



Jail woes strain county budget

Officials estimate it will cost \$72,000 a month just to house prisoners

By STEVE REAGAN
Staff Writer

Financially speaking, the closure of the Howard County jail could not come at a worse time, officials said. Failure of a smoke evacuation test at the troubled jail Tuesday afternoon led County Sheriff Dale Walker to decide that, effective immediately, no prisoners will be kept overnight at the facility.

According to terms of a temporary agreement with the state jail standards commission, prisoners can be kept up to eight hours in five single occupancy cells and the detoxification cell — the “drunk tank” — can be utilized as well, but all other prisoners must be farmed out to other jails in the area.

And that’s going to cost the county — and its taxpayers — a lot of money, officials said.

Walker estimated that renting bed space from other communities will cost the county in the area of \$72,000 a month — and that does not include related costs, such as transportation, personnel, equipment and medical expenses. Unofficial estimates place total yearly costs for housing inmates elsewhere at more than \$1 million.

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E-waste collection day set for Saturday

Take your computers, cell phones and other electronic items to the designated hangar at the airport between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

By THOMAS JENKINS

Area residents with old video cassette recorders,

computers and other electronics will have the chance to help the environment Saturday, when Keep Big Spring Beautiful and the city of Big Spring team up for the second annual e-waste collection day.

According to Todd Darden, director of public works with the city of Big Spring, the volunteer effort will be targeting

electronic products that have reached the end of their useful lives, such as old computers, VCR players and fax machines.

“It’s one of the fastest-growing segments of waste in this country, and we need to turn our attention toward recycling those items, instead of increasing the burden on our landfills,” said Darden.

Electronic items, Darden said, must be handled differently from other waste items because their components can cause damage to the environment. Those special handling requirements have strained the budgets and resources of waste-disposal personnel throughout the state, he

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Bond project outlined

By STEVE REAGAN

COAHOMA — Having successfully passed a \$13.9 million bond, Coahoma Independent School District trustees began the first steps toward spending the new-found money during a special meeting Thursday night in the administration building board room.

Coahoma ISD voters recently approved the bond to finance construction and renovation projects throughout

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HERALD photo/Steve Reagan
Architectural consultant Allan Wolf, left, talks about the upcoming construction and renovation project at Coahoma Independent School District campuses during a meeting of the CISD school board Thursday. Also shown are Gina McEndree, center, district business manager, and Judy Dobbs, secretary to the superintendent.



Acclaimed musicians to be featured during St. Mary's celebration

By LINDA HILL

Special to the Herald

On Sunday evening, the skirl of bagpipes and sound of drums will mark the beginning of the fifth annual St. Andrew's Day Celebration presented by St. Mary's Episcopal Church.

Although 7:30 p.m. is listed as the official beginning time of the Celebration, the musical festivities will actually begin at 7:05 p.m. in the courtyard with a medley

of Scottish pieces played by the Thorn and Thistle Pipe Band. The Thorn and Thistle Pipe Band is based in Midland/Odessa and consists of six pipers and three drummers.

Immediately following the pipe medley, the prelude music will begin inside the church. Beethoven's “Three Equali” will be played by Rocky Harris, trombone; Ryan Harris, trombone;

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HERALD file photo
Big Spring City Council accepted a bid of \$75,000 Thursday night to purchase the Settles Hotel.

Settles sells for \$75,000

‘Big day in Big Spring,’ Mayor McEwen says

By BILL MCCLELLAN
News Editor

It’s “Settled.” Well, almost. The papers haven’t been signed but the city council has accepted an offer of \$75,000 to sell the landmark hotel that has graced Big Spring’s skyline since the 1930s.

“It’s a big day for Big Spring,” declared Mayor Russ McEwen. “I’m overjoyed. So many people have said ‘Let’s get something going with the Settles Hotel.’ Well, now we are going to be able to do that.”

Former local resident and Big Spring High School graduate Brint Ryan, who resides in the Dallas area, made the offer the purchase the Settles Hotel. He was not present at Thursday’s council meeting, but is expected to make a public statement once the paperwork is signed.

“Mr. Ryan is so excited about seeing this done. He has told me he does not want to do anything that is not first class,” said McEwen, who inferred that the pending sale is only part of positive changes planned for



McEwen

the downtown area.

“The passage of the bond, which allows us to enhance the downtown area with lighting and sidewalks and fix the streets, and now this with the Settles. I really think Big Spring will be a difference place three years from now,” he said.

Last week, Big Spring voters approved a bond issue that calls for improvements in the downtown area, as well as reconstructing Scurry and Main streets.

Ryan’s exact plans have not been disclosed — some of that may depend on what is incurred once an environmental study is completed on the structure. In approving the sale, council members stipulated that monies from the sale would be put in a special fund to enhance the downtown area.

In a night when the mayor recognized the

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JURIED ART COMPETITION

Howard College students are invited to participate in a collegiate juried art competition for placement prizes.

Deadline to enter is Monday, Nov. 27, in the Hall Ceter for the Arts Art Gallery Hallway on campus with name, title of work, media, year completed and contact information.

The show will run from Nov. 30 to Dec. 5. Juror will be Sue Bagwell.

The closing reception will be 5 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5, in the Hall Center for the Arts.

Adjoining music festivities will be held in the Hall Auditorium at 7 p.m. on Dec. 4-5, officials said.

STICKY SITUATION

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (AP) — A sticky situation at a school has come unglued.

Wednesday, police arrested two teenagers who they believe broke into their school last week and put glue in all the door locks.

The teens were charged with burglary and criminal mischief, police spokesman Capt. Tony Rode said. The damage cost McArthur High School nearly \$30,000.

Police and school officials were able to break into most of the classrooms before students arrived, but witnesses said some students were still stranded outside classrooms. Investigators used surveillance video to help catch the pair.

VOTE MISCOUNTS MINOR

There were some irregularities in the vote count during the Nov. 7 general election in Howard County, but officials say they didn’t effect the outcome of any races.

The biggest problem came at the ballot box at Goliad Intermediate, where 18 votes were cast but unaccounted for because of machine error.

The problems, however, fell within acceptable margins of error, Election Administrator Sandra Bloom said.

“You’ll always have mistakes, even if you use paper ballots,” Bloom said. “Even if you hand-count each ballot, someone will miss some votes.”



JAIL

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The sheriff would not put a dollar figure on extra expenses the county will now incur. "I'm not going to tell (commissioners) that I need X number of dollars; that's their decision to make," Walker said. "I'm just going to tell them what our needs are, in terms of personnel, equipment and related costs." The sheriff said a preliminary assessment of needs shows that his department will have to acquire three new transportation vans (at a total cost of between \$48,000 and \$60,000) and an additional eight personnel, which

HERALD photo/Thomas Jenkins
Howard County Sheriff Dale Walker listens for the order to reset the smoke evacuation system at the county jail during a test of the system Wednesday evening.

would cost the county about \$360,000 in salaries and benefits.

Add in related costs such as fuel and medical services for prisoners, and the tab for the jail's closure rises even further.

And this is the worst time of the year for the county to incur additional expenses, officials said.

The months between September, when the old budget year ends, and January, when new tax money starts trickling into county coffers, are traditionally the toughest times of the year, fiscally speaking.

County Auditor Jackie Olson said the county makes ends meet during that time by using money from its "fund balance," about \$2.5 million in revenue earmarked for operating expenses. That money cannot be used for extra jail-related costs without seriously short-changing other county ser-

vices, she noted.

The county has \$800,000 in "rainy day" funds to be used in such emergencies such as these, but that money will not last long under the new situation, Olson said.

"Once that's gone, we're broke," she said. "We can always borrow money, but of course, we'd have to pay that back, with interest."

The cheapest alternative now open to the county is to find a way to get the current jail back up to acceptable standards, and even that will cost a significant amount of money.

"Our main goal ... is getting that thing back up and running," Commissioner Jerry Kilgore said. "And it's probably going to cost us \$250,000 plus to get it into acceptable shape."

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331, ext. 234, or by e-mail at reporter@bigspringherald.com.

CISD

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the district. Thursday night, trustees were given a briefing on the general timeline of the project by architectural consultant Allan Wolf of the Lubbock firm Parkhill, Smith and Cooper.

Superintendent Jerry Johnson said the next step is to actually sit and wait. State law prohibits the actual selling of the bonds until at least 30 days after election results are canvassed.

Once the bonds are sold — probably some time in January — full-scale preparation for the project will begin, Wolf said.

The first steps will be completion of a survey and geotechnical report. Then, PSC engineers will refine and finalize their design drawings, bids will be awarded, contractors assigned and actual construction should begin sometime in May or June, Wolf said.

Among the many projects the bond will finance are:

- High School — In addition to complete replace-

ment of electrical, plumbing and heating and ventilation systems, 20 classrooms will be demolished and replaced, a new library and office complex will be constructed, the band hall and auditorium will be renovated and a new field house will be built.

- Junior High — Complete replacement of electrical, plumbing and heating and ventilation systems are scheduled, as well as work to bring the building into compliance with fire safety and Americans with Disabilities Act require-

ments.

- Elementary — The major work here will be installation of a fire safety sprinkler system and renovation of the electrical system. In addition, the main plumbing line will be replaced and new carpeting — the first for the building since its construction — will be installed.

- Administration building — This structure will be expanded to house the district's technology department, currently housed in the old Primary building. The Primary building will be demol-

ished.

Because the district wants to minimize disruption of instructional time and the use of portable classrooms, the project will be a lengthy one. Wolf estimated Thursday that construction would continue in one form or another until mid to late 2009.

"We originally talked about the work taking about a year to a year and a half," CISD Board President Jody Reid said. "I think most of us are pretty anxious to have this work done as soon as possible. At the same

time, we don't want to get in a rush and make mistakes.

"My fondest wish is that taxpayers will look back on this when it's all finished ... and say it was a great thing for the district," Reid added.

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331, ext. 234, or by e-mail at reporter@bigspringherald.com.

E-WASTE

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added. "Some people aren't aware of how much lead is actually contained in a computer monitor," said Darden. "Also, things like cell phone batteries and other electronic items can contain very hazardous materials, so they need to

be handled differently."

Keep Big Spring Beautiful and the city will set up a collection point Saturday at 1700 Rickabaugh Drive West — building 1107 — from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m.

"Just enter the McMahon Wrinkle Airpark off Highway 80 and turn right," explained Darden. "Then just follow the signs to the first big hangar to the right. If peo-

ple have questions regarding the collection, they can contact the city at 264-2500."

Darden said statistics show more than 1.5 million new computers are bought annually in Texas, with less than 175,000 of the old units being recycled.

"That leaves more than 1.3 million old computers that can be assumed to be either stored or sent to

landfills every year (in the state)," Darden said. "That's a lot."

People disposing of their old computers are urged to either remove or destroy the hard drives before turning the units over for collection.

"We will ask people to sign a paper releasing us from liability in case they've left sensitive information on their hard drives," Darden said.

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Jesse Reed, Jr., 69, died Thursday. Funeral Services will be at 11:00 AM Saturday at Mt. Bethel Baptist Church with burial at Trinity Memorial Park.
William "Willie" Hull, 74, died Tuesday. Graveside Services will be at 4:00 PM Saturday at the Garden City Cemetery. The family will receive friends from 7:00 until 8:30 PM Friday at Myers & Smith Funeral Home.

SETTLES

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Coach Randy Britton and the Big Spring High School cross country team on its Class 4A state championship, and police Sgt. Lance Telchick on receiving a Gold Star Award, the council's business was full of routine items.

The only controversy was whether to go out for bids for a full-time city attorney. The city is currently served by attorney Jean Shotts on a part-time basis. A Lubbock resident, he is in Big Spring for a day or two each week, depending on the city's needs.

Councilwoman Jo Ann Staulcup said going out for bids was a bad idea — there is no need for a full-time attorney, which would require a secretary and office space, she said. Mayor McEwen agreed, but thought the council should at least explore all opportunities. In the end, the council voted down a Staulcup motion not to go out for bids, 4-3, and by the same margin accepted a motion to seek bids. As to other bids, the

council accepted these:

- Five police cars at \$19,644 each from Pollard Chevrolet.

- A roll off truck at \$114,327 from Corley-Wetsel Freightliner of Abilene.

- A sanitation truck at \$132, 831 from Young's Truck Center of Abilene.

- A half-ton, long, wide-bed pickup at \$15,971.50 from Bob Brock Ford.

- Two half-ton, short wide-bed pickups at \$13,737.50 each from Bob Brock Ford.

- Two defibrillators at \$19,690.40 from H-GAC Cooperative.

The council decided to re-bid on SUVs for the fire department and airpark.

In other business, Vicki Dahmer and Vivian Glickman were elected to the Animal Control Board.

Council members also addressed a number of other items Thursday, including the following:

- Approved on second reading an ordinance to

make the intersection at Edwards and Pennsylvania a four-way stop.

- Approved on second reading minutes from the McMahon-Wrinkle Airpark

Development Board, Convention and Visitors Bureau Committee, Moore

Development Board and Howard County Appraisal District Board.

- Approved on first reading expenditures for a recirculation pump to be installed at the spring in Comanche Trail Park.

- Approved on first reading a three-year

agreement with Power Resources.

- Approved several resolutions in regards to allowing the purchase of property for less than the amount of judgment or appraised value.

Contact News Editor Bill McClellan at 263-7331 ext. 235 or by e-mail at newsdesk@bigspringherald.com

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