

Commissioners to purchase voting machines for county

Written by

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At the recent Washington County Commissioners meeting held on March 3, the group made a decision to purchase 19 used voting machines for \$131,420, from HARP Election Services, based out of Lexington, Ky.

The current county voting machines will not be state certified after the 2010 election.

The machines were originally used in Hawaii and due to a legal battle in that state, HARP made the choice to take back the machines a re-sale at a discounted price.

"This discounted price will not be available for long, I simply just came across it a few days ago," said Washington County Clerk Shirley Batt. "I am trying to save money for the county, new machines could run up to \$350,000."

According to Batt, the warranties that come with the used machines are equivalent to new machines and the first payment to HARP will not occur until January 2011.

This will give the Clerk time to budget for the purchase and bring the amount up at the county budget hearings later this year.

Commissioner Sullivan had a concern the ballot transfer bags that will need to be purchased for \$17,100, which is included in the total price above. Batt stated, "That the votes have to be secured when in transfer to the Courthouse from voting site."

The voting machines will replace the prior paper ballot machine with a touch screen and each of the 17 polling places will have one machine, with two machines to spare if needed.

The motion passed 3-0 with a few questions that will need to be answered.

The first is by County Attorney Tom Scifres to make sure the county meets certain rules, requirements and regulations on a purchase of this size.

"We do not want to see ourselves in the same situation as Hawaii," Scifres said.

The second concern came from Commissioner Dave Brown regarding the maintenance fee.

On the proposed quote from HARP to the county, it stated one year maintenance fee of \$2,950.

"We need to see if that amount has to be paid each year, that seems like a high amount," Brown said.

Batt will move forward with the purchase after the concerns are worked out with the company.

Melvin Beeker and Eric Hart representing, RQAW, spoke with the Commissioners regarding the county's upcoming bridge inspections.

The two said they would work hard for the county to keep the costs down, work side-by-side with the county and work hard to make the most of the county money.

"The cost for bridge inspections are increasing substantially with more paperwork, more checks and new data bases, it will be hard to meet the same price as your last contract, due to those issues," Hart said.

According to Sullivan, the last contract was for 130 bridges and a total cost of \$109,000.

The Commissioner thanked the gentlemen for coming and will keep them in mind when it comes time for bridge inspections.

Douglas Stephenson with Westler and Associates gave a report of Bridge 113 in Fredericksburg to the Commissioners.

"Everything is going fairly smooth and we are starting to make progress and the dismantling of the bridge will be in a few weeks," he said.

According to Brown, this bridge is in his district, but he has turned it over to Sullivan due to the time of almost 10 years since this project has started and she was more familiar with the

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project.

"We have done more in the last six months than we have done in 10 years since the start of this project," Sullivan said.

With the agreement of the commissioners, Stephenson will only report to the board once monthly, except for May, June and July, when most of the work will be completed.

Bridge 113 will be dismantled piece by piece, number by number, and re-used as a walk-way in Hamilton County over the White River.

In other business, Ron King expressed his concerns over the Planning Commission and individuals rights to their land.

Also, the final real estate lease was signed by the commissioners between the county and Knox County EMS.

Sullivan informed the board that the Sparksville project was not eligible for the grant through Baron Hill's office.

The commissioners reviewed the 17 parcels that did not sell at the tax sale in February and only saw two parcels that could be of any use for the county.

They will check more into those parcels along with highway Superintendent Rick Graves.

"I am always looking ahead to the future, we are growing and we always need pace," Sullivan said.

Two parcels were redeemed by the property owner leaving 15.

The matter was tabled until further information is obtained by SRI, the company that handles the county's tax sales.

Brown relayed to Sullivan and John Mishler that he attended a meeting between IDEM and local officials concerning the eyesore at the Child Craft Property and he hopes the situation will be resolved.

Mishler also briefed the board on the first meeting held by the Planning Commission.

"This meeting was a very productive meeting," he said. "A plan of action was made and goals were set. The county will be better off if we let this happen and then give it time to work."

Sullivan read a thank you letter received by Washington County SOAR!

Highway Superintendent Rick Graves gave a report regarding his department and said the cost of material has risen again to \$54 a ton and will keep rising.

According to Graves the additional help that was needed to get the county roads open after the recent snow storms cost the county \$28,000 and he thanked all the volunteers who helped.

The county highway department also purchased another 500 tons of material for this year and will be ready if another storm comes our way.

The commissioner's next meeting will take place on March 17 at 3 p.m.