

January 18, 2011

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE REPORT

A Transportation Committee meeting was held on Tuesday, January 18, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. in the County Administration Building, Quorum Court Meeting Room, 215 East Central, Bentonville, Arkansas

Committee Members Present: Douglas, King, Harrison, Hawkins, Blaty, Curry

Others Present: JPs Jones and Sandlin, County Judge Bob Clinard, Comptroller Richard McComas, Administrator of Public Services Gary Black, Administrator of General Service Elizabeth Bowen

Media: Tom Sissom – Daily Record

JP Douglas called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Public Comments:

None

1. Overview: Committee Responsibilities and Purpose

JP Douglas stated that this is a new committee which will address issues regarding several areas including roads, (although the purpose of this committee is not to run the Road Department); the decision whether to purchase or lease new road graders; bridges that are currently closed and whether or not they can or should be opened; the convenience centers and their role in keeping the county clean; public transportation, including some information coming forth from Ozark Regional Transit later in the year; and other miscellaneous things that could fall under this committee's attention.

He explained the process of bringing issues to certain committees which will then forward a recommendation to the Finance Committee if the expenditure of any funds is required.

County Judge Bob Clinard was recognized and stated that he would like for the committee to listen to the people in the county regarding what they feel the county should do. He said that his administration has a lot of ideas about how to operate more efficiently, and some of them are ideas that will be discussed in this committee. He said one of the ideas is to obtain feedback from school bus drivers regarding the condition of county roads on the routes that they drive, and he is in the process of contacting all of the School Superintendents. He said that he has already had a conversation with the Bentonville Superintendent who has told him that one of the main complaints that his bus drivers have is vegetation interfering with the sight line at intersections, and that is something that they need to address.

He added that he would like to see this committee hold some meetings out in the community so they can hear firsthand what the citizens' concerns are. The committee agreed that that was a good idea.

JP Douglas stated that he would like to spend one Saturday looking at some of the problems they are facing, such as the shredder location; Road Department buildings and equipment; and several of the county's bridges – perhaps offering to meet some of the local residents at those bridges to look at them together.

He also suggested that the JPs volunteer to work on a Saturday at the courthouse during public shredding or at the Convenience Center to see some of the problems that are encountered there.

JP Hawkins stated that even though the committee's function was not to run the Road Department, would part of the scope of the committee's work be to look at the possibility of privatizing and contracting out some of the Road Department functions in order to cut costs?

JP Douglas stated that they could certainly look at the figures to see what would be cheaper, and they do have the ability to study proposals. JP Kevin Harrison noted that they do have the right to make recommendations to the County Judge after gathering information.

JP Curry asked who should be contacted when a constituent comes to him with a problem with a particular road. Administrator of Public Service Gary Black stated that they should contact him, and if the problem is not addressed, then the County Judge should be contacted.

2. Discussion: Convenience Centers

JP Douglas stated that currently the Convenience Center at the Road Department is open on the first and third Saturday of each month for the public to dispose of old appliances, mattresses, electronics, furniture, etc. He said that there has been some contact with the Benton County Solid Waste District regarding the possibility of merging their operation with the county's Convenience Center function. He said they are located on Brookside Road is only 3 miles from the Road Department, and the Solid Waste District has most of the equipment and the staff to handle it.

Gary Black stated that right now, there is some duplication of services. He said that one of the Environmental Officers, Joyce Higgins, has been working on the Convenience Center project, and noted that they are averaging about 100 people dropping off loads on each Saturday. He said the only thing that the Solid Waste District is lacking is a backhoe to press the materials down into the dumpsters. He said that once the tires that are already there are disposed of, they might be able to begin taking tires again. He also noted that the Road Department will lose part of its yard when the Juvenile Justice Center construction begins, and the Solid Waste District has more room. He stated that Benton County would pay a fee to the Solid Waste District to cover their additional costs.

JP Blaty asked what is done with the material that is dropped off. Gary Black stated that the metal is collected and sold, the electronics are sent to Texarkana, and that the rest is trash, and they have to pay to have it hauled off. Environmental Officer Joyce Higgins explained that the electronics are sent to Texarkana where prisoners repair what they can and then break down the rest for the parts to be recycled, adding that Wal-Mart pays for the shipping to Texarkana.

JP Kevin Harrison asked if they have looked at opening up more locations throughout the county for people to dispose of unwanted items, either once a month or twice a year.

County Judge Bob Clinard encouraged the members to come to the Convenience Center on Saturday so that they can see for themselves the amount of material that is brought in and how much the people appreciate the program. He said that he would like to continue the service at no charge, because it keeps some of the trash out of the ditches throughout the county. He said the county currently pays for disposal of what is collected in the dumpsters, and if the Solid Waste District takes it over, the county would still have to pay that fee, so there is no additional cost in transferring the project to the Solid Waste District. He said that remote convenience centers are a logistical problem that the committee needs to solve, such as how to get the dumpsters to the location, what will be allowed to be disposed of, whether they will accept appliances, metal, etc. He said the scope of a remote location will have to be decided on, and emphasized the roll that Wal-Mart plays in providing a trailer to load all of the electronics on and transporting them to Texarkana at no cost to the county. He said that it is a great program, it is environmentally sound, and the residents are getting their money's worth and he would like to continue it. He said that remote locations will have to be staffed, or people will fill up the dumpsters with items that would not normally be allowed.

JP Kevin Harrison stated that Hot Spring County has sites located throughout the county that take household trash and other items, which are fenced in, and open two days per week and every Saturday. County Judge Bob Clinard stated that he is not against stealing a good idea, and that is something this committee could look into. He said he would like to continue the current program on some level, and continue to look at other options, one of which could be providing drop off sites at the Road Department locations out in the county, and then transporting the material to the Solid Waste District. He added that one issue is the use of full time employees from the Planning and Environmental Departments at the Saturday events, which takes them out of the office during the week, away from their regular duties.

County Judge Bob Clinard stated that the Solid Waste District does not accept hazardous chemicals; those must be taken to “Enviro-Sources” in Rogers, which charges a fee. He explained that in the past, Benton County paid a fee to the Solid Waste District to cover the cost of disposing of the hazardous chemicals, but when the District lost part of its funding due to a court ruling regarding tipping fees, that payment had to be used to cover their operating budget. He said they also do not accept tires or batteries, but batteries can be taken to “Battery Outfitters” in Rogers at no charge, which is something that needs to be publicized.

County Judge Bob Clinard stated that the advantages of moving to the Solid Waste District are that they already have full time, experienced staff, and they are open every day instead of two Saturdays per month. Gary Black stated that the Solid Waste District is already set up for recycling newspapers, glass, aluminum, etc, so residents would have one place to go to drop off everything.

JP Curry expressed concern that switching to one location only might overwhelm that location. Gary Black stated that the Solid Waste District is pretty well set up, and the County’s Work Program Coordinator, Kay Strickland, has mentioned that there are a lot of people who would like to work both days of the weekend, so they should be able to supply the Solid Waste District with enough labor.

JP Douglas stated that the program currently costs a little more than \$1,000 per month, with a small amount of that offset by the sale of scrap metal, so moving to the Solid Waste District would not cost the county any more than it is paying now.

JP King spoke in favor of partnering with the Solid Waste District, noting that the traffic flow would be better because it is available more than one day every two weeks.

JP Hawkins made motion to further explore combining the county’s Convenience Center operation with the Solid Waste District’s current operation, seconded by JP Harrison.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Gary Black requested that the committee move as quickly as possible on making a decision. JP Douglas added that there will be some legislation proposed in the upcoming legislative session to try to restore the funding for Solid Waste Districts that the court decision on tipping fees took away. He said if that happens, they may be able to look at expanding the service.

3. Discussion: West Side Road Department

JP Douglas stated that due to safety concerns, the proposed West Side County Road Yard site on Bethlehem Road has been shelved, and this committee needs to give the County Judge some direction on how to proceed. He said the property was donated, the site had been prepared for building, and that a salt shed has been constructed, but after consulting with the Sheriff’s Department, the State Police, and the State Highway Department, they have determined that the location of the main entrance for trucks and trailers turning onto Highway 59 is not safe.

JP Douglas gave a brief review of why the decision was made to construct a Road Department facility on the west side of the county, citing an estimated \$167,000 in fuel cost savings, a reduction in man hours lost due to travel time, and a reduced effect on the environment. He said that they will need to move as quickly as possible to find a new location, because the Energy Savings Grant which will help pay for the project had already been approved; they have asked for and received an extension, but they do not know how long the extension will be.

JP King stated that he is in favor of finding a new location and proceeding with the project, and noted that the time the county trucks and trailers are on the highway is the busiest time of day for travel, so we are also increasing our exposure to an accident.

The committee discussed what has already been put into the Bethlehem Road site. JP Douglas noted that they were still going to have to spend \$15,000 to install a water line, and \$5,500 for a fire hydrant, so if they are able to locate a site with utilities already in place, they will save what they have already spent on it. JP Douglas stated that he and the County Judge have met with the Mayor of Decatur, and looked at some possible locations, but they need to decide how much land they need, and if they are going to do a bare-minimum substation on about three or four acres, or get a piece of land large enough to allow for expansion if they decide at some point in the future to move the entire Road Department to the site.

County Judge Bob Clinard stated that they have spent \$27,000 on Architect and Engineering costs, a large portion of which they will be able to reuse because it is the same building, unless they decide to change the scope of the project, and increase the size of the building and garage bay area. He said the salt shed cost approximately \$11,700, and it cannot be moved or salvaged. He added that the land was donated with the specific requirement that it be used for a County Road Yard, so they are going to meet with the donor to determine how to deal with it, but it will more than likely revert back to the landowner who donated it.

JP Douglas stated that the current location of the Road Department is more valuable for other possible future uses, such as a courts facility, than it is for a Road Department. He noted that discussions were held last year regarding where a new courts facility could be built – either downtown or out on the Road Department property. He said it is possible that when they get two facilities located on the East and West sides, they will no longer need the one on Highway 102. He posed the question of whether they want to look for three or four acres for a minimum facility, or should they look for eight to ten acres, so if they decide at some point in the future to move the Road Department from Highway 102, they will already have a place to put it. He said he believes that it would be possible to find land in the range of \$5,000 to \$10,000 per acre, with utilities available.

JP Kevin Harrison stated that he does not feel that land values are going to go down much more, and any land purchased now will only increase in value. He said they really needed to know how much land is needed before they can make an educated decision. Gary Black stated that the Road Department currently sits on 10 acres, which is plenty.

JP Sandlin asked how many acres are occupied by the Solid Waste District, which would be a more central location and more convenient for hauling equipment to and from the East Side for major repairs. Gary Black stated that he thinks the site is about 10 acres. JP Douglas stated that they need to locate the Road Department on a site that is more central to the West Side. JP King noted that the multiple trips made across the county every day would add up to more than the few trips made hauling equipment in for repairs on the big trailer.

County Judge Bob Clinard stated that the building design that is currently in place contains 4 bays, and some offices, and the grant pays for all of the site improvements, including the fuel tank, fencing, and the concrete pad. He said that they had only budgeted \$180,000 of the \$230,000 available from the

grant, so they might want to look at increasing the size of the facility, because we do not keep the grant money that is not spent.

JP Douglas stated that if they can purchase land for between \$50,000 and \$100,000, especially with utilities available, he felt it would be foolish not to go ahead and purchase the land.

JP Kevin Harrison made motion to recommend that the committee move forward with having the County Judge locate a site of eight to ten acres for a West Side County Road Yard, seconded by JP Curry.

JP Blaty asked how they had gone from the three to five acres mentioned in the County Judge's memo, to the eight to ten acres they are discussing now.

JP King said that if he had made the motion he would have stated that they should look for a piece of property that is suitable for the needs of this project, because if you start setting certain acreage amounts, that might leave out a suitable piece that is seven acres or eleven acres. He added that it should fit the needs for the best possible price. JP Douglas noted that sometimes, smaller pieces of land cost more, so buying ten acres might not cost a whole lot more than buying a two or three-acre tract.

JP Hawkins stated that he is not opposed to looking for a piece of property, or looking at expansion, but he would like to inject that this would be a good time also to look into the privatization of some of the road maintenance, perhaps through a pilot program on the west side, as opposed to a capital expenditure and expanding our workload at a time when revenues are suspect.

JP Blaty offered a friendly amendment to the motion, striking "eight to ten acres", seconded by JP King.

JP Douglas restated the motion, "to move forward with having the County Judge look for a suitable site for current needs for a West Side County Road Yard, and for future expansion".

Motion to amend passed by unanimous voice vote.

Gary Black stated that time is of the essence in this matter, just as it is with the Convenience Center. JP Sandlin stated that since these are both urgent matters, is there any expenditure of funds that will need approval prior to any action by the County Judge. JP Douglas stated that he believes that if there is acreage available, they could sign a contract on it and have it ready for the next regularly scheduled Finance Committee meeting in February. County Judge Bob Clinard stated that it his intention to get the information to this committee as soon as they are able to locate a piece of property, because he wants them to be a part of this decision before it goes to the Finance Committee, even if that requires a special committee meeting.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Gary Black distributed copies of the "2006-2010 5-Year Road Plan", which was to have been paid for with the proposed countywide sales tax which failed in a special election in 2005. He said they are working on a new 5-Year Road Plan, but he thought the old one would be a good reference for them to have.

After motion and second, meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.