

Council agenda features parks, transportation, rodeo grounds

Published: April 12, 2009 09:36 pm

Jacksonville Progress

By Kelly Young

A number of fairly important items appear on the agenda for Tuesday night's Jacksonville City Council meeting, as the council sets its transportation priorities, considers action to gift the rodeo grounds to Lon Morris College and takes action to approve the city's new parks master plan.

In March, Barry Hughes of the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority presented the council with a list of five potential transportation projects and asked them to rank those possibilities in order of importance to the city. Hughes will return at Tuesday's meeting to hear the council's decision.

Prior to the 6 p.m. meeting, the council will hold a workshop for the purpose of making final determinations. The projects being proposed are: the widening of U.S. Highway 69, south of Wells; a Highway 69 relief route to the west of town; a rail spur at the Jacksonville Industrial Park; an expansion of 10.72 miles of U.S. Highway 175; and the widening of U.S. Highway 79 between Jacksonville and New Summerfield.

Cherokee County commissioners have already set their priorities — naming the widening of Highway 69 and the expansion of Highway 175 as their main priorities — but Haberle said he personally favors the Jacksonville relief route as his top choice.

"The bottleneck near Wells is the only trouble spot along 69, and I'm sure TxDOT is aware of the importance of that road as a safe route for hurricane evacuation. By the same token, I know land acquisition has already started along that stretch of 175, so I think both of those projects are foregone conclusions," Haberle said. "I would personally make the Highway 69 relief route my first choice because I think it would have an untold economic impact on this county. Why spend our prioritization capital on projects that are probably done deals?"

The mayor said relief routes have historically proven to be economic boons for communities where they are built.

While City Council members have not met to discuss their priorities together, Haberle said they have been "mulling their options privately." Hughes told county commissioners last month that the county and city are free to alter their priorities at any time.

The city will also consider making final an agreement with Lon Morris that has been nearly a year in the making. The agreement is expected to give the 11-acre rodeo grounds and the city's recreation center to the school in exchange for continued use of the facilities and the promise certain upgrades and programs will be made available to the community.

"This thing has gone back and forth for many months during a long process of carefully considering everybody's concerns. I think everything has now been addressed, and everybody — the rodeo association, the rider's club, the college and the city — should all feel like their needs are met by this agreement," Haberle said.

The mayor said LMC has reached a verbal commitment with the YMCA to house the national organization inside the facility and provide programming for the community.

Other than a few concerned citizens at the beginning of the process, Haberle said he has received virtually no public outcry regarding the gifting of the land to the school. He called the agreement a win for all parties associated with it.

Consideration will also be given to adopting the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan designed for the city by MHS Design. Haberle said an up-to-date parks master plan is a requirement for the city to apply for greenspace grant funds.

"This is a needed piece of the puzzle for us to be able to seek grants from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. We are also going to be looking at whatever city revenues are available and will be talking to JEDCO about a partnership that would allow us to fund outdoor improvements," he said. "The council wouldn't be bound to make the improvements in this document if it is approved, but it gives us a lot of guidance regarding timelines and methods for the improvements that we do make."

The mayor said the parks master plan contains potential plans for each of the city's parks except Nichols Green.

Other agenda items include:

- approval of previous meetings' minutes;
- hear the financial audit for the year ending Sept. 30, 2008, and consider approval;
- a pay request of \$35,372.41 from Duplichain Contractors for the 2007 Texas Community Development Program sewer improvements;
- consider proposal from the North Central Texas Council of Governments to perform the requirements needed to comply with GASB 45;
- an ordinance canceling the May 9 general election;
- a resolution adopting an identity theft prevention program policy in compliance with federal rules;
- the closure of Austin Street from Rusk to Wilson and of Commerce Street from Austin to Nacogdoches from 5:30 p.m. June 12 until 5 p.m. June 13 for Tomato Fest; and
- consider an appointment to the ACCESS board of directors.

The Jacksonville City Council regularly meets at 6 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Norman Activity Center. All meetings of the Jacksonville City Council are open to the public.

