lusk will compile information concerning expected expenses and bring it back to commissioners.

Highway projects prioritized

In another matter, Barry Hughes of North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority (NET-RMA) asked commissioners to prioritize Cherokee County highway projects.

Commissioners placed widening U.S. Highway 69 S. at Wells as the number one priority item.

Because the highway is only two lanes, hurricane traffic almost came to a standstill last fall, commissioners said.

The project is slated to widen the two-lane highway to a three-mile, four-lane divided urban roadway. The improvements are planned to begin two miles north of FM 1247 near Wells and extend one mile south of FM 1247 in Angelina County.

Construction cost will be \$16,318,000; engineering fees, \$1,354,394; environmental costs will be \$57,130; right-of-way costs, \$1,582,846; utilities cost, \$815,900 and construction management, \$1,794,980. Total cost of the project is expected to be \$22,437,250.

Expansion of U.S. Highway 175 drew the second place slot in priority items. The 10.72 mile expansion of U.S. 175 will begin two miles north of FM 855 in Anderson County to FM 347 in Jacksonville. The project will reconstruct a two-lane to four-lane divided rural roadway. Cost will be \$92,649,000.

A Jacksonville relief route is the number three priority item. Other county plans include a project involving U.S. Highway 69 and a Jacksonville relief roadway, which begins north of Jacksonville and extends 9.602 miles south of the city. A new two-lane roadway will be off the ultimate four-lane facility. Cost will be \$124,250,630.

An industrial rail spur at the Jacksonville Industrial Park is the number four priority item. This is a preliminary item and project description and costs are not available.

An 8.6 mile U.S. Highway 79 expansion will begin 0.1 mile east of SH 204 in Jacksonville and extend east to 0.8 miles east of SH 110 in New Summerfield for the reconstruction from a two- to a four-lane divided rural roadway. Cost will be \$119,905,000.

Lake Columbia projects include a new reservoir in northern Cherokee County along West Mud Creek; U.S. 79 1.37 mile bridge at Lake Columbia to replace the existing bridge to accommodate the lake; relocation of 5.26 miles of Union Pacific Railroad at Lake Columbia; and reconstruction of SH 135 at the bridge on West Mud Creek, raising the existing 1.5 mile roadway bridge to accommodate the lake.

Total cost in Cherokee County will be \$419,286,880. No dates for any of the projects have been determined.

In other matters, commissioners approved the appointment of Darrel Schimnowski as a reserve deputy sheriff.

An interlocal agreement between the county and the city of Rusk was approved.

Commissioners authorized the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to utilize the courthouse and courthouse lawn in conjunction with Child Abuse Prevention second annual blue ribbon event at noon April 7.

Completion of public records classes for Jack L. White, constable for precinct 2 was accepted.

Commissioners also approved the purchase of rollers from Cooperative Purchase Agencies, Sea-Max Mixer from Franklin County for precinct 3, taking of bids for seal coating and the purchase of rollers from Ritchie Brothers Auction in Houston.

Among items from the consent agenda approved were the report from the airport advisory board meeting of Jan. 27; license and weight monthly report; Lynn Kelley, constable, precinct 1, monthly report; Jack White, constable, precinct 2 racial profiling law and monthly reports; Jamie Beene, constable precinct 4, monthly report; and Thomas Jones, subdivision no. 1, for plat purposes only.

Attending the meeting were Judge Davis, Commissioners Kelly Traylor, Kevin Pierce, Katherine Pinotti and Byron Underwood; county clerk Lusk and county auditor L.H. Crockett.