

The Bandera PROPHEET

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County commissioners consider purchasing equipment in response to pandemic, hear report on English Crossing bridge replacement

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The Bandera Prophet

Bandera County commissioners approved a resolution authorizing the acceptance of the 2020 CARES Act Grant, and the 2018 and 2020 Election Security Grants, “to help mitigate CoViD-19 health concerns for the voting public.”

If approved, the election grants could be worth up to \$25,000. County Judge Richard Evans said shields will need to be installed on voting equipment, which will cost at least \$10,000.

In a 3-1 vote, commissioners approved the purchase of a new computer for Pct. 1 Justice of the Peace Mike Towers, and two laptops for the county auditor. Towers said due to new videoconferencing needs, the computer he has is inadequate.

“We perhaps have an opportunity to roll it into the CoVID-19 requirements,” Towers said.

The computer is more than eight years old, he said, and has been as upgraded as it can be, according to the county’s IT Department. Towers said all of the justice center training is now being done online via webinars and YouTube videos, and hearings are being conducted via Zoom - all of which is a direct result of the pandemic.

“It’s hard to do interactive online training and video with an eight-year-old machine,” Towers said.

The county may spend up to \$243,000 for pandemic-related expenses through the CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Grant with no match, provided the purchases are made within the 2020 calendar year.

“It appears this would be appropriate,” Evans said. “I think we need to use as much of that money as we can.”

Further, new laptops would enable access to county business in the event of future closures due to flooding or other circumstances. Commissioner Jordan Rutherford said he was concerned about security issues with laptops, specifically payroll.

“I also have concerns about some things being done off site with a laptop,” Evans said. “Some things should not be done off site, and they won’t be.”

The motion to approve the purchase carried with Rutherford opposed.

English Crossing

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) officials told commissioners the low-water bridge at English Crossing has been approved for the state’s Off-System Bridge Program.

The crossing, built in 1980, has a 66.2 percent efficiency rating, which is “pretty good,” an official said. However because the detour route is 50 miles when it washes out, the structure qualifies for rehabilitation. The bridge is often closed for weeks to months at a time after a flood.

Commissioners were tasked to identify other water crossing projects that would meet specifications for the TxDOT program, which provides a total of \$952,000 in funding - the county’s equivalent match is 10 percent.

“It could be one, it could be two, it could be five, it could be 10,” an official said. “As long as the projects qualify.”

The county has three years to complete the projects once accepted. One of the biggest caveats is the projects must begin after approval in order to receive state funding - if the project has already begun, it may not be included.

Evans said the county has been looking at the crossing at Wharton’s Dock.

“Don’t start it yet,” Evans said.

Another major caveat is if TxDOT spends money on architectural design and the county pulls out, the county will be liable for those expenses.

The target date for construction to begin on the English Crossing bridge is January of 2022, and is estimated to take about six months.

“We do what we can to minimize the traffic impact,” a TxDOT representative said.

Commissioner Bruce Elikier was appointed as a liaison with state officials and engineers, who will coordinate with adjacent property owners on right-of-way easements, and determine what will be required to replace the bridge.

“It’s a very good opportunity for the county,” Commissioner Bobby Harris said.