

Elections Post Search Begins

Commissioners Finalize Elections Oversight Office Monday AM

By Dustin Wright
Sentinel Managing Editor

The search is officially on for Gaines County officials, as they will look to fill a recently created position to oversee the elections registration and performance processes, following action taken by Gaines County Commissioners on Monday morning.

In a unanimous vote of the Commissioners Court, County leaders approved of an "Order for a County Elections Administrator."

Vicki Phillips, Gaines County Clerk, said the Court's approval of the Order was needed by several Texas agencies, including the Texas Secretary of State's Office, which

serves as the oversight of election issues within the Lone Star State.

"Per the Election Code, we have to notify the Secretary of State's office of our County Election Administrator's position and our intentions to fill the position," said Phillips.

Gaines County officials approved of the position to serve as the oversight of voter registration, and the elections process as a whole, as part of the 2013 fiscal year budget process.

Currently, the Gaines County Clerk's Office oversees the election's process for Gaines County, as well as Loop ISD and the Llano Estacado Underground Water Conservation District, while voter registration issues

is overseen by the Gaines County Tax Assessor/Collector's Office.

Gaines County Commissioners set aside over \$133,000 within the 2013 fiscal year budget for the creation of the County Elections Administration office, of which includes \$71,000 devoted toward the salaries and benefits of an Election Administrator and an assistant. All other funds for the office within the budget are devoted toward basic office needs and funds for trainings for office staff members.

According to the Gaines County Auditor's Office, just over \$54,000 in county funds were spent in relation to the county elections process. Phillips, on Monday morning, said

the chairmen of Gaines County's Democratic and Republican parties would take part in the hiring process for the position, as well as several Gaines County officials which will include Phillips and Tax Assessor/Collector Susan Shaw.

To fill the proposed position, Gaines County officials would have to follow the guidelines of Section 31.032 of the Texas Election Code, which pertains to the "Appointment Of Administrator/County Election Commission."

Guidelines for the process are as follows:

The position of county elections administrator is filled by appointment of the county election

commission, which consists of:

(1) the county judge, as chair; (2) the county clerk, as vice chair; (3) the county tax assessor-collector, as secretary; and (4) the county chair of each political party that made nominations by primary election for the last general election for state and county officers preceding the date of the meeting at which the appointment is made.

b) The affirmative vote of a majority of the commission's membership is necessary for the appointment of an administrator.

(c) Each appointment must be evidenced by a written resolution or order signed by the number of commission members necessary to make the appointment. Not later than the third day after the date an administrator is appointed, the officer who presided at the meeting shall file a signed copy of the resolution or order with the county clerk. Not later than the third day after the date the copy is filed, the

county clerk shall deliver a certified copy of the resolution or order to the secretary of state.

(d) The initial appointment may be made at any time after the adoption of the order creating the position.

To be eligible for appointment as county elections administrator, a person must be a qualified voter of the state, according to state law.

In addition, a county elections administrator may not be a candidate for a public office or an office of a political party, hold a public office, or hold an office or position in a political party.

At the time an administrator becomes a candidate or accepts an office or position in violation of this subsection, the administrator vacates the position of administrator.

Phillips offered no time table on how long applications would be taken for the position, or how long it would take for County officials to fill the position.

County Agrees to Pay for Portion of Downtown Project

Venture to Include West Part of Gaines Co. Courthouse Grounds

By Dustin Wright
Sentinel Managing Editor

Gaines County Officials will dip into their "Capital Projects Fund" to join in with the City of Seminole for beautification efforts around the Gaines County Courthouse Square, in downtown Seminole.

On Monday morning, Gaines County Commissioners unanimously approved to pay a \$107,122 portion of a \$298,593 bid for the second phase of the downtown revitalization

project, which will see the installation of new sidewalks, floral planters and period lighting systems to western parking area of the Gaines County Courthouse grounds, as well as the eastern side of the Gaines County Courthouse square -- located in the 100 block of S.E. 2nd St.

City of Seminole officials unanimously approved of the bid in their late February regular meeting, which was awarded to RGCCM, LLC of El Paso.

City of Seminole officials are looking to continue their project, which was started in the 2011 calendar year with the replacement of sidewalks and installation of floral planters and period lighting in the northern and western portions of the Gaines County Courthouse Square.

"When we discussed this a while back, we all felt this was something we'd like to take part in," said Lance Celandier, Gaines County Judge

in Monday's discussion of the topic prior to the Court's vote. "I feel this is something we should do to unify the (courthouse) square."

Rick Dollahan, Gaines County Auditor, said payment of the project -- which would be a reimbursement to the City of Seminole -- would come from the County's "Capital Projects Fund." That fund totaled \$2.01 million as of the end of the County's first quarter of the 2013 fiscal year, in late December.

In a break down of the \$298,593 bid awarded by the Seminole City Council, \$112,040 of the project is devoted to concrete and construction work for the sidewalks along 100 block of S.E. Ave. B, in front of CashSavers and C&L Real Estate.

Separate from the bid, Seminole City officials will also purchase \$29,700 in period lighting for the project, which Phillips said could be done at a cheaper cost through this route rather than through the bid process.

In the 2011 calendar year, the City of Seminole saw the completion of the first phase of the revitalization project, which has boasted a total estimated cost of \$1.06 million.

The multi-year project is anticipated to see improvements to the City's sidewalk system around the Gaines County Courthouse square, as well as on the east and west sides of the 200 block of S. Main St., and the 100 block of N. Main St.

The first two half-blocks renovated by the City -- the 100 block of S. Main St. and 100 block of E. Ave. A -- was completed in the fall of 2011 at a price of \$316,910.

The City of Seminole, in 2011, received a \$150,000 grant from the Texas Dept. of Agriculture's Texas Capital Fund for the project, which paid for roughly one of the half-block portions of the project.

Area Airport Towers Subject to Sequester Cuts

DALLAS (AP) -- Two area airports -- Lubbock's Preston Smith Lubbock International Airport and the Lea County Regional Airport in Hobbs, N.M. -- could see their Federal Aviation control towers reduce the number of hours of operation, or worse be closed, because automatic federal spending cuts take effect next week.

Federal officials say travelers should expect delays when the cutbacks begin in April, the officials say.

The Federal Aviation Administration said this past Friday that the reductions are part of its plan to cope with a spending reduction of \$600 million during the rest of the fiscal year, which runs through Sept. 30.

The FAA said it is considering furloughing most of its 47,000 employees for one day every two weeks -- in effect, a 10 percent reduction in staffing -- and closing more than 100 air traffic control centers, including 19 in Texas. Overnight shifts could be eliminated at more than 60 additional airports, including six in Texas.

The largest airports, such as Dallas Fort-Worth International Airport and Houston's Bush Intercontinental Airport, are not on FAA's list of potential closures or cutbacks.

The Texas air traffic control facilities that could be closed, according to an FAA list: Waco Regional, New Braunfels Municipal, Jack Brooks Regional (Beaumont), Brownsville-South Padre Island International, Easternwood Field (College Station), TSTC (Waco), Lone Star Executive (Houston), Fort Worth Spinks, East Texas Regional (Longview), Arlington Municipal, Grand Prairie Municipal, Georgetown Municipal, San Marcos Municipal, Dallas Executive, Sugar Land Regional, Stinson Municipal (San Antonio), Collin County Regional (McKinney), Tyler Pounds Regional and Victoria Regional.

The Texas facilities that could see overnight shifts eliminated: Abilene control tower, Austin tower, Corpus Christi tower, El Paso tower, Meacham tower (Fort Worth), and the Lubbock tower.

In New Mexico, regional airport facilities in Santa Fe, Roswell and Hobbs could lose their airport control towers because of federal budget cuts, raising questions about whether commercial airlines would continue flights that the communities have fought so hard to secure.

Officials with American and United airlines, which serve the small airports, have declined to comment on whether such cuts would impact service.

Towers at the three small airports, as well as the general

aviation Double Eagle Airport in west Albuquerque, are on a list of nearly 200 being eyed for possible closure if across-the-board federal budgets cuts that took effect Friday stay in place. The FAA is expected to announce the final cut next week.

FAA and airport managers say any final decision on whether to maintain service to tower-less airports lies with the carriers. A spokesman for American Airlines, which services Santa Fe and Roswell, said it's "too soon to discuss" that question. United, which flies to Hobbs, declined to comment, referring questions to an industry group in Washington, which called the issue "premature" as no tower furloughs would occur before April 7.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and FAA chief Michael Huerta said Friday in a letter to aviation industry trade groups that the agency "may reduce the efficiency of the national airspace in order to maintain the highest safety standards."

Flights to major cities like New York, Chicago and San Francisco could have delays of up to 90 minutes during peak hours because there will be fewer controllers on staff, they said.

Airlines are likely to cancel some flights if they expect problems, similar to the way that they reduce flights during bad weather to avoid overloading a weakened air-traffic system.

Automatic federal spending cuts are scheduled to take effect next Friday if Congress and President Barack Obama can't agree on future government spending, although the deadline could be pushed back, as it was at the end of 2012. Government rules require giving workers 30 days' notice of furloughs, which can't start until March 1, so the slowdowns would be expected to hit in April.

On Thursday, airline industry officials tried to sound optimistic that political leaders will reach a deal.

"We fully expect and urge the Congress and the president to ensure that the air transportation system is not negatively impacted" by automatic spending cuts, said Dan Elwell, senior vice president for safety and operations at Airlines for America, a trade group representing the biggest U.S. airlines.

The Seminole and Gaines County community is within an area of two international airports -- Lubbock and Midland -- as well as the Hobbs, N.M. regional facility, which offers daily flights to Houston through Continental Express flights out of the Lea Co. Regional Airport.

Thank You

We would like to take this moment to say thank you to everyone who sent flowers, cards, food, said a prayer and thought of us during the loss of our loved one.

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