

Special Session, Commissioners' Court

Tuesday, October 30, 2001 8:30 a.m.

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

Members of the EMS Committee present:

Edith McCauley- Sabine County Hospital Administrator
Don Iles - Hemphill City Manager
John Booker - Mayor of Pineland

D. B. Chance with Hemphill Vol. Fire Dept. and Eddie Ferrell is also present in Court.

Commissioner Nethery is a member of this Committee and is acting in that capacity at this meeting. He will abstain from voting on any motions.

Judge Leath called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

Agenda item #1-Take Action on Funding of Sabine County E M S

Judge Leath said this was discussed at the last Court meeting and we have talked with the EMS Committee and today we are coming back with a possible solution.

Judge Leath asked Commissioner Nethery to give the Court the results of their latest meeting.

Commissioner Nethery said the first issue the Committee would like to deal with is the long term issue and then the short term. He said they believe the only solution for the long term financing is to create an Emergency Medical Services District. We recommend that it be patterned after the one that San Jacinto County created that includes the Volunteer Fire Departments. The Committee recommends that steps be taken to get this started. Commissioners' Court would be responsible for appointing an interim Board of Directors. That Board would actually call for an election. The EMS District would have taxing authority and he said it is his understanding that a tax of up to 10 cents can be charged. The

Committee recommends that 8 cents goes to the EMS District and 2 cents to the Volunteer Fire Departments. They have calculated that approximately (\$65,000) 65 thousand dollars would go to the Fire Departments and (\$265,000) 265 thousand dollars for the EMS District. He said that the cash flow and money received from subscriptions is not going to cover the cost of financing an EM Service. He said this is their recommendation.

Commissioner Smith said he didn't have any questions but has comments. He said this would have to be approved by the voters and he is opposed to creating another taxing entity. This is probably going to jeopardize the Water District that we have been already working on. We have a Hospital District with taxing authority and when it was created by in about 1979, the people were promised at that time that the hospital would have the ambulance within its jurisdiction.

Edith McCauley asked Commissioner Smith where it was stated that the hospital would have the ambulance service. It is not in the bill that created the District.

Commissioner Smith said it was part of the selling to the people of the County. He said he does not know where it is in writing, maybe in the archives of the Sabine County Reporter.

Mrs. McCauley said she has everything in a binder that was printed in the Reporter since 1978 and she will pull it out when she gets back to the Hospital. She said she was at all the meetings and she doesn't recall that being stated but it has been a twenty something years and she may have just forgotten.

Commissioner Smith said he specially remember that the people were promised the ambulance service would go along with the hospital and this would allow the Starr's to get out of the ambulance service. The Starr's said that if the Hospital District was not formed, they were going to get out of the ambulance service. The Hospital District was passed and formed and the Starr's still got out of the ambulance service and the Hospital did not have the ambulance service either. That is when private citizens tried the ambulance service.

D. B. Chance said the County purchased an ambulance and Squeaky Starr ran it for the County for a while. He said all he knows is that it belonged to the County. He did not know if it fell under the Hospital District or the County. Later on a man and his wife operated the first personal ambulance service after the Starr family quit.

701 Pg 749

Commissioner Smith said that the people that are paying the ad valorem tax is loaded already and there are too many people getting a free ride. He is not in favor of putting another tax on the ad valorem.

Commissioner Nethery said that originally a surcharge on electric meters was thought to be the most fair way to help finance the ambulance service. This was checked into and found that we could not do it without some legislature being passed. We have found out that Deep East Texas Electric Coop is against this and will fight it if we try to get legislature introduced. Representative Christian is therefore not willing to carry the legislation for it. Every member of the Committee believes that we have to provide ambulance service to our people in our County. There are a bunch of reasons why but one is that really comes to mind is that we are a County of elderly citizens.

Don Iles said there is no other way to pay for the ambulance service except a Taxing District. We have tried the voluntary bases with the subscriptions to generate the \$250,000 and the citizens will not participate. The money has to come from somewhere. He said in talking with D. B., we may not have to tax the full 10 cents. The Fire Departments may not wish to participate in the Emergency Services District. They might would lose grant money and voluntary contributions if they participate. Whichever way we go, whether we close our ambulance service and have to subsidize a private company to provide ambulance service, we will be spending about the same amount of money. If we pay a company, then the money spent would not stay in the County and we would not have control. No one is doubting the quality of service we are providing right now. He said he believes the best way is to do it in house and keep control.

Commissioner Smith said there are not any of the Hospital Board members present. He asked if anyone could tell him why the Hospital Board just flat refuses to take the ambulance service.

Edith McCauley said because the hospital does not have the money just like everybody else. We would have to raise taxes.

Commissioner Smith said should that not be the umbrella that the ambulance service is under?

Mrs. McCauley said she does not have that authority. The Board is the one that makes that decision. The hospital can not accumulate more debt. We are

putting more and more on the books now because of people not paying their bills. The hospital is doing their part.

Commissioner Smith said he realizes that the hospital is helping, but from the beginning, he has said that the ambulance service being under the jurisdiction of the Commissioners' Court makes as much sense as our gradall being under the umbrella of the hospital. Even if it is going to cost us more money, why create a new District.

Mrs. McCauley said he would have to present this to the Hospital Board. The Board voted not to accept the ambulance and to forego the \$25,000 that the County was going to pay the hospital to manage the ambulance service.

Commissioner Nethery said he thinks the Hospital District is limited on the amount of tax they can impose just like an Emergency Services District would be.

Mrs. McCauley said she does not think there is a limit but there is a roll back rate.

John Booker said the property owners are going to have to foot the bill for the ambulance service. Is the Commissioners' Court really committed to funding an EMS service?

Judge Leath said he does not think we have any legal obligation for County Government to furnish an ambulance service. Many Counties do not have an ambulance service except on a volunteer bases. At the present time we are using taxpayers money to fund it without their permission. If we put it to the voters, at least they will have a say. If the voters vote against an E S District, he said he does not know another way to go.

Commissioner Smith said we already have two taxing authorities. It should be either under the hospital or under the County and not create another taxing entity. We should be helping the hospital instead of the hospital helping us.

Mr. Booker said the County could raise the County tax 10 cents and see if the voters would accept it or vote for a roll back.

Commissioner Smith said the County only got into the ambulance service after the hospital refused to do it. He said he is very disappointed that the people did not subscribe as we thought they would. The only reason he can think of is that maybe the people are thinking just let the County do it.

Mr. Iles asked Commissioner Smith if he is not for the Commissioners' Court raising taxes to fund the ambulance service?

Commissioner Smith said he would have to look at the hospital's financial records before saying a 10 cent increase.

Commissioner Clark said it sounds like everybody thinks the ES District is going to pass. What about now?

Judge Leath said we will discuss the short term after we get some kind of resolution for the long term.

Commissioner Dickerson said it is a service we need. The money has to come from somewhere but let the people decide.

Eddy Ferrell asked what would be wrong with letting a free entity handle the EMS?

Commissioner Nethery said that when Champion gave the County notice that they were taking their option to get out of the EMS contract with the County. At that time, Judge Leath appointed an EMS Committee. The Committee then went out and asked other ambulance service companies for proposals. The best proposal was from Gold Star and they wanted \$22,500 a month from the County.

Commissioner Clark moved to start the process to create an ES District. He withdrew his motion to allow for further investigation.

Commissioner Clark moved to ask the EMS Committee to solicit proposals from private EMS companies. Commissioner Dickerson seconded. Commissioner Nethery abstained. Commissioners Clark, Smith and Dickerson and Judge Leath voted for the motion. Motion carried.

Commissioner Dickerson moved to request the Hospital District to assume the EMS responsibility. Commissioner Clark seconded. Commissioner Nethery abstained. Commissioners Clark, Smith and Dickerson and Judge Leath voted for the motion. Motion carried.

Commissioner Nethery said for the short term, we have about \$13,500 in the bank at this time so we can meet payroll next week. We still have \$25,000 credit at the bank. The Forest Service money is supposed to be coming in the middle of November and \$65,000 is to be used on ambulance service. We are operating at a minimum of service right now and the medical community says if we cut services all together, we will be putting the people in the County at risk. He said the Committee is asking that we keep operating the way we are for now.

Judge Leath said it is a day to day situation. In 2 weeks we have to meet payroll again. If the cash flow keeps coming in we can continue to operate as we

are now. If the cash flow is not enough, we can cut back to 1 ambulance or get out of the EMS business. If we cut back though, we will have to contact all the subscribers. We will become a 911 service only.

It was decided by the Court to continue operating as we are now.

Commissioner Clark moved to adjourn. Commissioner Smith seconded.

Meeting adjourned.

John Latta COUNTY JUDGE

Keith Clark COMMISSIONER PCT. #1

Lynn Smith COMMISSIONER PCT. #2

Doyle Dickerson COMMISSIONER PCT. #3

R. Gentry 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. 28 PAGE 748

JANICE McDaniel COUNTY CLERK

BY *Reine Clark*
Deputy



Vol 28 Pg 753