

Court Approves Inmate Healthcare Contract

Pending County-Attorney Review...

The county appears to be one step closer to farming out its inmate-healthcare services following Tuesday morning, November 10, action by commissioners' court.

Commissioners had recently rejected proposals received in the summer and went through another bid process.

Before the submittal deadline passed last week, three proposals were received in County Judge Justin Lewis' office.

Correctional Healthcare Management (CHM) of Colorado, Lake Whitney Medical Center of Whitney and Southern Health Partners (SHP) of Tennessee were vying for the contract.

Following a review, SHP was recommended to be the provider at a cost of \$279,600.

Both SHP and CHM had a cost-pooling model in their contracts, but SHP was more favorable to the county, according to the judge.

With CHM, its contract covered the initial \$50,000 in costs for medical services and half of the costs up to \$90,000.

The catch was that CHM paid for pharmaceutical costs with the \$50,000.

SHP had a \$50,000 cost pool, with the county covering all costs above that figure, but pharmaceuticals were paid separately.

Commissioner Lee Harkins pointed out that the county spent \$100,000 last year on pharmaceuticals for inmates.

Under the SHP proposal, any money not expended from the \$50,000 pool would be refunded to the county.

SHP will provide an LVN or RN 12 hours a day, seven days a week, a psychiatric nurse four hours a week and a doctor two hours a week.

The fact that SHP addressed the mental-health aspect was a plus for Commissioner Danny Bodeker.

Sheriff Jeffrey T. Lyon said that he could support any proposal that brings healthcare costs down and keeps inmates in the county jails rather than on the road visiting medical facilities.

CHM bid of \$275,042.52 was slightly lower than SHP. Lake Whitney bid \$296,000, and there was no cost-pooling measure.

The SHP contract was referred to County Attorney Mark Pratt's office for legal review.

Judge Lewis said that he felt the move would save the county money in the long run, but would probably be a wash up front.

"It is going to save us time and money transporting inmates to the doctor.

"It will also reduce the county's liability and exposure by not having jailers dispense medications and keeping inmates locked up," the judge added.

The county had set a goal to have a healthcare provider in place by Sunday, November 15, but the judge wasn't sure a contract could be finalized by that time.

Votes were cast in the Hill County Appraisal District Board of Directors' election.

The county's 1,239 were divided among candidates John Bowman and David Wolfe.

Since there were an odd number of votes, a flip of a coin gave Bowman 620 votes and Wolfe 619.

The court agreed to accept requests for proposals for the expenditure of hotel/motel funds for the 2010 fiscal year.

Bodeker said that he had a \$49,200 request from White Bluff Resort to promote its facility. Only \$60,000 was budgeted for the year.

The judge noted that most of the revenue collected in the first year of the hotel/motel tax existence was distributed.

"The economy was what it was, and it wasn't good. We spent the money trying to get things going

With collections coming the entire fiscal year, the entire \$60,000 budgeted may not be available for disbursement before the end of the calendar year as suggested by Bodeker.

Proposals are due in the judge's office by 4 p.m. Thursday, December 3. They will be considered at the Tuesday, December 8, court meeting.

A resolution was passed to seek \$75,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.

The money would come in the form of an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Grant.

An interlocal agreement with the Heart of Texas Council of Governments was approved to continue the county's emergency-notification system.

The reverse 9-1-1 system can notify residents of approaching severe weather or other emergencies. The annual participation fee is \$1,683.

Deeds on several lots in the Whitney Independent School District were approved, putting the property back on the tax rolls.

A resolution was passed designating November as Home Care and Hospice Month in the county.

Bids for fuel, other than transport deliveries, will be accepted by the county.

It would allow all departments of the county to purchase fuel through local providers in Hillsboro and across the county.

Closure of a section of HCR 4426 east of Itasca was tabled after an access issue was raised by Commissioner Steven Sulak.

The commissioner recused himself from the discussions at the recommendation of the judge, due to a possible conflict.

Harkins said property owner Chris Harris had indicated keys would be provided to anyone still needing access to the roadway.

(MORE)

Harkins was concerned that he hadn't stipulated the size of gates to be erected on the road.

But Assistant County Attorney David Holmes said that once the road was closed, the county would have no say on the gate size or who could use the road.

Action on closing Sandy Circle Drive in the Whitney area was postponed once again.

Bids will be sought for the sale of surplus filing cabinets and two old safes that were once in the courthouse.

Officials with CareFlite were on hand to present the county with an automated-external defibrillator (AED) and first-aid kit for the courthouse.

CareFlite President and CEO Jim Swartz gave a brief update on his company's first month of operation for Hill County Emergency Services District #2.

The EMS provider answered 128 calls in October. Because the ESD purchased Caring Hearts memberships for its constituents, Swartz estimated that it had saved residents \$53,000 already.

Sulak received permission to trade in a used motor grader on a new motor grader through the state's Buy Board.

Because of overstock, the \$373,000 machine was being sold for \$198,500.

The commissioner's trade of \$34,000 reduced the cost to \$164,500.

Tom Hemrick was introduced as the county's new emergency-management coordinator.

The hot-check report for October totaled \$13,732.46. Of that figure, \$8,700.95 were checks, \$3,015.40 were merchant fees, \$2,011.05 were district-attorney fees and there was a \$5 overpayment.

one column must

Sheriff's Office Units Strike Deer Over Weekend

Two Hill County Sheriff's Department units were damaged over the weekend after striking deer.

Deputy Kevin McCarty must have felt snake bit or was that deer bit since he was the driver in both instances.

The deputy was traveling on Farm Road 310 east of Lake Aquilla when the first deer was struck. That accident occurred at 9:49 p.m. Friday, November 6.

Just over 24 hours later, a deer darted in front of the deputy on Farm Road 933 north of Whitney. It was reported at 12:24 a.m. Sunday, November 8.

Troopers Doug Childs and Richard Medina investigated.