

Thursday, July 15, 1999 7:00 p.m.

Special Session, Commissioners' Court

District Courtroom

Members of the Court Present:

Jack Leath	County Judge
Keith Clark	Commissioner Pct. #1
Lynn Smith	Commissioner Pct. #2
Doyle Dickerson	Commissioner Pct. #3
Gene Nethery	Commissioner Pct. #4
Janice McDaniel	County Clerk

Judge Leath called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Agenda item #1-Public Hearing on Visitors Information Center

Judge Leath said the reason for this public meeting is for the Court to hear remarks and recommendations from the public on the proposed visitor information center. The proposed site is on highway 21 on National Forest Service land shortly before the Pendleton Bridge on the North side of the road. The proposal is for the County to assume the responsibility of constructing this building using 80 percent grant money that is available through TXDOT. This has not been approved. We have to make a bid for this grant. The application has to be in by August 9. This public meeting is one of the things required to get the grant. He said an agenda was prepared giving an outline of who will speak. Afterwards the floor will be open for questions and comments. See attached copy of agenda.

Blain Owens, Chair of the Economic Development Committee with the Chamber of Commerce, gave an overview of the program with which we will be operating to finance this project. The ISTEA grant, Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, program was started in 1991. Later the program was expanded and called TEA-21. Tourist information centers came under this. Texas has been proportioned approximately 128 million dollars to be spent on the enhancement projects of the type we have been talking about. Some of the 20 percent that the County is responsible for can be in in-kind services, such as site work using County equipment. Some can be donations from businesses.

Larry Potts, District Forest Ranger with the U. S. Forest Service, said the Forest Service is greatly interested in how the public feels about this project. If

this project is accepted by TXDOT, the Forest Service would give the County a long term lease agreement. It would be probably a minimum of 20 years. This would not give the County ownership of the land. The Forest Service plans to relocate in that general area sometime in the future. We could possible make our senior citizens program available at no cost to the County. If we do locate there, we could help with the maintenance cost.

Malcom L. McKinley with the firm of Goodwin-Lassiter, said part of the requirements of the grant is to show preliminary floor plans, elevation and site plans. He showed a drawing that they propose the building to look like and gave details on how they came about with their ideas.

Commissioner Nethery said we are here tonight to hear from the people. He said he is speaking to the people at this time as a member of the Chamber of Commerce, not as a Commissioner. He said Mr. Potts first brought this to his attention. This project has 2 cost elements. First is the building of the facility. We must have a good set of numbers because that is what we will get if we receive the grant. He said we are not far enough into the project to know what the construction cost will be. Jay Chance, a local business contractor, has offered his help. Second is the operation and maintenance of the facility for long term. Commissioner Nethery said his estimated cost for yearly operation and maintenance is \$62,500.00.

Loretta Sterle, chairperson of the Chamber of Commerce, gave some figures of how the Louisiana Tourist Information Center has been used, visitors asking directions, rest stop and etc. She said we could do some of the same things that they have done. Several of the marinas and business owners were contacted and only one negative response was given.

Leon Addicks gave comments about the center and is in favor of this project.

Mr. Sidney Bishop is in favor of the project and wanted to let the Court know that he has some land in the area that is for sale.

Mark Hanlon said that if the fish were biting, people would come. If the fish are not biting, the people will not come. We do not need such a building.

Another gentleman in the audience said that for every bass fisherman that comes into town, he has a wife, daughter or son.

Jerry Cowgill said he has stopped at several different information centers and it not just for fishermen. We need to think about the whole community and not just 1 individual. He is in favor of the center.

Maggie Hauser said the subject of insurance and liabilities has not even been talked about. We need to clean up the town and get businesses in here. Also when the census is completed in the year 2000, we may not be able to collect the hotel/motel tax.

Linda Mier said she believes a tourist information center would put Sabine County on the map.

Evelyn Kilgore said she has a real estate business at the intersection of highway 21 and 87 in Milam. She said she feels she is currently the visitor information center in Milam. She puts information from her business in the information center located on the Louisiana side of the Pendleton Bridge and she gets calls from people all over.

Rodney Bishop said the Chamber of Commerce sign is located on his property and he has a lot of people that stop for information. Wherever it is built, it will be an asset.

Bob Brothers said he takes brochures to the Louisiana tourist information center.

Mrs. Bob Brothers said we have talked a lot tonight about why we need a tourist information center. We need to talk about history. This part of East Texas has been overlooked. We do need to continue working on downtown, but let's share our history.

Charles English asked to what extent is other tourist organizations in support of this project.

Mr. Blain Owens said none. It will be our responsibility.

Elvis Stone said information is what we are trying to serve here whether on highway 21 or somewhere else.

Judge Leath said questions that need to be asked are how the County's portion can be funded, how the maintenance can be funded. The hotel/motel tax does not bring in that kind of money and if all the money were given to this project, there would not be any for anything else. According to the law, after the year 2000, any County bordering Toledo Bend Reservoir with a population over 10,000 can not charge the hotel/motel tax. Our population will probably go over 10,000 when the 2000 census is done.

Betty from Alpine Marina asked where the money will come from if couldn't collect the hotel/motel tax.

Commissioner Smith said he does not see why we would need this kind of a facility to distribute information. Maybe the Forest Service wants to build a nice facility and allow a room for us.

Commissioner Nethery said he feels in his heart that this is a step in the right direction.

Marjorie Williams asked where the money is going to come from after this is built. We are a poor County.

Harry Johnson said most everyone has said it will bring in more business and that will help.

There were no more questions or comments.

Judge Leath declared the meeting adjourned.

<u>Jack Leath</u>	COUNTY JUDGE
<u>Keith G. Clark</u>	COMMISSIONER PCT. #1
<u>Ann Smith</u>	COMMISSIONER PCT. #2
<u>Douglas Dickerson</u>	COMMISSIONER PCT. #3
<u>R. Grotzky</u>	COMMISSIONER PCT. #4

ATTEST:

Janice McDaniel COUNTY CLERK

The State Of Texas
County Of Sabine

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THESE DOCUMENTS WERE FILED AND
DULY RECORDED IN THE COMMISSIONER COURT MINUTES OF SABINE
COUNTY, TEXAS.



VOL. F PAGE 485
JANICE M. DANIEL COUNTY CLERK
BY Louise Clark
Deputy

vol FF Pg 488