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Commissioners OK engineering services for two road projects

By JIM HARDIN Herald-Banner

ROCKWALL COUNTY — Agreements to provide \$2.2 million in engineering services for planned road projects on Texas 66 and Farm to Market 552 won unanimous approval this week from Rockwall County commissioners.

Even though both agreements were approved Tuesday without discussion, commissioners have had lengthy discussions at two meetings this month involving engineering services for unfunded road projects.

Another agreement considered during the meeting had a tougher time winning approval. That agreement was with Patrick Baugh to apply for a municipal separate storm sewer permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for a \$9,000 fee.

A vote to table action on the issue was defeated by a 2-3 vote, then a motion to approve the agreement was approved by a 3-2 vote.

On the road project issues, commissioners were advised last week to continue planning road construction projects, even when it appears construction dollars are not available.

“I encourage you to keep advancing your projects for no other reason than to have them ready when money does become available,” Rob Franke, co-chairman of the Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition, told commissioners during their April 20 meeting.

Commissioner David Magness invited Franke and two other transportation officials to speak at the meeting after County Judge Chris Florance suggested at the commissioners’ April 6 meeting the possibility that the county “narrow” its list of planned road projects.

Florance said the county possibly should consider trimming the list of seven planned road projects — which includes the Texas 66 and FM 552 projects — because the state cannot provide funding support as expected when the county’s \$100 million bond program was approved by voters.

Rockwall County has been moving forward to get engineering and advanced planning completed on seven road projects that currently don’t have funding on the advice of its

road consultant, John Polster of Innovative Transportation Solutions Inc.

Magness said last week's meeting was "about an opportunity to look at these projects and what the opportunities are for Rockwall County as we move through those projects."

"I think the reason this has all come about is because I questioned the program last time, trying to be a constructive voice in our economic times when we're struggling," Florance responded. "The \$100 million referendum was predicated on, bottom line, with the county providing a third, TxDOT (Texas Department of Transportation) providing a third and then a third coming from COG (council of governments). ...It didn't give me much encouragement or hope that if we proceeded the way we are with our program that we were ever going to get anything done."

The Texas 66 project involves widening 11.5 miles of the highway in Rockwall and Collin counties. The project will stretch from Texas 205 to Farm to Market 1777. The highway will be widened from two lanes to six lanes. Cost of engineering services will be almost \$1.5 million.

The FM 552 project involves widening 5.3 miles of the highway from Texas 205 to Texas 66. The road will be widened from two to six lanes. Cost of engineering services will be \$776,741.

Commissioners considered action on the agreement with Baugh after meeting in executive session.

Immediately after Florance read the agenda item involving the proposed agreement with Baugh, Commissioner Lorie Grinnan made a motion to table the contract and seek additional candidates to provide the professional services. The motion was seconded by Dennis Bailey.

Grinnan and Bailey voted in favor of the motion to table. The motion was opposed by Florance, Magness and Jerry Wimpee.

Florance then asked if commissioners wanted to "re-address a motion."

After 20 seconds of silence, Wimpee made a motion to approve the agreement. The motion was seconded by Florance.

Before the vote, Florance asked if any commissioners wanted to discuss the motion.

"Yes, given the chain of events and new information, I don't believe it's in the best interest of the county to approve the contract," Grinnan said.

Wimpee, Florance and Magness voted in favor of the motion. Grinnan and Bailey voted, "no."

Grinnan said Wednesday that she made the motion to table action on the agreement because she wanted to see written proposals from other firms or individuals.

Regarding her comment about new information, Grinnan would say only that “after research and review of job references, I believed it was in the best interest for us to continue to seek an additional potential candidate.”

Commissioners voted at their April 12 meeting to hire Baugh to create a county storm water pollution prevention plan. The expense was not exceed \$10,000.

“The ultimate goal is that all the water that returns to the lakes and so forth are clean and free of chemicals,” Magness said at the meeting.

Magness said the plan also will address construction sites, companies that wash their vehicles onsite and water conveyance structures like storm sewer facilities and drainage ditches alongside roads. The plan is mandated by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Because this is a professional services contract, competitive bids were not required from prospects.