

**CALLLED MEETING OF THE
BREWSTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT
FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2009, AT 9:00 A.M.**

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Judge Beard called this meeting to order. Officers present are listed as follows:

VAL CLARK BEARD	COUNTY JUDGE
ASA STONE	COMMISSIONER PCT. 1
KATHY KILLINGSWORTH	COMMISSIONER PCT 2
RUBEN ORTEGA	COMMISSIONER PCT. 3
MATILDE PALLANEZ	COMMISSIONER PCT. 4
CAROL OFENSTEIN	TREASURER
BETTY JO ROONEY	TAX ASSESSOR COLLECTOR
JERRY SOTELLO	J.P., PRECINCT 1
BERTA RIOS MARTINEZ	COUNTY CLERK
JO ANN SALGADO	DISTRICT CLERK
STEVE HOUSTON	COUNTY ATTORNEY

1. 2010 Budget Workshop/ No Action

A. County Budget Officer's comments concerning need for public input in Budget process and challenges in preparing budget/ No action

Judge Beard said this workshop is non-decisional, but rather an informational meeting.

Every year, Commissioners Court goes through the process, with almost zero input from the public. She is planning a press release asking for input as it is the most opportune time for the public to express their opinion about what's working and what is not. She has personally invited several people, although that is not working. Unless "the wheels are off," people are not really interested.

She said anything Commissioners do to get folks to the meetings or to get their constituents to communicate outside of meetings is appreciated.

B. Presentations to Commissioners by County Department Heads regarding 2010 Budget requests/ Discussion with Commissioners Court regarding all aspects of Departmental needs and matters related to budget/ No action

Judge Beard said 2010 is going to be a very, very tight year. When Commissioners Court asks questions or has concerns, it does not mean that

requests are invalid or improper; it means that the County must be more conservative than usual. The County Appraiser is scheduled to appear at the regular meeting Monday to talk about assessed evaluations. Judge Beard said things are leveling off; there are no big individual properties coming onto the tax roll this year.

She also noted that at Monday's meeting, she thinks an extra effort needs to be made to communicate to the public the appraisal process and the process of setting budgets and tax rates.

Many citizens, and even elected officials, do not have a good grasp of those processes.

Judge Beard said her goal is to not increase the tax rate this year. It is low, and she wants to keep it that way.

Judge Beard invited Treasurer Carol Ofenstein to join the discussion as needed.

JERRY SOTELLO, J.P., PCT. 1

He said his budget is completely flat. He is not asking for additional funds for anything. A few weeks ago, he copied the Commissioners a letter asking for help. During his second year in office, he averaged about 1,500 citations to be entered. At the time, that was quite a bit. The average monthly report was about \$6,000-\$7,000. Now, they are averaging a little more than 4,000 per year. He expects close to 5,000 for 2009.

Judge Sotello said a part-time clerk would be very helpful. At present, he has one full-time clerk. He proposed an hourly wage for the part-timer. Treasurer Ofenstein noted that even a part-time receives retirement benefits, as well as vacation and sick leave.

Judge Beard said she does not believe the workload will be sustainable. The increase in citations is due to the increased number of State Troopers in the area. Judge Beard believes they will be needed elsewhere soon as the number of Troopers is a response to Border Security. The Border Patrol is in the process of increasing its presence.

Commissioner Pallanez asked how much of the J.P. fines the County keeps. Treasurer Ofenstein said the County keeps the fines, unless they are TPWD fines, and court costs are sent to the State; court costs are substantial.

Judge Beard asked about the Precinct1 Technology fund. Mr. Sotello said it is workable. His office is being very conservative. He is hopes they are getting close enough to budget for the automated Ticketwriter system which, when a ticket is written by DPS, automatically sends it into the J.P. system.

Currently, Judge Sotello is required to do 20 hours of continuing education. He said he does far more the minimum. He is trying to talk the J.P. Education Committee into bringing some classes to West Texas.

BETTY JO ROONEY, TAX ASSESSOR

Ms. Rooney said her initial request is made on increases in costs, including postage and the cost of paper.

She said she also has a hard time with her education and training budget due to so much travel to Austin. Ector County is trying to sponsor more classes, which is much cheaper.

Her office will now be certified through the State office. She doesn't know if they will have to start over completely with their certification. She hasn't been able to get much information. They officially take over in January, at which time she will have more information.

Ms. Rooney noted that legal advertising in the newspaper is getting very expensive; the state requires big ads.

She is going to talk with the appraisal district about leasing a new copy machine, possibly at a lower rate. She said her computers are aging and she isn't sure how much longer they will last.

The Tax Office is paying for five user licenses for appraisal software, although they are only using three. Ms. Rooney and Mrs. Ofenstein will work with the appraisal district to reduce the amount if possible.

Ms. Rooney said the four employees in her office rotate between vehicle registration and collections so that they continue to understand the process.

BERTA MARTINEZ, COUNTY CLERK

Mrs. Martinez said her office is running very smoothly. She and her two employees are all cross-trained to perform all of the office functions.

She said the Hill Country court software won't print citations; her office is then having to purchase them at a higher cost.

Mrs. Ofenstein said she will visit with the Hill Country vendor to see if they can work on that option.

The Records Management fund has quite a bit of money in it right now, said Mrs. Ofenstein. It is used for training, software, etc.

Her original operating supplies budget was \$1,000, which she would like to double. She would also like to increase her Training and Education budget to \$5,000. She is required to do 20 hours of continuing education, but she, too, has to travel quite far, and generally takes one of her deputies with her.

BERTA MARTINEZ AND BETTY JO ROONEY, ELECTIONS & VOTER REGISTRATION

Judge Beard said there will be a lot to talk about as the County has recently switched from an Elections Administrator to splitting the duties between the Clerk and Tax Assessor offices.

Mrs. Martinez explained that she had hired an Elections Assistant. The two of them began the computer training, but it turned out to be a more advanced course and the State told them it would be better to start at a conference. Mrs. Martinez asked the new hire if she could begin again in August, when a conference

was scheduled. A month later, she filed for unemployment. Mrs. Martinez eventually hired someone else who will travel with her in August for Election School.

Elections require monthly reports to the state and she and the employee will be learning together. The employee will be full-time.

The budget would include the clerk, supplies and copies, postage, publications and notices, election kits, training and travel, remote voting, and repair, maintenance and equipment.

Ms. Rooney said she has requested a total of \$8,750 for operating expenses. All four of her employees have been trained for voter registration.

She is expecting a total of \$2,000 in funds from Chapter 19, with which she plans to buy two new printers. That money can be used for supplies and travel.

JO ANN SALGADO, DISTRICT CLERK

Mrs. Salgado said she has no changes for her budget.

She said her Technology is working. Her computers are a couple of years old, and she thinks they will last another year.

The passport volume has leveled off.

Judge Beard asked about tax suits, and Mrs. Salgado said her office is keeping up.

TOM SANTRY, EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR

Mr. Santry said the North County EMS is asking for a \$500/month increase. The liability and workman's compensation insurance rates have increased.

The Marathon VFD insurance has increased from \$3,700 to \$4,500.

He said he would like to have an emergency exercise this year, and would like something included in the budget for that.

When there are HAZMAT incidents, Mr. Santry said the substances cannot be simply disposed of. They must be sent off to the HAZMAT disposal company in Midland, and disposal has to be made under federal guidelines, which is expensive. Only a licensed company can make the disposal. He said every year for the last three years, there has been a substance disposal, and he thinks it needs to be included in the budget. It can cost from \$500 to \$1,900.

The Code Red system is not in the budget. Judge Beard said it is scheduled for discussion at Monday's regular meeting.

Judge Beard said fire safety signs which Mr. Santry has noted will actually come out of the courthouse budget.

She asked if he has enough of a budget for Volunteer Services, which includes food and drink for firefighters and other emergency workers.

Judge Beard asked about the long-term needs of the VFDs. Mr. Santry said they all have lists.

Commissioner Ortega asked how the pick-up is holding up. Mr. Santry said it's good, although he has asked for new tires in his budget.

Mr. Houston said he has asked for an additional \$2,000 for computers, and that is the only change in his budget.

He has been told that Gov. Perry has added \$87 million to the State budget for additional Border Troopers. Mr. Houston said he was alarmed because his work load has already increased in the same ways as Judges Beard and Sotello. He has asked to be included in any TDCAA meetings concerning the subject. It is his belief that some of that money can also be used for prosecutors.

CAROL OFENSTEIN, TREASURER

Mrs. Ofenstein said she needs additional postage funds. One of the computers in her office may need replacement next year.

She will keep her travel budget at \$5,000. She has to do 40 continuing education hours, 20 as Treasurer and 20 as the Certified Investment Officer.

VAL BEARD, COUNTY JUDGE

Judge Beard said she is asking for an additional \$50 per month for car allowance. She has asked for \$100 more in office supplies, and a slight increase for transportation and conferences.

She believes the two computers in her office are four or more years older, and probably need to be replaced, as does the laptop she uses.

COUNTY COURT

Judge Beard said she has raised Law Library Supervision and Operating Supplies by \$100.

She would like to break court-appointed attorney fees into juvenile, criminal and probate (attorneys ad litem), and up the entire amount by \$750. She explained the requirement to have attorneys ad litem in certain probate matters.

ROAD & BRIDGE, COMMUNITY FACILITIES & NON-DEPARTMENTAL

Commissioner Stone said he feels like each Commissioner should discuss the needs of their Precincts in future workshops.

He has Supt. Frenchie Causey working on the capital equipment budget. Mr. Causey has already said he needs a new haul truck, and would like one more pick-up truck.

Judge Beard said at the next budget workshop, Commissioners should be prepared to discuss their wish lists for next year, and for the two following years.

Commissioners agreed that the County Roads are a priority; seal-coating is important.

Judge Beard said she and Mrs. Ofenstein have gone through the Courthouse budget, and she thinks it is okay.

She asked Conrad Arriola if he learned anything about energy stimulus funds in a conference call this morning.

He said applications will hopefully be sent out in the next two or three weeks. The money has not been divided up yet by the Department of Energy. Once the application is received, the County will need to do a cost analysis about replacing HVAC equipment on energy savings which would benefit the Courthouse.

The courthouse needs to be re-painted next year, said Judge Beard. She said the budget can easily handle it. The parking lot is being re-stripped now.

Commissioners said their Community Facilities budgets look good if they stay the same as last year.

For non-departmental, Mrs. Ofenstein said the health insurance premium is going to up, but just a little bit, and the County will receive a credit similar to the one it got last year.

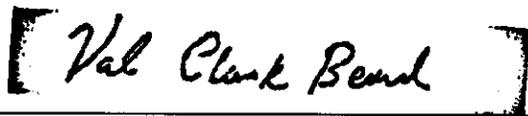
Judge Beard said there is a line item for contract maintenance. But because of the diverse nature of County Government, all maintenance has been ad hoc. She said perhaps this is a good time to look into making a contract with one business or provider which will regularly check the courthouse, jail and all other County buildings so that the process is systematic. Commissioners agreed that it was time to look at this.

Judge Beard said the Commissioners will need to give serious thought to how to budget for the three new County buildings, including utilities, maintenance, supplies and custodial services.

The new buildings are already included with the County's insurance.

C. General Discussion concerning all aspects of County finances and 2010 Budget/ No action

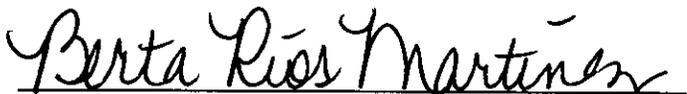
Commissioner Ortega made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Commissioner Stone, and passed unanimously.



VAL CLARK BEARD, COUNTY JUDGE

ATTEST:

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BERTA RIOS MARTINEZ, COUNTY CLERK