

Bandera County Courier

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Commissioners send controversial boat downriver

By Carolyn B. Edwards BCC

Bandera County Commissioners Court voted to transfer ownership of a fishing-rescue boat to the Medina Lake Volunteer Fire Department at a special meeting held Tuesday, August 23.

Bandera County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Richard Smith had asked the court to consider the donation of the boat to the Lakehills' nonprofit organization to use for fire suppression.

The 2003 Sea Fox boat and accessories, including a trailer, valued by investigators at around \$17,000, had long been the focus of felony charges brought against former Sheriff Weldon Tucker.

Tucker had accepted the boat as a gift to the county from San Antonio bail bondsman Albert Saenz in 2007.

Tucker said the boat was to be used for search and rescue efforts on Medina Lake. However, the ex-sheriff kept the boat on property near Tarpley for two years and allegedly used it for his own personal pleasure.

Title on the boat was transferred to Bandera County only after questions were raised about the ownership and usage of the boat.

After pleading guilty to felony abuse of official capacity, Tucker turned in his badge and resigned from office.

Representatives of the MLVFD present at Tuesday's meeting thanked the commissioners for the gift and promised to outfit the boat with a pump for fire-fighting purposes.

"I'm so glad to be shed of it," said Smith. "It's been a thorn in our side."

SUBHEAD CVB budget

Commissioners also approved the budget of the Bandera County Convention and Visitors Bureau and renewed their contract. County Judge Richard Evans reminded BCCVB Director Patricia Moore to turn in quarterly reports to commissioners court. The reports, which apparently have not been turned in with any regularity in the past, are required in the contract with the county.

Budget amendments

County Auditor Christina Moeller presented the court with six budget line item transfers for consideration. County Judge Richard Evans expressed his chagrin about the items.

He wondered why they hadn't been included in recent budget workshops. Evans indicated that he thought some of the items looked like "federal budget tactics" where someone sees money left in their budget at the end of the fiscal year and thinks they'd better spend it or their budget will be cut next year.

"We don't operate that way," he said. Since the court just completed work on the 2012 budget, "Anything we do today is going to have to come off of what we have to spend next year," Evans concluded.

The first line item request came from Road and Bridge to fund the purchase of a new welder. "Our welder was under water in a flood," said John Andrade, road superintendent. "We refurbished it, but it's now held together with straps." Andrade said he should have included it in the 2012 budget for his department, but had hoped it would last a little longer. He said problems with the welder's operation have increased and "someone could get shocked." Apparently, the welder is being held together with straps.

Tax Assessor Collector Mae Vion Meyer requested the funds for a new security camera system for her newly renovated offices. The new system would include audio as well as visual recording. The old system, Meyer proposed, would be re-installed at the Medina Annex. Meyer said that having audio would be a definite benefit in recording incidents involving irate taxpayers and voters that come into her office.

Chief Deputy Smith requested a transfer of funds to purchase a new antennae on the BCSO's

communication tower. "Our antennae is 18 years old and it's leaning over," said Smith. "We've had to deal with weak or no signal in Lakehills and Vanderpool."

Bandera County EMS, Rural Addressing and the Fire Marshal's office all requested funds to purchase communications tablets for their offices. The tablets are compact, lightweight personal computers.

Fire Marshal John Stith said the tablets are the norm for state emergency services. "In the event of a large scale incident, [having the tablets] would free up resources," he said.

EMS Director Cindy Martin explained that the tablets could be used to enter data and pull up maps during emergencies. "I think it would enhance our systems."

Stith added that "we can do [our jobs] without them, but they would make our jobs more effective.

Martin said that presently she carries her personal laptop on emergency calls.

After the presentations, a long silence fell upon the court. Evans suggested a short break, and upon return to session, Commissioner Bobby Harris moved to approve all of the line item transfers. "It's \$12,000. I see it as a safety issue. We can pay \$12,000 [for these items] now or pay \$120,000 defending ourselves in a lawsuit."

The court voted unanimously to approve all of the line item requests.

Other business

In other business the court:

- Approved a request by Martin to apply for a TEEEX grant to fund a paramedic class;
- Accepted a gift of \$100 from Shoe Biz for the BCSO's DARE program;
- Voted not to renew a contract with Waste Management for servicing the county's compactor stations, but to solicit RFPs for furnishing solid waste equipment;
- Extended the contract term until Oct. 1, 2013 in a Memorandum of Understanding with Indigent Health Care Solutions;
- Re-appointed John Andrade as County Road Superintendent and approved the renewal of his bond;
- Approved a tax rate of .6769 (the same as last year) and set a schedule for public hearings on the rate.