

Commissioners review infrastructure and Music Center funding

Highway Superintendent exit announced

By Courtney H ughett Brown County Democrat

The Brown County Commissioners announced the resignation of Brown County Highway Superintendent Arec Burton at their Feb. 18 meeting. Burton will be leaving his position at the end of the month.

Commissioners acknowledged Burton's work during the meeting, noting his efforts in infrastructure planning and capital asset documentation. Burton provided several updates as part of his report, including completion of a long-awaited road and bridge capital asset list. With assistance from Clark Dietz, the highway department compiled updated valuation figures for county roads, bridges and right-of-way assets in accordance with State Board of Accounts requirements. Commissioner Kevin Patrick noted the auditor had requested updated asset numbers for several years, so it was good to finally have them done.

Burton also updated the board on ongoing bridge projects. On Mt. Moriah Road, crews will replace beams and bearings while reinstalling the existing deck after repairs. Some concrete work will be required once components are removed, and the department will install a temporary culvert to allow residents access during construction. Two additional bridges, North Shore and Owl Creek, will require more extensive work and will likely need to be bid out because of costs.

Burton reported that highway crews have been hauling gravel throughout the week as fluctuating winter weather continues to affect county roads. Three trucks have been hauling gravel out to deteriorating roads, while two trucks have been bringing material in. Burton noted that the combination of snow, thawing and rain has created challenging maintenance conditions typical for this time of year.

In other business, the commissioners discussed a potential funding shift involving the Brown County Music Center. Commissioner Ron Sanders proposed exploring whether innkeepers' tax revenue could be used to make the Music Center's mortgage payments. Sanders suggested that doing so could free up approximately \$665,637.96 for the county's general fund while maintaining the existing 75/25 revenue split. He emphasized that he was not asking for an immediate decision but wanted to present the concept to the Music Center board and discuss it further at a future administrative meeting. Commissioner Tim Clark responded that such a change would require coordination with the County Council and likely the Convention and Visitors Commission, and agreed the idea warranted additional discussion before any action.

The board also approved a contract with AT&T to upgrade dispatch center communication lines at the Law Enforcement Center. Commissioner Patrick explained that the county currently relies on outdated copper lines to handle rerouted 911 calls from neighboring counties. Because the technology is no longer supported, the county must transition to a fiberbased solution.

AT&T presented three options. Solution 1 would cost \$194.98 per month, totaling \$7,019.28 over three years. Solution 2 would cost \$628.60 per month, totaling \$22,629.60 over three years. The recommended Solution 3 would cost \$125 per month, totaling \$4,500 over three years. Termination fees decrease over time under each option. For Solution 3, the termination cost would be \$2,250 in the first year, \$1,500 in the second year and \$750 in the final year of the agreement. Commissioner Patrick said the selected option is used in other counties, requires no additional equipment maintenance cost and will utilize the county's existing network infrastructure. The commissioners voted unanimously to approve Solution 3.

An ordinance establishing usage policies for county-owned vehicles was introduced. The ordinance is intended to clarify procedures and address IRS rules regarding potential taxable benefits if county vehicles are used for

personal purposes. Commissioners voted to table the ordinance to allow additional public review and directed that it be posted on the county website.

Commissioners' Administrative Assistant Theresa Cobian provided an update on the Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation (OOR) grant program, stating that applications closed Feb. 17. Homeowners selected by a third-party administrator will begin receiving notification calls Feb. 27, with income verification scheduled to begin in March. Cobian emphasized that homeowner selection is handled by an outside entity and that neither commissioners nor county staff participate in choosing recipients.

Cobian also announced that Corey Frost has been hired as the county's new Emergency Management Agency director and began work Monday under the commissioners.

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