

**CALLED MEETING OF THE
BREWSTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT
THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2013, AT 1:30 P.M.**

**VAL CLARK BEARD
ASA STONE
KATHY KILLINGSWORTH
RUBEN ORTEGA
MIKE PALLANEZ
BERTA MARTINEZ
BETTY JO ROONEY
CAROL OFENSTEIN**

**COUNTY JUDGE
COMMISSIONER PCT. 1
COMMISSIONER PCT. 2
COMMISSIONER PCT. 3
COMMISSIONER PCT. 4
COUNTY CLERK
TAX ASSESSOR
COUNTY TREASURER**

To discuss and take action as appropriate on the following:

- 1. 2014 Budget Workshop / Discussion concerning all aspects of County revenue/expenditures & current finances and upcoming financial needs for all County departments and other entities funded by the County / Discussion concerning setting of tax rate / Scheduling issues related to adoption of Budget and setting Tax Rate / County Department Head's presentations***

Judge Beard said this is a major budget workshop.

She said Commissioners will be doing a mark-up of the budget draft before them.

Before that, she said Commissioners will be hearing from Department Heads.

Betty Jo Rooney, Tax Office

Ms. Rooney said there isn't much change. However, the software provider is increasing the fee by 10 percent this year. This is for the software which is shared by the Tax Office and the Appraisal District.

She noted that as there are two abstract offices in Brewster County now, the revenue from tax certificates has doubled.

So far, revenue from passports has been unpredictable.

Commissioner Killingsworth asked if there is the ability to do a long-term contract with the software company in order to lock in a fee.

Ms. Rooney noted that our contract is with the Appraisal District, not the software company.

Judge Beard said she and Ms. Rooney discussed tax collection contracts a couple of days ago, when Ms. Rooney said that, at least for the last 10 years, there has not been a rate increase. She expects contracts to go out the first part of September.

Judge Beard said if the rate is going to increase, they need as much lead time as possible.

Ms. Rooney said she thinks it is reasonable to increase the rate. Some entities require more assistance than others.

Commissioner Killingsworth suggested “phasing in” the increase.

Ms. Rooney and Judge Beard agreed that the contracts may already be too low now, when compared to expenses.

Judge Beard asked Ms. Rooney to work on a plan.

Ms. Rooney said the Voter Registration budget is good. She has Chapter 19 funds from the State that need to be spent by Aug. 31.

Carol Ofenstein, Treasurer

Mrs. Ofenstein said the only thing she has increased is equipment repair and maintenance. She said she thinks she is going to need two new computers.

She would like to raise one position in her office from \$11/hour to \$12/hour.

Judge Beard said an increase like that needs to be coupled with more responsibility. The position Mrs. Ofenstein is referring to will be picking up more duties soon, so that should cover the increase. Commissioners concurred.

Berta Martinez, County Clerk

Mrs. Martinez noted that her employees have been in her office for 17 years.

She said one employee, in particular, has taken on many, many new responsibilities over the years. Right now, she is making \$16.01/hour. She would like to try to get her to \$18/hour.

Judge Beard said we’re in a frustrating situation because we want our employees to know how much that we appreciate them, but we’re working right up against the revenues just to cover the insurance premiums. She said we will do everything we can, but it may not be much.

Mrs. Martinez said that high turn-out elections will be held in 2014.

She did not receive a letter about elections from the Democratic Party Chair which was given to Commissioners, although she was made aware of it. She said the letter was upsetting and inaccurate.

Mrs. Martinez contacted the Secretary of State to find out about her responsibilities during the Primary Election. She was told that the parties can cover those costs, and the responsibilities, i.e. she is not required to conduct the Primary for the parties. She did explain that she is required to conduct early voting for the Primaries.

She will be present to answer questions, as is required.

Judge Beard discussed some of the issues in the past, and said there were many misrepresentations in the letter referenced above. She said no election will ever be perfect, whether it is in Travis County or here; the best that can be done with available resources is the goal.

Jo Ann Salgado, District Clerk

Mrs. Salgado said her budget is flat compared to last year.

However, she said the Chief Deputy is going to be graduating in December, and she said she would like to know if his degree will earn him a pay increase.

She would also like to increase the part-time employee budget.

Judge Beard said she has already increased the part-time budget.

She agreed that the Chief Deputy is deserving, but repeated her advice about struggling just to meet the cost of the insurance premiums for employee.

Judge Beard asked Mrs. Salgado if her office still needs help catching up with delinquent tax cases. Mrs. Salgado said she believes they are caught up.

Judge Roy Ferguson, District Judge

Judge Ferguson said he is very grateful for the detail and intensity which is used for the budget review.

Judge Ferguson said he is in need of one new computer and a printer.

Former Judge DeHart had a subscription to legal books which Judge Ferguson is using online at a cost of \$49/month. He anticipates the library expense will decrease by about \$600. He said he would then put that toward a higher education and training budget.

Judge Ferguson reviewed the employees of the Court.

The Court Reporter has purchased new equipment on her own, received additional training and is working longer hours than in the past. Judge Ferguson has asked for a six percent pay increase for that position. Commissioners and Judge Ferguson talked about the County's very tight budget for 2014.

Ronny Dodson, Sheriff

Sheriff Dodson said he is asking for an additional \$5,000 for fuel.

He said he is trying to increase the licensing budget over time to prepare for the loss of grant funding to pay for CopSync.

If at all possible, Sheriff Dodson would like to provide someone to assist the deputies in South County, at least on a part-time basis.

Sheriff Dodson can make some purchases, such as uniforms, from the Asset Forfeiture account. With that in mind, he doesn't mind if the budget is adjusted to allow for an increase in other line items.

Sheriff Dodson moved on to the Jail budget.

The prisoner board is the biggest priority. Commissioners have already discussed privatizing the meals, and Judge Beard is currently working on the RFP process.

Sheriff Dodson said they are using someone new for medical services at the jail.

The utilities budget is currently running way over, and we need to figure out this issue; Commissioners need to know why utilities are so high.

There appear to be some drainage issues (clogged HVAC drain lines and gutters) which are causing some leaks in the Sheriff's Office.

Judge Beard said that the draft budget before the Commissioners comes from a meeting which was held Friday with the Judge, Treasurer Ofenstein and her Deputy, and Commissioner Killingsworth. It includes a two percent pay roll increase.

The draft originally began with the purchase of three pick-ups, two for Road & Bridge and another for Ag Extension. Frenchie Causey said he can defer the purchase of one truck, and Jeff Davis County will cover half the cost of the Ag Extension truck.

Judge Beard asked Commissioners to comment on the suggested tax rate.

The suggested rate is an 8 percent increase.

Commissioner Killingsworth said she wants to make sure a large debt payment due in February is covered without having to move money from the General Fund.

The Appraisal District rent has been slightly increased.

Commissioners reviewed each departmental budget.

They discussed Professional Services and a stipend for someone to oversee CJIS reporting.

Also discussed was the split from Alpine Public Library services in Marathon. As Marathon is working to creating its own Library service, the money should be split accordingly.

The Emergency Management budget is basically flat.

There are some legal issues which need to be reviewed as concerns the ambulance contract.

The law library budget is being steadily decreased with the use of online service.

Commissioners discussed an increase for the court reporter. Judge Beard said she would like to speak to counsel. More information is needed on this item.

Judge Beard noted a drop in the J.P. revenues due to fewer cases being filed in his court.

Commissioners discussed getting a better rate for the phone lines at the Marathon Justice Center.

Judge Beard said she's not received a budget request from the District Attorney's office, so it has been put in to reflect a two percent salary increase, plus or minus. She has no details about what proportion of this budget is allocated to salaries.

Judge Beard said there is nothing extraordinary about the County Attorney's Office. Training and Education has been increased slightly.

Commissioners discussed a possible 10 percent increase on tax contracts this year, with another 10 percent increase next year.

The Precinct 3 Constable is not yet certified, according to Commissioner Ortega.

Commissioner Killingsworth suggested finding a way to pay for the Ag Extension truck other than using the 2014 budget as doing so would cancel out any other increases. She suggested using carryover from this year.

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

VAL CLARK BEARD, COUNTY JUDGE

ATTEST:

BERTA RIOS- MARTINEZ, COUNTY CLERK