

MINUTES OF THE ARANSAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' COURT

REGULAR MEETING - FEBRUARY 8, 2021

On the 8th day of February, 2021, there was a Regular Meeting of the Commissioners' Court in the Commissioners' Courtroom, 2840 Hwy 35 N, Rockport, Aransas County, Texas, with the following members present in person, via ZOOM, or via YouTube: **C. H. "Burt" Mills, Jr.**, County Judge; **Jack Chaney**, Commissioner, Precinct 1-1A; **Leslie Casterline**, Commissioner, Precinct 2; **Pat Rousseau**, Commissioner, Precinct 3; **Wendy Laubach**, Commissioner, Precinct 4; and **Carrie Arrington**, County Clerk.

**Other County Officers present** in person, via YouTube, or via Zoom, were: **Alma Cartwright**, Treasurer; **Laura Kocian**, Chief Deputy Treasurer; **Pam Heard**, District Clerk; **Jaime Blackburn**, Executive Assistant to the County Judge; **Tracy Orr**, Administrative Assistant to County Judge; **Amanda Oster**, County Attorney; **Jennifer O'Steen**, Assistant County Attorney; **Jacky Cockerham**, County Auditor; **Tana Taylor**, First Assistant County Auditor; **Latisha Murphy**, Assistant Auditor; **Kevin Stroud**, Elections Administrator; **Linda Doane**, HR Director; **Elizabeth Guerra**, HR Assistant; **Judge Diana McGinnis**, Justice of the Peace - Pct. 2; **Sheriff Bill Mills**; **John Gutierrez**, Chief Deputy Uniform Operations (Sheriff's Department); **Collin Jackson**, IT Director; **Jerry Brundrett**, County Surveyor; **Anna Marshall**, County Tax Assessor-Collector; **Kat Comeaux**, Development Services Coordinator; **Valerie Gonzalez**, Environmental Health Director; **Rick McLester**, Emergency Management Coordinator; **Mike Geer**, Airport Manager; **Rene Butler**, Facilities Director; **John Strothman**, Project Manager; **Kim Foutz**, Long-Term Recovery; **William Whitson**, Long-Term Recovery; and **Lori Cesar**, Animal Control Director.

Members of Local City Government, Community Groups and other Interested Parties present in person, via YouTube, or via Zoom, were: **Patricia Arnold**, ACMSI; **Jennifer Day**, Rockport Cultural Arts District; **Suzanne Ransleben**, Executive Director for the Education Foundation; **Lenora Keas**, Del Mar College; **Kiwana Denson**, Del Mar College; **Dr. Joshua Garcia**, ACISD; **Diane Probst**, Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce; **J. Mark Wagnon**, Economic Development Corporation; **Brandi Karl**, J. Schwartz & Associates, Inc.; **Randall Freeze**, General Land Office; and **Mike Probst**, Editor and Publisher, The Rockport Pilot.

**Aransas County Citizens** present in person, via YouTube, or via Zoom, were: **Nancy Bolting**, **John Jackson**, **Barbara Gurtner**, **Mike Fields**, **Joe Owen**, **Katy Jackson**, **Richard Smith**, **Allan Smith**, **Ricky Ethridge**, **Rebecca Bagby**, **Janae Evans**, **Kristie Rutledge**, **Rachel Thomas**, **Brad Chilcote**, **Aaron Holigan**, and **Emily Martinez**.

The Meeting was convened at 9:00 a.m. at which time roll call was taken and a quorum was declared by Judge Mills, WHEREUPON, the following proceedings were had and done, to wit:

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

While there were citizens who signed up to speak at the meeting, they all wanted to speak on item 10 during item 10. Judge Mills also relayed that he had 10 emails in his possession all in favor of item 10 - to be read on behalf of citizens during item 10 but that he probably wouldn't read them all because some of them are quite lengthy.

PRESENTATIONS

1. Rick McLester and Patricia Arnold, members of the Aransas County COVID-19 Task Force, gave a presentation about the organization,

timing, and administration of available COVID-19 vaccines for Aransas County citizens.

**McLester** began the presentation stating that it is challenging to turn a year's worth of COVID 19 into a seven-minute presentation.

Since day one, we've been dealing with this challenge that is new to everyone. We've been relying on the State of Texas, the Federal Government, and, of course, in Aransas County, since we are without a hospital district or a health district, we have also been relying on Harlingen, Region 11, to be our expertise, if you will. I'm just an old cop. I have a lot of experience in disaster management but I don't have - none of us have - experience with a pandemic like this. So, we are struggling along here but we are getting advice from the State of Texas.

He spoke on the history of COVID-19: First PPE, initially we couldn't get any to save our souls and now there are warehouses full of it. Then testing, at first you had to show symptoms for testing because there were not enough tests available to test everybody who wanted to get tested for COVID-19. Now, there are warehouses full of tests. Tests seem to be everywhere. Mobile testing too. The State of Texas, Texas Division of Emergency Management, has set up four permanent testing sites across our region: in Beeville, Corpus Christi, Jim Wells, and Kleburg counties and with a mobile testing group to fill in the gap in rural counties. Now we're into vaccines - and I'm going to let Patricia speak on vaccines - but we're seeing the same pattern as before - not enough to go around. There are not enough vaccines for everybody to get one. So, rules and regulations have been put out.

The State first said all first responders. Well, that turned out to be a broad statement because when it became time for

vaccinations, we learned only schedule 1A, 1B - which was our elderly population and our folks on the front line in the medical field - were getting them. That's been problematic across the state. I will tell you that as we speak here today, even though Aransas County has received some vaccines, there are still five counties within our region who haven't received any.

So, there's a problem across the state, there's a problem here in our region. But, through due diligence, including a lot of phone calls, there's a light at the end of the tunnel. More vaccines are coming available and I assure you there is a strong contingent in Aransas County pushing to get what Aransas County needs and what Aransas County deserves.

However, we are not a population center, we are not a hospital district, so we are fighting with other rural counties to get that small allotment of vaccines. But our biggest problem is, I feel, that we are fighting this battle with both hands tied behind our back. Every program that we've seen has been directed by the State of Texas and the Department of Health. I'm not going to throw them under the bus because they are doing a bang-up job with what they've got.

Commissioners, we're coming up on a year and I will tell you that, at least, two to three phone calls, conference calls, a week have happened. I, personally, have been on those. The Judge, the mayors have personally been on those. Receiving the latest information, the best practices available, to try to handle and get a handle on COVID-19.

I will say that the best thing we've done - and I'm about to hand this presentation over to Patricia Arnold - is, when we moved into the vaccine part of this, it obviously became more involved and,

with the Judge's endorsement, we contacted Patricia Arnold and she's been a god-send.

I want to publicly turn to Patricia and say, Patricia, thank you. I don't know where we would be today without you. And, as far as I'm concerned: our program, our first volley with the 300 vaccines that came to the county - not HEB, not Walgreens, not the Family Planning Clinic - but the first 300 vaccines allotted for Aransas County that was somewhat under our control, if you will, although completely under the direction of the Department of Health, at Paws and Taws, Patricia received twenty-four hours' notice that we were getting them and she hustled two tents, hustled 50-60 volunteers to be prepared to work those lines and collect that data. The State of Texas showed up with people to vaccinate and with data entry people. That's it. Everything else, Patricia hustled in twenty-four hours.

Patricia, you're doing a bang-up job. Bless you for taking this on. And, the biggest thing is, she's doing it for free, folks. My pleasure, Patricia Arnold, handling our vaccine program as it stands today.

**Arnold:** Good morning, and thank you for that, Rick. Good morning, and thank you, Commissioners and Judge Mills, for allowing me to present today. We've been really busy as he said. My name is Patricia Arnold. I am the Executive Director for ACMSI, more formally known as Aransas County Medical Services, Incorporated - which is a non-profit organization. Our purpose is to assist our community in gaining access to needed services and to advocate for community resources. And, I am honored that Judge Mills and Rick McLester called on us to assist with this pandemic.

As you are aware, the State of Texas closed and consolidated their health departments many years ago. Aransas County did have a

health department here. Now, Aransas County is the most northern county in Region 11, which means our health department's main office is in Harlingen, Texas, and that's under the direction of Dr. Emilie Prot, as medical director. Several nurses and staff under Department of State Health Services - Region 11 work remotely and they are in Aransas County 1-2 times a month located at the ACMSI Medical Complex, however, they have been closed because they have required all of those personnel to be on a COVID team.

ACMSI has joined task forces to assist with education and awareness, and to include meetings with community leaders, medical community, and best practices during this pandemic. So, we have been a weekly presenter for the Facebook COVID-19 information page through the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce to help navigate the DSHS website for the State of Texas. And we're working with the EOC - with Rick McLester - in setting up testing for Aransas County. People were looking for testing all over, at one time it was very limited. However, that included us getting the COVID-19 PCR testing here prior to Thanksgiving and Christmas so our community members could get the required PCR tests to go into the nursing homes to see their loved ones and to help make those decisions prior to traveling for the holidays.

I work with Texas Department of State Health Services Region 11 to set up the flu clinics along with the Rockport Police Department and our volunteer fire departments so that we could practice flu vaccines prior to COVID-19 coming in, prior to bringing the vaccines here to our community so that we can work with that. In mid-December, we began receiving lots of concerns from the medical community, our non-profits, our veterans, the city, Town of Fulton, Lamar/Holiday Beach, and several concerned residents regarding vaccines. How do I get them? Where do I go? At that time, I requested for the secretaries and the Meals on Wheels and different

ones that were asking to please write their name and phone number down and I would contact these citizens that are concerned about where to go. From there I was able to refer them to vaccine hubs. I was able to discuss with the VA clinic in Corpus Christi who is receiving their vaccines and they're coming out to see our homebound veterans, to be able to vaccinate the homebound veterans at this time and/or refer them to specific pharmacies.

Dr. Cuevas requested that we sign up more providers in Aransas County, so that has been a goal of ours over the last couple of weeks to present to several different physicians and several community members - maybe school districts or law enforcement - to become providers and even the EMS to become a provider for vaccines if they choose to. They would be able to help more with their own employees and to help with some of our home bounds, like you're seeing with Corpus Christi Fire Department helping with the Meals on Wheels. So, we continue to advocate daily for vaccines. We hopefully assist with concerned citizens, when and where to receive the vaccines. And, we received some doses from neighboring counties with the assistance of Judge Mills and putting me in contact with specific people in Judge Canales' office. Region 11 continues to request vaccines for our community as we are now considered a high priority county.

We were notified within 24 hours that Region 11 would be needing assistance setting up the drive-thru clinic with specific guidelines and requirements that they needed. So as always, our community leaders, our employees, and our volunteer organizations were able to meet the requirements and deadlines requested by Region 11. So, it wasn't just me. It was a lot of people who put these things in place, and they do it with just a phone call and they jump and take care of those things for our community. At the vaccine site, the Texas Division of Emergency Management, Gary

Barney, was on location. The Texas Department of State Health Services Medical Director, Dr. Emilie Prot, was also on location, here in Fulton, Texas. I was the designated task force leader for this vaccine clinic. I provided the call list and coordinated the events on scene.

In the review process, we addressed lessons learned and best practices to better prepare for this second dose allocation which will be coming soon to Aransas County. It was brought to my attention by Dr. Prot that she received several emails from concerned citizens and an elected official regarding notification to the public and concerns following the Texas schedule 1A and 1B. At no point did these emails thank Dr. Prot and her staff for bringing vaccine clinics to Aransas County. These emails were sent with such haste that they made accusations that things were handled inappropriately and could have jeopardized our opportunity for future vaccines. I assure you this list met all state requirements and was used fairly.

As a reminder, please remember you are leaders in our community and our citizens are scared and concerned and are looking for us to help reassure them. Listen to them and leave them with the most accurate information in a respectful manner. The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The second is to say thank you. And in between, as a servant, automatically respond to any problem by listening first.

I accept your feedback and recommendations for future Aransas County vaccine sites as you are welcome to volunteer to help make these events more successful. The more vaccines we bring in to Aransas County, the more volunteers we will need to help direct traffic and things like that. Today, we have 9,560 people on the registration link. We are advocating daily for more vaccines. We



are encouraging all citizens to continue to search for vaccines and get in line wherever they are able to.

Rockport H-E-B pharmacy, Walgreens pharmacy, South Texas Family Planning, our nursing homes have all done an amazing job. So, if you have an opportunity, please say thank you to them. The supply and demand will one day catch up - just like the toilet paper finally did.

Dr. Prot and her staff will bring in second doses in the next few weeks. It is my goal to show them that our community can handle to task of being a mini vaccine hub. Our volunteers stand ready to help our community. Please remember to thank the boots on the ground. And, most importantly, please be patient. Thank you.

#### CONSENT ITEMS

2. Minutes from the January 25, 2021 Regular Meeting.
3. Approve Official Public Bond and Oath for Commissioner Pat Rousseau.
4. Approve Official Public Bond and Oath for Melissa Brown.
5. Approve the addition of Laura Kocian to the Official Public Blanket Surety Bond for the Treasurer's Office.

A motion was made by Commissioner Chaney and seconded by Commissioner Rousseau to approve the consent items.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

#### COUNTY REPORTS

6. Following Executive Director Jennifer Day's report to the Court, a motion was made by Commissioner Rousseau and seconded

by Commissioner Laubach to approve the 4th Quarter 2020 Report for the Rockport Cultural Arts District as given.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

COUNTY ROADS

7. After Brandi Karl described the two new mobile home communities proposed at 501 Rattlesnake Point Road - Costa Palms Resort and Pura Vida Palms, she and Kat Comeaux answered the Court's questions pertaining to size, sewer, ownership, water distribution, roads, etc., a motion was made by Commissioner Rousseau and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve the conceptual plan submitted by Holigan Communities, Inc.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

COUNTY ELECTIONS

8. A motion was made by Commissioner Rousseau and seconded by Commissioner Chaney to approve authorizing Judge Mills to sign, as a witness, the Contract for Elections Services between the Aransas County Elections Administrator and the City of Rockport for the Joint Election to be held on May 1, 2021.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

9. A motion was made by Commissioner Laubach and seconded by Commissioner Rousseau to approve authorizing Judge Mills to sign, as a witness, the Contract for Elections Services between the Aransas County Elections Administrator and the Aransas County Independent School District for the Joint Election to be held on May 1, 2021. There was some confusion as to why the Court would need to authorize Judge Mills to sign as a witness

on contracted election services. Elections Administrator Kevin Stroud agreed because state law doesn't require that these contracts come to Commissioners' Court - since they are agreements between the Elections Administrator and an entity - but his predecessor, Michele Bennett, added a witness signature line and then included authorizing the County Judge witnessing them as an agenda item in order to provide awareness about contracted elections events, so he was simply providing the same courtesy.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

*[Anecdotally, perhaps future items similar to numbers 8 and 9 above are better placed within the Consent Agenda.]*

**CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, GRANTS & LEASES**

10. A motion was made by Commissioner Chaney and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve acceptance of a \$1,700,000 Economic Development Administration Grant with a total project cost of \$2,138,731 for a workforce development and entrepreneurship center (matching funds provided by public and private sector cash, in-kind, and workforce account donations in the amount of \$438,731) and authorize the County Judge to sign the Financial Assistance Award Form and any related documents.

There were many people who spoke on this item or sent emails to be read. The vast majority were in favor of the item.

**Nancy Bolting**, a citizen and previous teacher, briefly went over a timeline of the numerous public input sessions for this community's long-term recovery plan after Hurricane Harvey. She read off a list of 11 such town hall meetings and workshops,

between late December 2017 and mid-August 2018, for local stakeholders and residents in which to meet and discuss area challenges and possible solutions - the results of which, in turn, were put into the Aransas County Long Term Recovery Action Plan and Report - and included workforce training, one of the things the public repeatedly asked for to support our economic recovery and development.

On August 30<sup>th</sup> of 2018, the first draft of this report, which was built over many months in collaboration with Texas Sea Grant and all jurisdictions within the County, was widely distributed to the public for review and comment before being formally adopted. And all along the way, starting back in December 2017, there was information posted online on various websites, including those belonging to Aransas County Long Term Recovery and Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce. It was also covered in The Rockport Pilot.

On November 14, 2018, the long-term recovery team asked for more public comment on the plan. They are following what the public has asked them to do, and one of the things the public has asked for is workforce training, they wanted extended education.

Later that month, several local TV stations - Action 10 News and KIII also had this on the news. They were talking about our public input on our workforce training center. More public comment.

December 10, 2018, the final draft of the Plan and Report was put out for public comment - which included the long-term workforce training center.

This team has done so much for our community. So, from the key points from the Long-Term Recovery Team Mission Statement:

- Capture funding opportunities that support the implementation of the recovery plan - *which included workforce training, and*
- Work to improve the economic conditions of those impacted by Harvey - *because we knew we were nothing but a tourist location and we had people that were working here in our tourist industry: wait staff, dishwashers, people that were not educated enough that could stay here in this environment so they moved away because they had to support their family.*

Commissioners Court was presented this plan on June 2, 2020. On August 2020, you all approved the grant application. July 2020, Lenora Keas, at that time was VP of workforce development and strategic planning, came and did a presentation. And, here we are today: 2021 and still trying to decide if we are going to do a workforce training center. Our kids, and our public, and our community need it. Thank you.

**Suzanne Ransleben:** Hi. I'm Suzanne Ransleben and I am the Executive Director for the Education Foundation and I work directly with Aransas County ISD on grants and my pulse on what the needs are. I also run the ACE After School Program at the high school so I have a particular knowledge of the needs of our students there.

Back in 2010, when all of this industry started here, I was part of a workforce task development committee, back with our former mayor. And, at that time, the overarching goal for the school district and especially our high school was to provide courses that would enable our kids to earn certifications that would qualify them for all of these lucrative positions. In

case most of you aren't aware of this, about 70% of our kids come from economically disadvantaged households. They can't afford to go to Corpus to go to any kind of training and much of the time they stay here and work at minimum wage.

The high school - through the Foundation - offers a stellar welding program, Welding I and Welding II, where our students do earn their basic NCCER certifications. We put over a million dollars into that program so it would be available at the high school.

We also have a state-of-the-art Culinary Arts Department. Another \$650,000 went into it. So, you can understand the cost to the school district to provide programs like that. We also put in another \$65,000 this last year so that they could offer a phlebotomy course and an electrocardiograph course through Del Mar College.

I will also tell you that last year, prior to COVID, our construction site at the high school of which we put in about \$300,000 to offer, through Del Mar, a construction course for all citizens. There were probably 35 adults who took the course to learn the construction trade - and I witnessed that every day.

There are simply not enough words to tell you how much a workforce training center is needed in our area. It's truly an investment in the future of our children - and I can't think of any better return for your investment than that.

**Lenora Keas:** I am Lenora Keas. I am the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Del Mar College. I am also a Rockport-Fulton High school graduate, which I am very proud of. We have a long history there in Rockport. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you all there this

morning. I'm going to take time to try to address some of the questions and issues that have come before the Court or come before the community, really, in the last few weeks and summarize some information.

Del Mar College, last summer, we were invited by the Aransas County Partnership Economic Development Corporation to participate with the County and Texas A&M University in preparing the grant application to the EDA. In support of this grant application, for the Center, we entered into an MOU with the County to operate and pay all operating expenses, instructional expenses, anything related to the delivery of instruction at the facility. We anticipate offering a variety of programs and courses locally that provide college credit and continuing education credit to meet the needs of the community.

The purpose is to work with the community and to continue to grow a highly skilled workforce - building off the TEAMS concept that you all worked on for about a year, as I understand it. And, this will focus on technology, entrepreneurship, art, and maker space. This includes examples such as: all the areas of health sciences, light industrial, highly skilled trades, public safety, entrepreneurship, and the arts - those types of things can all be offered in a combination of for college credit, continuing education credit, or seminar type situations.

Students who take college credit courses will be able to apply for financial aid. Our workforce courses are college credit courses and/or continuing education courses depending on the type of course and, quite often, we offer them simultaneously and it depends upon the student's needs - so that financial aid is available.

The dual credit program at the high school will continue as it is. We've been engaged with Rockport-Fulton High School for many years and we intend to stay there and continue to offer those course at the school. If we were to offer dual credit coursework - and we'd like to offer that flexibility at this site - it would be because it offered special technology or there was not the room available at the high school. It would be an unusual situation. Or, if things were great and really grew. But primarily, dual credit will remain at the high school.

Today, I hope to carefully answer some of the questions and concerns regarding the intentions of the college in the pro forma budget and the overall operating expenses. Questions regarding the possibility of annexation or taxation of the County have come forward. This workforce center does not include or will it cause taxation by the college in the future. Texas law under Texas Education Code section 130.065 provides for annexation or taxation of an area ONLY if people in the area vote it in. Therefore, operational expenses in the college is obligated to pay will be paid by revenue generated by the center or other resources from the State. I can also confirm that the center will not force the County into a college taxing district.

The State of Texas legislature defines the service area for all community colleges in the State by statute. The service area for Del Mar College are the Counties of Nueces, San Patricio, Aransas, Kennedy, and parts of Kleburg. The taxing district is only the city limits of Corpus Christi and the school districts within the city. Another additional piece is that for us to go into a taxing area, it must also be contiguous.



This college presently draws students from other surrounding counties, such as Refugio, Jim Wells, and Calhoun. This is due to our unique and exceptional programs and the convenience or needs of the students.

The college is financially very strong and our public documents are transparent and published in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report and receive independent annual audits. I want to be clear: the budget and enrollment projections and economic impact was prepared based on actual historical data, revenue and expenses, and projections from professionals. The budget was prepared to show sustainability, that the center is financially viable for the long term. The revenue and expenses are projected as an additional site that provides for instruction within the space only being used primarily for instruction. This is also looking at adding one location.

The College's total operating budget for 2019-20 was over \$107.9 million and with over four revenue primary sources. This site will have primarily tuition and fees for the first few years and then state reimbursement will become available. Therefore, the percentage of funding to equal 100% cannot be the same or compared to the College as a whole. Projections in the grant application for the economic diversification, population growth, and student enrollment come from experts, such as Dr. Jim Lee, Professor and Economist of Texas A&M Corpus Christi, and facilities programming and consulting firms.

Facilities Programming provides demographic and enrollment projections for Del Mar College and many other colleges and universities across the state. The budget that is in the grant application makes assumptions based upon enrollment projections provided by Facilities Programming. Using the adult population between the ages of 18 to 64 within the proximity to the Little

Bay Primary School, they projected enrollment. The amount of tuition and fees is an approximate average of out-of-district tuition and fees assuming students attend part-time, take eight credit hours of either credit or continuing education courses for two semesters. This is based upon actual historical statistical data on our student population. These projections are conservative and on an annual basis. Using this information, we prepared a balanced budget for revenue and expenses to pay operational expenses and salaries specific to this center.

The question has come up regarding the amount of state reimbursement in the projections beginning year three. This number was provided by the Comptroller of Accounting for the college and is a conservative projection. The College receives that funding from the state appropriations on a two-year or biennium basis for the number of contact hours actually taught during even numbered years. The reimbursement rate varies from approximately \$2 to \$6 per contact hour. This is for continuing education or college credit. The rate that was used in this calculation was \$2.67 per contact hour. Most of the courses that will be taught over here will earn more than that rate because they will be in the career and technical fields.

One key point about the pro forma budget is that expenses tied to instruction and operations can be covered. It is important to point out that this proposed site is for a center and not a campus. This is significant because the overhead expenses tied to the College in a campus are significantly different than to a center. The College has two other centers, two campuses, and is presently building a third campus on the south side of Corpus Christi in Nueces County.

To summarize, the State funding and the percentage of total funds to the entire College does not proportionately relate to

the center. The center will primarily incur direct expenses ties to instruction. The total College budget includes overhead costs of administration, infrastructure, libraries, technology, and many other categories; therefore, the percentage of the whole College does not equate to the center. Del Mar College operates with a centralized administration, plant infrastructure, registration processes, and instructional oversight. Those indirect costs are not allocated to the center.

The purpose of this budget is for the Center and it adds only operational costs and instructional expenses. For example, the instructional deans for the proposed programs have already visited the site and honestly are very excited about opening up and providing additional instruction. They will oversee the programs as part of their existing jobs. Our administrators and program leaders oversee many different locations throughout the four and a half counties, and other centers, campuses, and usually up to 40 different high schools. This location will become part of their duties. We will assign a full-time director to this center as an administrator and instructors as needed, and those salaries are in the budget as well as the maintenance and operating expenses which are outlined.

Del Mar College is committed to serving Aransas County and the community through expanded workforce and entrepreneur programs. This is a great opportunity for the families in Aransas County to be able to attend college and continuing education locally. We are committed to continue working with the school district to offer dual credit courses at the high school and expand the opportunities for graduates and adults to expand their educational opportunities. And, at this time, I am open to answer questions if that is acceptable, Judge Mills.

**Judge Mills:** Actually, Lenora, we have so many people here who want to speak on this item so we need to press on. In fact, going forward today, we will need to limit everyone else to five minutes of speaking time. Plus, I know you have another meeting to go to so I thank you very much.

I'm going to go out of sequence here a bit because the superintendent of our school is here and he probably needs to get back to work. Dr. Garcia, would you like to come up and speak now?

**Dr. Joshua Garcia:** That I do. Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure being part of this community. I live in Rockport now and I am excited seeing all the great things that are happening in our area.

So, I'm just here to say just some factual and positive things about the partnership that's being developed right now through the EDC and the opportunities of the courses, the dual credit college courses expansion opportunities for our students in the area. Why is this important? Dual credit allows for a smoother transition between high school and college, giving first-hand exposure to college-level work while still in high school.

The partnership also includes an expansion of opportunities in the career and technical fields that are needed to succeed in life. These technical skills and academic skills are employable skills that are needed and will apply to the needs of our employers in Aransas County. And, that will continue to help our county and our community be a great place to visit, stay, and work. Thank you for your time.

**Emily Martinez,** Coastal Bend Council of Government, indicated the COG's support of this particular workforce center project as it is in line with their workforce development goals within

their comprehensive economic development strategy. Workforce development and diversifying workforce development in our region will be key to helping us continue to be successful and to continue to protect our communities from not only natural disasters but also economic development disasters as well. Diversifying our employment options and ensuring that we have adequate labor for the future will allow this region to continue to grow and be well-protected against the economic impacts that could effectively impact us in the future. Thank you.

**Brad Chilcote** spoke specifically about gifted youth - both here and in his previous residency in Rockwall County - who move elsewhere after they graduate due to lack of opportunities for them to stay. He applauds the County for trying to keep the infrastructure and the educational resources going here for the growth that we all expect here. He believes that post-secondary education, workforce development, business growth, and entrepreneurship is as important to us as our infrastructure needs. He thinks we would should want to keep our top youth here in the County, to have them be able to stay and have promising careers here. And, he cannot think of a better alternative to this current proposal for us that would be more economical in supporting quality workforce development and entrepreneurship. Thank you for your time.

**John Jackson:** Judge and Commissioners, as you know, I am the Chairman of the EDC Exploratory Committee for Workforce Development.

Today is a critical vote for the future of Aransas County. A positive vote to "once again" approve the 1.7 million EDA Grant for a Workforce Development Center will set in motion what so many people now, and in the future generations, will benefit from, and that is the chance to be trained and educated right

here in Rockport. And it will not only benefit high school students but also so many others after high school who want to upgrade their skills, knowledge or even if they're already in the workforce, to upgrade to a higher paying job.

This will also help our local businesses who will have better trained employees and one of the best benefits: students who graduate from here will more likely be able to remain here. And it also helps all of us who are in economic development to further diversify our local economy. Even retired people will benefit, not just those getting started in a career.

In addition, we are so fortunate to have one of the best community colleges in the state as a key partner and who is willing and excited to help make this happen. Lenora Keas from Del Mar, who you heard from earlier, grew up in the County and School system and I consider her a stakeholder just like the rest of us who live here.

Everyone who has supported us so far is really counting on you. I sure would like to see a unanimous vote today. Our community is strongly in favor of this opportunity. What kind of signal would we be sending if we turn down a \$1.7 million grant that so many have supported?

- To backtrack some, the need for a workforce development center came out loud and clear in Post Harvey public meetings. It also was recommended in our Long Term Recovery plan, the Coastal Bend Council of Governments Plan, the City of Rockport Comprehensive Plan, the GLO Plan, the Coastal Bend Innovation Center and IC2 UT Austin Community Sessions held a year ago and their Communities as a Start-Up Plan follow up this year, and on and on.

- What signal would we be sending to our students and their parents?
- How about the lost opportunity for our local citizens out there who would have been able to upgrade skills right here in town to get a job or maybe a better one?
- What about the signal to the 25 donors who stepped up and committed \$438,000 of cash and in-kind services from individuals, businesses and local foundations? We accomplished that in just two weeks last summer for 100% of the match required without the county having to match any funds at all.
- What about the good faith consistently shown by current owner of Little Bay Primary who has extended this option several times, to his own financial detriment, because of the delays, and on top of that additionally donating \$11,500 to pay costs that the County would normally have had to pay for environmental work? All of this was done by him and his trustees in good faith.
- What signal would this send to all the strong endorsement letters from all other public entities here, the City, the Navigation District, Fulton, and ACISD, and the favors we asked and received from our State Representative Geanie Morrison, State Senator Lois Kolkhorst, US Senator Ted Cruz and US Congressman Michael Cloud?
- What about the unanimous support of our Local Government Corporation?
- How about Texas A&M Corpus Christi and the Coastal Bend Innovation Center and IC2 UT Austin, all which led to the TEAM Concept for workforce development center and the grant application to the EDA?

- How about the dozens of support letters we received from our regional businesses and partners?
- And the list goes on...

Ever since last June, this project has been on the agenda for some kind of a vote several times and has actually already been approved once, and most every time unanimously, by this court: It has been discussed numerous times.

If we don't move forward I can't even imagine the black eye we will have as the result of turning down this grant, and that will not be received well the next time we need help.

The county's primary role is limited to that of a landlord. The Del Mar MOU approved by this Court months ago clearly spells that out. Let's unite this county on this Workforce Development Center Grant again, once and for all, by a unanimous vote today. Thank You.

**Kristie Rutledge:** I have lived in this county for 18 years. I have read the entire grant package and I understand that commissioners have had this opportunity as well this last week, thanks to our new County Attorney.

The EDA requires nine-year oversight after construction is complete and will retain ownership in the project for 20 years. Within 20 years, if the property is sold or not otherwise used for the purpose defined in the grant the EDA will require the County to pay back \$1.7 million or their share of the market value of the property.

The County and Del Mar assumes in the grant application a population of 52,000 in the 18 to 64 age range from a multi-county region as potential students at the workforce development center. The student population included in the



grant application is from as far away as Calhoun County, which is nearly 60 miles outside of Aransas County.

Aransas County population in the targeted age range is not large enough to sustain the operations of the workforce development center. According to demographics presented in the grant application, Aransas County population trend is in decline and is expected to continue to decline over the next few years. However, in contradiction to the declining population trends, when I spoke to Ms. Keas last week, she confirmed to me that Del Mar's student attendance projections are based on an increased population in Aransas County. The County and Del Mar assumes 800 students will attend in the first year of operations and that attendance will increase 20% each year up to 1,800 students per year.

The County and Del Mar project operation costs of \$1.45 million in the first year. That's at a tuition rate at an average of \$1,815 per student. The workforce Development Center will offer primarily short-term classes such as training and continuing education, which are not typically eligible for financial assistance or student loans. The workforce development center emphasizes classes related to arts and crafts, pottery and painting, and entrepreneur classes for artists, which are historically offered at the Rockport Center for the Arts and generate income for their members.

The Workforce Development Center also emphasizes dual credit, which is currently being offered at the high school. Del Mar will not be eligible for state funding for two years as Ms. Keas explained, and the typical state allotment under Del Mar's current in district taxing is 15.8%. And, this is what is stated in the grant. The projected budget for the Aransas County Workforce Center has an amount of 33% expected from the

state in the third year and over 40% in the fifth year. If Del Mar only received the 15.8% it states it expects from the state in the third year for our Workforce Development Center, the budget shortfalls will be \$500,000 and increasing in the fourth and fifth year. And, this is according to the projected budget put forth.

If Del Mar determines at some point that Aransas County's Workforce Development Center is not financially sustainable, the options put forth by Ms. Keas to me are to sell the property and pay back the grant. Or, the County keeps the property and joins Del Mar's Junior College Taxing District. Or, the County gives the property to Del Mar and joins Del Mar's Junior College Taxing District. This is also confirmed by Mark Wagon, Board Member of the Aransas County Partnership Economic Development Association who will manage the property along with the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce.

Commissioners, you should not be gambling with taxpayer monies. Just because a grant is available for construction and acquisition of property does not mean the project is sustainable. I urge you to be sure that this project is sustainable and that we are not headed for an eventual vote to approve a taxing district. Our population is too poor and too small to absorb this.

If classes are needed for the younger populations in Calhoun County and Refugio County, then those classes should be offered there. Refugio and Calhoun County students will go to Junior College in Victoria or Del Mar in Corpus Christi. They will not choose a small school, a 12-room school, in Aransas County. I can assure you this. I have four children and they have all gone to college either online or have moved away.

So, I think it's great for Aransas County students to be offered this opportunity and currently 235 students were enrolled in 2019 in Del Mar's programs. And, those that choose to go and continue their education have already made plans to do so.

I'm not sure that setting us up for a potential junior college taxing district outweighs the risk versus the benefit in Aransas County. It looks like another grant application based on large projected growth. Thank you so much. Vote no against item 10 and make sure it's financially sustainable.

**Judge Mills:** Also, we have seven emails that I'm not going to read because they're all positive, in favor of this item.

**Commissioner Laubach:** I have an email to read from Kathy Kane. It's brief.

I'll start with Little Bay. I don't believe you should spend \$30,000 to continue the option on this building. It has been empty for years with little interest. Don't throw away any more of the taxpayers' money. If it is meant to be, the building will be available if and when it is needed.

Regarding the workforce grant, I am 100% supportive of offering non college bound students and residents options to learn a trade. I applaud the county for going out and asking for all the money you could get post hurricane Harvey but I question the wisdom of this one. How will we sustain this venture? What happens if we don't pull in the number of students as proposed in the proposal? What happens to the building? Will it just be empty in 3 to 4 years? What happens to the grant money if this venture with Del Mar fails? How will it be paid back?

It is wonderful we received this grant but you have to ask if this is the gift that keeps on taking. Please vote against both items on the agenda.

**Commissioner Rousseau:** Judge Mills, may I say something on this item?

**Commissioner Laubach:** Also, when you finish, I'd like to add a couple of questions.

**Commissioner Rousseau:** The last time this was brought up, I did vote against it and I said that I had concerns.

Those people who know me know that I have served on the Education Foundation Board here for two terms with Suzanne and several other very committed members, we brought in those grants to improve the welding program to state-of-the-art and the culinary arts program. I am a huge supporter of education.

I also, when I first moved to Corpus Christi, was active with 4UCC and we brought in a four-year campus to that community even though we heard dire statements about what would happen to Texas A&M Kingsville. None of that came to pass.

The concerns I had were that I did not want the resources that we had developed at the high school to be cannibalized by this program, and I spoke with Ms. Keas at length last week, I've also spoken with Ms. Hutchinson who's on the Del Mar board, and I've been assured that that is not going to happen. That, if anything, they will work to improve those and if we eventually outgrow the resources we have there, they will do something to expand but what we have in place will be used to the utmost.

I was also concerned with some of the expenses that weren't clearly defined and as I had it presented to me before this meeting - well that was all very clear in the grant paperwork.

I just received that grant paperwork this past weekend. I've been reading these pages all through the weekend. I couldn't do an essay test on it but I certainly know a lot more and after talking with Ms. Keas and reading the paperwork I am very comfortable that Del Mar will pay the operational costs, the salaries including mowing and signage. And, the County will be responsible for insuring the building and the eventual replacement of the roof and HVAC systems - those two items are both new having been recently replaced after Harvey. With that stated, I have no reservation about approving this. Thank you.

**Commissioner Laubach:** And, I'd like to echo - really endorse - everything that Commissioner Rousseau has just said. I actually voted for this last August whenever it was that it first came up primarily because I saw so much community support for it. Even though I had some private reservations it seemed to me that the people with the money put their money where their mouth was. My objection two weeks ago was that there were documents I had not been able to get. I have since then been provided with copies of the grant and all related grant sort of ancillary documentation. I've spent much of the last three or four days, hours and hours on the phone with Lenora Keas, with Kim Foutz, and with four or five or six different constituents who are worried. The primary worry is what do we do if this thing somehow can't make budget, are we going to get a claw back under the grant terms? My concerns on that, I mean I can't say that's a zero risk situation but it seems to me that we've been presented with good enough information to conclude that we're not likely to face a failure and, if we do, we'll have this valuable piece of real estate to make ourselves whole with. I just can't see that there's enough risk here of a claw back to justify overriding a very strong community support for this workforce training center.

**Judge Mills:** All right. That being said, anything else?

**Commissioner Chaney:** One quick thing. First of all, I apologize for not being here last week. I had a child that was sick and I did not just simply couldn't make it. The second thing is, we keep talking about dual credit and that's awesome, that's incredible, but this is primarily for people that are out of high school that are looking to improve their educational lot in life or their community lot in life. This is a very good thing. I taught in Aransas Pass for five years and was very in the Career and Technology Program over there. There were several kids in the program and whenever they left high school, they started working at more than the principal of the high school was making. This is a great thing. And, with that, I'll call for the question. Motion carried unanimously. It is so ordered.

11. A motion was made by Commissioner Chaney and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve the First Amendment to the Option to Purchase Real Estate Contract, dated August 24, 2020, to extend the option period by three months and to authorize the expenditure of additional option fees not to exceed \$18,000 for the property located at 2000 Highway 35 N for a potential workforce development and entrepreneurship center. **Mark Wagnon** gave a brief outline of the option extension agreement. The proposed amendment extends the time to exercise the option of what we generally call the Little Bay property from February 14 to May 14, 2020. The amendment also provides for the accrual of \$6,000 per month during the extended option period, increasing the maximum accrued option fee to \$53,000 if the option is not exercised or if it expires. The original option agreement provided for an initial option fee of \$20,000 not applied to the purchase price. That is still the case in the

amendment. The remaining option fees of \$33,000 are applied to the purchase price upon exercise of the option or closing of the purchase. All other terms of the option agreement remain the same, unchanged but for the extended time and the accrual of \$6,000 a month for the three months which, again, is applied to the close purchase price at closing. I would also like to remind you as Mr. Jackson did - that the sellers donated \$11,500 towards the environmental and appraisal fees further reducing the acquisition cost to the County. Private citizens raised over \$400,000 to match the funds. To not approve the amendment to extend the option, in my opinion, makes no sense because then you have no property at which to build a workforce training center. Any questions? Thank you.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

12. A motion was made by Commissioner Casterline and seconded by Commissioner Rousseau to approve termination of State Contract with the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) for the County's Texas Community Development Block Grant (TxCDBG) #7218085 Doughty-Mathis Colonia sewer improvements grant—including repayment of \$52,000 in expensed grant funds and de-obligation of remaining funds. **Commissioner Casterline** then gave a little history on the grant and similar problems earlier. We had some problems like this one in the past, but we were always able to move from one street to the other and pick up the people that would actually sign up to hook up. The problem that created this is we have the people in the area but because of the economic losses from Harvey, they don't want to put the money up to pay the minimum fee to the city for sewer and are just electing to stay with the septic systems that they have. But, it looks as if the ones who did want the service and would put up the money are going to be able to be absorbed into other

nearby projects. Then **Rachel Thomas** from GrantWorks basically agreed with what Commissioner Casterline had said.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

13. A motion was made by Judge Mills and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve accepting and awarding the mosquito control bids. Valerie Gonzalez read the awarded bids into the record: Verseris for Biomist 30+30, Mineral Oil, and Altoside Briquettes; ADAPCO for Malathion; Target Specialty Products for Wet Soluable Powder; and Clarke Mosquito Control for Mosquitomist, Summit BTI Briquettes, and Fourstar briquettes. Question. Motion carried unanimously. It is so ordered.

#### PLANNING & BUDGET

14. A motion was made by Judge Mills and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve the January 2021 Indigent Healthcare Report as given by Treasurer Alma Cartwright. Question. Motion carried unanimously. It is so ordered.
15. A motion was made by Commissioner Laubach and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve the changes and updates to the County Treasurer's job descriptions for all positions and change pay groups as follows: Chief Deputy Treasurer - from 16-5 to 17-3, no new monies; Deputy Treasurer-Payroll Clerk - from 13-9 to 15-5, no new monies; Deputy Treasurer-Assistant - from 12-6 to 14-2, no new monies; Deputy Treasurer-Hotel Occupancy Clerk - from 12-1 to 14-1, \$3,320 additional wages for 2022 budget; Deputy Treasurer-Indigent Healthcare Service Clerk - one position from 10-9 to 13-3, no new monies and one position from 10-7 to 13-1, no new monies.



Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

16. A motion was made by Commissioner Chaney and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve a pay group change for the JP2 Pre-Trial Supervision Office & Court Clerk from group 11 to group 12, to bring the position more in line with probationary salaries in the general market.

Question. Motion carried on a 4 to 1 vote, with Commissioner Rousseau dissenting.

It is so ordered.

17. A motion was made by Commissioner Casterline and seconded by Commissioner Rousseau to approve the recommended replacement appointments to the Personnel Policy Committee as follows: Amanda Oster, County Attorney; Jacky Cockerham, County Auditor; and Jennifer Osteen, Assistant County Attorney. **Alma Cartwright** asked for her payroll clerk, Jennie Simmons, to be included as a member of the committee as well. Commissioner amended his motion to include her and Commissioner Rousseau provided the needed second.

Question. Amended Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

18. A motion was made by Commissioner Chaney and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve the creation of a Temporary Jailer position to allow jailors to continue their employment with Aransas County while attending Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) peace officer certification classes. This would be an on-call position that could be utilized during periods when the jail is short-staffed, which could help save some of the overtime budget.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

19. A motion was made by Judge Mills and seconded by Commissioner Casterline to approve emergency budget amendment to the 2021 Aransas County Budget to add budget items for the County's Asset Forfeiture Fund and Pre-trial Diversion Program - both are legally-required accounts but were omitted during were omitted during budget time.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

20. County Auditor Jacky Cockerham reported that there were several Budget Line Item Transfers needed for year-end budget clean-up. A motion was made by Judge Mills and seconded by Commissioner Chaney to approve the Budget Line Item Transfers for this period.

Question. Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

21. Ms. Cockerham also stated that our Accounts Payable and Payroll/Payroll Liabilities were all normal for the period. A motion was made by Judge Mills and seconded by Commissioner Rousseau to approve Accounts Payable and Payroll/Payroll Liabilities. Jacky Cockerham asked to bring two invoices that are not included in the packet that they received on Friday into the check run: 1)\$57,902.40 from PGAL and 2)\$95,325.80 from GrantWorks and it's very possible that we receive the funds from GLO prior to our next meeting and they have to be out within three (3) days, so I needed to bring them to your attention. Judge Mills made the amended motion to include the two checks and Commissioner Chaney provided the second.

Question. Amended Motion carried unanimously.

It is so ordered.

**REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS, ELECTED OFFICIALS & DEPARTMENT HEADS**

**WHEREIN NO ACTION WILL BE TAKEN**




**Judge Mills:** I do have something. As you noticed at the beginning of the meeting I had roll call. Starting next meeting, we'll have roll call for each vote. This is a good suggestion from legal.


**Commissioner Chaney:** I would like to bring up something. On Thursday of this past week or, I'm sorry, Wednesday, I got a call from a friend of mine that lives in Mason and she was in tears because they had just lost their courthouse to arson. The courthouse was built in 1908 and they lost it, lost everything. It was arson. They caught the arsonist and everything. But, I promised her that I would bring it to our Court so the Commissioners' Court of Aransas County could, perhaps, extend to the Commissioners' Court of Mason County our sincere sympathy and best wishes.

**Judge Mills:** And, yes, I got that same notification and our hearts go out to them.

**No further business presenting, the Court adjourned at 11:06 a.m.** on a motion duly made by Commissioner Rousseau and seconded by Commissioner Laubach.



  
C. H. "BURT" MILLS, JR., COUNTY JUDGE

  
CARRIE ARRINGTON, EX-OFFICIO CLERK

OF THE COMMISSIONERS' COURT

