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County budget set; tax rate uncertain

"No" again was the vote Monday by Precinct 4 Commissioner Billy Stiles as the Colorado County Commissioners Court approved the fiscal year 1983 expenditures budget without setting a tax rate. The vote was 3-1 for approval.

The vote, although court probably could decide to amend its action, locks in the amount of tax revenues and funds from other sources the county plans to spend next year. What remains to be done is the setting of a tax rate to raise the approximately \$1.75 million portion of the budget that comes from ad valorem taxes county residents pay. The remaining \$1.25 million the county has estimated as receipts in 1983 comes from such items as license plate sales, federal revenue sharing, etc.

Moments before the commission voted on the budget, the seriousness of the occasion turned to levity as on the surface it appeared the vote might end in a 2-2 tie, with Judge Lester Craneek casting the deciding vote. Commissioner Rafael Veselka kept questioning whether the 1983 expenditures budget, when it can't set the tax rate to raise the money needed.

Commissioner Stiles led several in commission chambers to smile, as all expected his no vote to be the lone dissent. "This might end up differently than I expected," Stiles said.

Veselka's questioning came up when Judge Craneek announced that at 11 a.m. Monday morning the county's property tax valuations appeared to be \$7 million less than the \$677 million figure used to set up the budget. Until the valuations are certified, which Judge Craneek hopes will be by September 27, the tax rate can not be set. Should the valuations decrease drastically, commissioners might decide not to increase the rate significantly above the 27.793 cents per \$100 valuation figure they have been using to date. Instead they could decide to reduce some budget expenditures.

For 1982 taxes, the valuation was \$507 million with a 28.8-cent rate. The valuation is up 33.5 percent.

After the meeting Monday, Stiles indicated budget cuts are precisely what county needs to do. During a public hearing last Thursday evening, after Judge Craneek spent two hours explaining the 1983 budget to the dozen people on hand, each commissioner was asked for his comments. Veselka of precinct 2, Otto Loessin of precinct 1 and Jerome C. Wicke of precinct 3, each agreed with the judge's explanation that more money needs to be spent on county roads.

Stiles explained his no vote with his philosophy that less government is better for the public, and that the United States is in serious danger because of the overpopulation influence of government.

After Monday's hearing he said he felt simply that there are places in the 1983 budget from which funds could and should be cut.

The 1983 budget is a 22 percent increase over the 1982 budget, which was the third of three years in a row where taxes were increased by only three percent.

A third of the budget increase goes to salaries of county employees, which can be increased up to ten percent under the new budget, and another third will go to the road and bridge funds. The remainder will cover increases in the 42 various departments the county supports.

For precinct 4 specifically, the road budget will be \$284,842 for 1983, up 30 percent over 1982. That increase of \$66,000 compares with increases of \$109,316 for precinct 1; \$80,299 for precinct 2; and \$101,238 for precinct 3.

On the average, the precinct road budgets increased about 32 percent.

In 1980, \$146,170 was spent on precinct 4 roads, while in 1981 \$176,081 was spent. Usually, the amount spent is less than that budgeted because of the need to keep reserve funds for unpredictable events, like the need to replace a bridge if it is washed out.

Other budget matters involving various Eagle Lake area copiers receiving money from the county include an increase (from 1982 to 1983) of \$444 to \$4620 for the secretary for Justice of the Peace No. 8, M. M. Jones in Eagle Lake, \$1,150 to \$1,265; Garwood, \$3,300 to \$3,530; and Rock Island, \$800 to \$880; Eagle Lake Winterman Library from \$2,500 to \$2,750; Sheridan Youth Library from \$1,150 to \$1,265; and Veterans Memorial Library in Garwood, \$1,725 to \$1,897.50.

Council to hold line on taxes; valuations up to \$49 million

Apparently there will be little or no increase in taxes this year for the city of Eagle Lake, according to comments made by city councilmen during their regular meeting Tuesday night.

City manager Robert Klockman led council through a worksheet detailing how the city can set its tax rate and remain within state law allowing them to change rates slightly without a public hearing.

Using a mixture of money needed for interest and sinking funds, as well as revenue to be generated for the general fund, the city plans a tax rate of 38.63 cents per hundred dollars valuation. Basically that is less than a 3 percent general fund increase, which is the level state law allows with no public hearing.

Times are tough, Ralph Truly told fellow members of council. "I don't think I would approve anything (tax rate) that would require a public hearing... These are not normal times," he said.

That rate would generate approximately \$175,000 in revenues, compared to \$160,000 last year and about \$140,000 the previous year. While the tax rate was 60 cents per hundred last year on valuations of \$27 million, the lower figure this year is based on \$46.2 million in valuations. City property was re-appraised this year, and no one on council could remember the last time property was re-appraised city wide. Also, \$600,000 in new construction valuation has been added.

A public notice will be published in The Headlight next week concerning the values and rates. Council indicated it would set the rate at its next meeting, scheduled September 28.

Sewer rates also were discussed, as were a new sewer ordinance, civil defense, cable television reception and various other matters.

With the construction of the city's new sewer plant, the federal government requires sewer charges to customers be based on usage. The city now charges residential customers a flat \$3 per month fee. That was increased from \$2.50 in 1980.

Klockman explained a proposed rate of a \$3 minimum fee, for up to 3,000 gallons of water used, then additional charges of 40 cents per each 1,000 gallons used. Councilman Gene Baker questioned such a charge. He said he felt the plant was built at a certain cost, and that all should share in that expense. Klockman said that is the reason for the \$3 minimum charge.

Under the rate formula proposed, \$67,000 in revenue would be raised, just slightly more than expenses. Mayor Elmer Struss asked Klockman to revise the rate schedule to increase revenues by up to 10 percent in the event expenses outpace revenues. Council will take action at a later date.

The sewer ordinance involved requirements of separation of storm and water, and sanitary sewer lines, so that the plant is not treating rain water. No action was taken.

As for cable television reception, council met with J.D. Staats of Yoakum, Texas regional manager for Communications Services, Inc., owners of the Eagle Lake cable franchise granted by city council.

He was asked to attend the meeting because of complaints some city council members had about reception. There were no comments made from the public at the meeting.

Staats explained technical problems the company has with channels 25 and 13. He also listened to problems councilman Roy Dean Van Nort told about reception at his home, and in the homes of several other persons in town.

Staats offered no explanations, although the local manager, Domingo Puente, Jr., told Van Nort that there are no problems with two other homes fed by the same connection which feed Van Nort's house.

In other action, council adopted a resolution of appreciation of the services H. E. Tate has given to the city for serving since 1960 as civil defense director. Council presented him with a plaque, and appointed Tommy Pilkington to replace him. "I hope the man that follows me can build a shelter and not have to use it for the next 22 years," Tate said.

Asked Klockman to investigate what effect the elimination of one of three patrol cars would have on the city police force. The force is down to two cars since the 1978 Ford it was using is now inoperable because of wear and tear. Van Nort also asked the city patrol the downtown area more on foot, especially on Friday afternoon.

Approved a request by the Eagle Lake Lions Club to display on the square a 1982 Capri the club is giving away this year as a fund raiser. The car will be manned by club members selling tickets.

Was told by Klockman that \$1,200 was spent rebuilding a portion of the hydraulic system on the city's old garbage truck. The truck now is back in full operation. The recent breakdown caused a delay in some garbage collection in the city.

Learned that a 1,000 gallon tank and pump will be installed by the city for unleaded gasoline. The cost, under \$1,000, is in the city's budget. It will enable the city to purchase gasoline at bulk rates, rather than purchasing it at a local filling station.

Learned the motor in the city's newest water well again burned out. A replacement motor has been loaned to the city, and a Central Power and Light engineer is investigating the problem.



Rob Johnson powers the ball through a hole in the Hallettsville Brahma defense as other Rice Raider players help move the opposition. Rice lost their second game of the season last Friday, 26-0. See the full story on the back page of this section.

90A near FM 102 may be widened soon

Bids for a proposed project to improve US Highway 90A near Eagle Lake in Colorado County are being accepted by the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation for its monthly highway contract this week.

The present two-lane road near Farm to Market Road Spur 102 has a heavy percentage of truck traffic and numerous commercial driveways. The proposed project would provide four lanes for traffic in that area and a continuous left-turn lane to provide greater safety for local traffic turning at the commercial establishments.

If a low bid is accepted for the project, work is expected to take approximately 75 working days to complete, weather permitting. Traffic will be allowed to move through the project.

Blood drive Saturday Revitalization group to meet Tuesday to talk about goals

The Eagle Lake Ministerial Alliance is sponsoring its semi-annual blood drive this Saturday. The drive will be held at First Presbyterian Church at 106 East State from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. The ministerial alliance hopes to collect about 75 units of blood for the Blood Center in Houston. This Blood Center supplies blood to our Eagle Lake hospital.

Everyone is urged to give blood on Saturday. One unit can be broken down at the Blood Center in such a way that it helps four people. This would mean that if we got 75 units of blood Saturday, we might be able to help save 300 people's lives.

If you have not made an appointment to give blood, please do so by calling your church office, or Grace Lutheran Church at 234-3381. Or, if you have nothing to do Saturday, or find a few free minutes, drop in and give the gift of life.

A meeting for owners of buildings and businesses in Eagle Lake will be held next Tuesday to further discuss the city's development of a revitalization program as discussed this month by more than 50 interested citizens.

Joe Lee McCreary, representing building owners, and Lis Waddell, representing business owners, will meet with the group at 7:30 p.m. next Tuesday in municipal chambers at city hall.

The meeting will center on some early clean-up projects as well as what some of the short-term goals of the project should be.

Letters of invitation will be mailed to those concerned, but the meeting is open for public discussion and information.

Dump site near Rice High School to be watched

The dumping of Houston sewage plant waste practically across from Rice High School prompted school board members Monday night to call for an investigation of its effect on the school.

At the regular meeting of the board of Rice Consolidated Independent School District members, Billy Heffner and Reggie Brisco suggested superintendent Harold King call the Environmental Protection Agency and an attorney to investigate the dump's effects.

King told the board the dump is on the Texuela Ranch, on the north side of U. S. 90A, just west of the high school. There are several dumpsites in the county, he said, explaining that as much as 16,000 tons of the material are hauled out of Houston daily.

"If it is so inert or harmless, they could dump it in Houston," Heffner said. King told the group that in a discussion with an attorney, there is little legal recourse unless it could be proven the dump was a nuisance.

The material is hauled onto the site and dumped, then disked into the soil. Several board members expressed concern over the possibility of the starch they felt could be created.

In other matters, King talked about seating at the various school district stadiums, as well as lighting at the variety football field near the stadium.

The board also talked about the continuing roof problems; about buying a new school bus as the continuing part of bus fleet maintenance; approved bids for butane for the coming cold season; approved the substitute teacher list for 1982-83; discussed problems with the water well at the high school; and considered changes in insurance for the district. They also approved the routine application for federal Chapter I and Chapter II funds.

The discussion about the stadium lights stemmed from a question Heffner had about the poles which are beginning to flake rust. King told the board he talked with the company in Minnesota which manufactured them, and was told that the steel alloy from which they are made is designed to be maintenance free and the flaking was a normal part of the metal's reaction to the environment. The company told King that if there was a question of safety, the company would charge the district about \$1,500 to come to the stadium and inspect the poles, but that it was very unlikely there were problems other than the normal exterior rusting. There was no action taken by the board.

The board also voted to replace home section seating at the Rice football field with aluminum, and use the better lumber to be removed to repair other stadium seating in the district.

King told the board the lumber to be taken off, and some new lumber to be purchased, would be used for maintenance work on Sheridan, Garwood and Eagle Lake stadiums.

The aluminum seating is more expensive than wood replacement seating, but has a much longer life-span. Seating replacement is in the district budget. More than likely it will be after mid-season before the new seating could begin to be installed, however, no schedule for replacement was announced.

As for the high school roof, King told the board an architect recommended the district talk with a roofing consultant, which King did. The roof at the school is beginning to leak seriously.

The board voted to ask the consultant to visit the school and make a recommendation to the board.

That would be at no charge to the board, but if hired, the consultant would recommend what action to take, would prepare specifications for bidding, and see the work through the completion.

While the board has a scheduled bus replacement policy, to insure a safe and sound bus fleet, action was tabled Monday night until information can be gathered on whether a diesel powered bus would better serve the district's economical needs.

Specifications on a new bid came from Modern Fuels, Inc. of Garwood. The only other bid read at the meeting was for 72 cents per gallon from Colorado County Butane of Sheridan.

The butane specification sheet allows the price of the fuel to fluctuate as the dealer's wholesale price fluctuates, but agreed the dealer mark-up would not change.

The board approved a list of 29 persons for substitute teaching positions, and discussed board policy in regards to insurance, before area insurance companies and agents are asked to bid next month on the school district's insurance needs.

A low bid of \$1.25 per gallon of butane was accepted by the board. The October 1.