

\$1.3 million in Equine Facility Funds Will Soon Be Available

By Bonnie Bolden, Bastrop Daily Enterprise
Tue Mar 10, 2009

Police Jury President Terry Matthews, District 6, announced Monday that the \$1.3 million in state guaranteed funds for the proposed Equine Facility, or activity center, has been moved to Priority 1 funding by the Division of Administration Facility Planning and Control.

A Priority 1 ranking means the funds will allow the project to proceed with the bidding process.

Jimmy Christmas, a businessman who has worked closely with the project for approximately a decade, said he is hopeful.

"I feel good about it," Christmas said. "I would hope that we'll be out for bids in the spring or early summer."

"McManus should have this completed," Matthews said.

Matthews explained that the jury is going to look for more grant and loan opportunities; many were missed because the jury didn't know the opportunity was available.

"We've missed so much money here because we have not applied," Matthews said.

At the regular meeting, held Monday March 9, Morehouse General Hospital CEO Cheryl Faulkenberry gave the jury a quarterly report.

According to Faulkenberry, MGH made \$130,000 in profit from operations in December and \$300,000 in operations year-to-date. Faulkenberry said the plans for the CT/MRI department that is to be built with USDA funds has been approved and is being let out for bids, and a recently purchases ultrasound machine should be in use by Wednesday.

"This is a big help for the hospital, to have state of the art equipment," Faulkenberry said.

Jason Crockett, District 5, asked if the hospital would continue to need tax support if the organization is making a profit; Faulkenberry said she cannot know how the economy and business closings in the community will affect the hospital, further the hospital will need the money to buy equipment.

"I don't think the people of the parish mind paying a hospital tax as long as we maintain out hospital," Mark Sistrunk, District 3, said.

Kay King, CEO of MEDC, talked to the jury about setting up a tax district that includes the whole parish, minus the city of Bastrop. A one cent sales tax going to that district, King said, would bring in \$700,000 a year that could be used for road work.

"Creating a tax district doesn't create a tax," King clarified. Creating the district would allow voters to decide how much, if any, they were willing to give to road repairs.

King also discussed the positive influence she thinks the consulting firm Tamerica will have on the parish while building the economic redevelopment plan.

"These people can come in and give a very blunt, honest opinion on things," King said. "When we go to do this plan, we're going to bring in a lot of people."

King said March 21 is the tentative kickoff date for the assessment team.

According to King, she's had a small business that would employ up to 30 people look at a local building. She and the jury agreed that getting several small businesses in the parish is more plausible than rapidly attracting another company that employs 500 people. King explained that to make the area more attractive, more infrastructure is needed, including sewers.

The jury approved the purchase of a gradall for the highway department. The insurance paid out only \$53,000 on the last gradall, with a \$50,000 deductible. The new machine is expected to cost more than \$300,000.

Gene Montgomery, supervisor of the highway department, also discussed future plans to clear canals in the parish; a major point of discussion was the Staulkinhead that runs through Bastrop. Currently, the canal needs to be cleared, but the jury needs permission from property owners to reach the canal and funds from a grant, expected next year, to clear the largest trees and debris.

The jury elected Sistrunk and Crockett to sit on the Noxious Weeds Ordinance Hardship Committee. Jack Cockrell, District 4, declined his nomination, citing concerns that he wouldn't be impartial.

Both Crockett and Sistrunk volunteered.

Assistant District Attorney Charles Brumfield asked if the jury had received all the bills for the Tanya Smith trial held in Bossier.

"That was money well spent," Brumfield said. "That woman will spend the rest of her life in jail. Mr. [Jerry] Jones did an outstanding job on that one."

At the same meeting, the jury approved the application for the Community Water Enrichment Funds Grant, voted to advertise adjudicated properties and agreed to open the shuttle site and provide a worker on Saturday, March 21 for the Great American Cleanup.

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