

Grayson County gives TAPS \$20,000 to fund transition



JERRIE WHITELEY / HERALD DEMOCRAT Denison Councilman Ken Brawley talks to the Grayson County Commissioners Court about TAPS Public Transit Tuesday.

By Jerrie Whiteley
Herald Democrat

Grayson County Commissioners agreed to give \$20,000 to TAPS Public Transit Tuesday to help pay for someone to overlook the process of getting proposals to get an outside transportation company to run the organization.

Grayson County Judge Bill Magers said he wanted Fred Gilliam to be the person to walk TAPS through that process, which he said should take about 60 days to complete.

Magers, who is also vice chairman of the TAPS board of directors, said Gilliam has a long history in transportation and is seen by those in the field as being “beyond ethical reproach” and “a straight shooter.” The Grayson County judge said four transportation companies have expressed an interest in submitting a proposal — First Transit, Total Transit, McDonald Transit and Transdev. He said First Transit, which is currently providing financial oversight for TAPS, wants to take part in the request for proposals progress so it could not oversee that process.

The comments came after Magers said TAPS currently has access to \$640,000 in grants from North Central Texas Council of Governments for services that have already been provided. Just how much of that TAPS will be able to draw down, Magers said, remains to be seen.

“One of the problems that TAPS has, one of the many problems that TAPS has, is that it has spent without drawing down the reimbursement for the money spent,” Magers said.

He said that amount was about double what he was expecting to hear might be available for services TAPS provided in Wise and Collin counties. Magers said he is optimistic that the amount that TAPS gets will be close to that number, if not dead on.

“A city council member in McKinney in open record made the comment that McKinney had received \$2.1 million in services for \$100,000 in payments,” Magers said.

He said the Texas Department of Transportation had requested that TAPS do a reconciliation of about \$900,000 in monies. TxDOT, he said, has said that its officials are cautiously optimistic about the process after reviewing about \$600,000 of the requests for reimbursement for that \$900,000 and they seem clean.

“This is not new money,” Magers said. “This is money that has already been received. But if you are concerned about whether or not the money has been spent appropriately, this is a pretty strong signal.”

Magers said when everything shakes out in the end, there will be a difference between what TAPS has spent and what it can legitimately claim for reimbursement.

“There is going to be a gap,” he said.

He said the TxDOT official he spoke with assured him that instead of asking for that money back, TxDOT would be more likely to just reduce the amount of money it pays TAPS going forward until that gap has been closed.

“The good news there is that there is currently \$302,000 in a request for reimbursement sitting on TxDOT’s desk right now that is payroll and it looks positive,” Magers said.

He said the \$640,000 from NCTCOG and the \$302,000 from TxDOT could leave TAPS with around \$940,000 to spend. TAPS owes the IRS \$370,000 and \$400,000 in past-due payroll, which would leave TAPS with about \$200,000.

Magers said Grayson County is now the leader of TAPS, noting the cities of Sherman and Denison have contributed a total of \$30,000 to TAPS. He then introduced Sherman Councilman Terrance Steele and Denison Councilman Ken Brawley, both of whom are also on the TAPS board.

“It may not appear, but we have a plan for its survivability,” Brawley said. “We cannot guarantee that survivability, but we do have a plan in place.” Brawley said the \$20,000 that the county gives to TAPS will help it get an 80 percent match from the state.

The TAPS board is scheduled to meet Wednesday at 2:30 p.m. at 3400 Texoma Parkway in Sherman. The meeting’s agenda calls for the board to receive an update on the organizational status of the transit company and to hold a closed executive session. Wednesday’s meeting will be the first for the board since the announcement of additional layoffs that have reduced TAPS’ staff to four positions.

- See more at: <http://heralddemocrat.com/news/local/grayson-county-gives-taps-20000-fund-transition#sthash.4eLma1hb.dpuf>