

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PLANNING SESSION**

October 22, 2020

4:00 PM

Meeting Room, Harris County Library
(Limited Seating & Teleconference)

Commissioners Present: Becky Langston, Susan Andrews, Rob Grant, Harry Lange, Andrew Zuerner. Staff Present (in person): Randy Dowling, County Manager; Nancy McMichael, County Clerk. Staff Present (via telephone): Russell Britt, County Attorney.

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Langston called the meeting to order.

Purchasing Policy. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that the County's purchasing policy needs to be updated and suggested changing the limit for no quotes from \$1,000 to \$5,000, for oral quotes from between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to \$5,000 and \$25,000, for written quotes from between \$5,000 and \$15,000 to \$25,000 and \$50,000, for sealed bids from \$15,000 to \$50,000, and for emergency purchases from \$25,000 to \$50,000. Following discussion, consensus was to proceed with drafting a new purchasing policy.

Hamilton Square. Commissioner Grant said that the ownership of Hamilton Square has been questionable; that it may be the County or the City of Hamilton; that he wants to make sure the square is preserved for historical purposes, whether it's County or City; that according to public, it's County and other records indicate the City. Discussion included that Chairman Langston said if the City owns the square she is not in favor of the County taking ownership; that if the County were to take ownership, an IGA would be entered into to allow Hamilton to continue doing what they have been doing on or with the square; that preserving the property is the objective, whether by the City or the County. Following discussion, consensus was for Mrs. McMichael to contact the Clerk of Superior Court regarding deed records to determine ownership.

Courthouse Security Fencing & Awning. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that Gil McBride, Superior Court Judge, has requested that the parking lot of the Courthouse be secured in a manner to provide protection for judges; that the Sheriff also requested something similar a couple of years ago; that the Sheriff obtained estimates, which included the use of chain link fence and barbed wire; that he would prefer, if this is approved, to have architectural steel fencing; that the cost estimate for the fencing is between \$100,000 and \$150,000; that 2WR, an architectural firm, has estimated the covered walkway, which would extend from the Courthouse to the gazebo, would be an architectural design aesthetically blending with the Courthouse, will be approximately \$24,000 to design and about \$125,000 to construct. Discussion included the awning is not warranted at this time; and that a better use of funding would be for a deputy to escort the Judges to and from their vehicles. Following discussion, consensus was for a letter to be written to Judge McBride regarding the security fencing and awning being unwarranted and suggest that a deputy be used for escorting purposes.

Whitesville Street Property. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said the County owns 10 acres on Whitesville Street, which formerly housed the Northwest Harris VFD; that there is an IGA with the Board of Education indicating that upon transfer of the property to the County, it could only be used for a volunteer fire department, voting precinct, and radio tower location; that the radio tower has never been constructed; that the property should be cleared and possibly sold; that there is asbestos and lead-based paint that would have to be abated, at an estimated cost of about \$45,000; that demolition could be done by the County at no charge; that it might be worth it to clear the property and sell it; and that there is an interested buyer. Discussion included that the deed would have to be cleared up before the County can do anything regarding the sale of the property. Consensus was to move forward with clearing up the deed, after which the Board can declare the property to be surplus and authorize the sale of same.

Northwest Harris Business Park Fire Station. Commissioner Grant said that having a fire station in the business park might make it more attractive to companies as well as provide needed fire coverage in the northwest section of the County; that he understands conversations took place during the planning of the park to possibly give West Point an acre of property on which to build a fire station; that he suggests the County build the station and lease it through an IGA back to West Point, who would not only man the station but provide all the equipment. Discussion included that Commissioner Grant and Randy Dowling, County Manager, had met with Ed Moon, City Manager, and Mit Smith, Chief of West Point Fire Department; that Mr. Moon and Chief Smith were interested in the proposal; that a proposed IGA has been prepared for same; and that it may need to be referred to as an EMS Station. Following discussion, consensus was to continue conversation with West Point.

Fire District Boundary Issue: Cataula & Antioch. Chairman Langston said that the Board, in the February and July 2020 planning retreats, heard from Antioch and Cataula VFDs regarding a boundary dispute on SR 315 from Mountain Hill Road and Fortson Road to I-185; that as a result of those meetings, the Board asked that the Council of Fire Chiefs make a recommendation regarding the territorial dispute between Cataula and Antioch VFDs and that Jack McClung, Chief of Chiefs, was present to discuss same. Chief McClung said that a committee made of three municipal VFDs met several times regarding the area of dispute; that when the committee was formed Richard McKinney (Chief of Antioch VFD) and Bill Czukor (Assistant Chief of Cataula VFD) both agreed to abide by the Council's decision; that the committee recommended the territory be covered by Cataula VFD; and that the Council unanimously agreed for Cataula to cover the territory. Chairman Langston said the during the Chiefs meeting there was discussion regarding the removal of Antioch's fire truck from the County's EMS Station on Mountain Hill Road; that the truck has been in that location for 22 years; and that she would not like to see the truck moved. Following discussion, consensus was to accept the Chiefs' recommendation for Cataula VFD to cover the territory in question. No consensus was reached regarding Antioch's fire truck in the EMS Station.

Marketing of the County. Chairman Langston said that she is and has been concerned about marketing the County; that Commissioner Lange has done an excellent job in helping to get businesses in the two business parks; that she had a conversation with a representative of a major store chain who said that they would love to have a presence in Harris County, but the number of roof tops do not meet their criteria; and that something needs to be done for an alternate revenue stream so that property taxes won't have to be increased. Commissioner Andrews said that the County needs to hire an individual to do nothing but promote the County and try to attract businesses. Following discussion, consensus was to include the position during preparation of next year's budget.

ADJOURNMENT