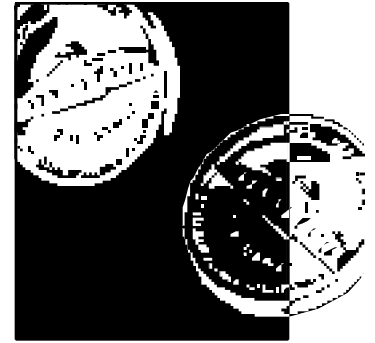


The FORUM

Editor: Cathie Carr
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This issue of the forum is being prepared to help you be an informed voter. Please make use of the information resources available to you and make your own decisions on the issues and bills presented here. It's important for you to vote! For additional information on the September 13 election go to www.escapees.com/website/voterinfo.htm

Important Voting Information Issue

Trailer Tax Repeal on the Ballot

SJR 25, the trailer tax repeal bill that amends the constitution, has been placed on the September 13, 2003, ballot as Proposition 5. This proposition, if passed by the voters, will amend the exemption language in the constitution to match the tax code. It also clearly indicates that travel trailers not substantially affixed to real property shall be exempted. Once this amendment is passed, it will seal the retroactive language in the enabling legislation and allow for refunds to be processed.

Proposition 5

Proposition 5 is rather awkwardly described and worded on the ballot. The description reads: "The constitutional amendment to authorize the legislature to exempt from ad valorem taxation travel trailers not held or used for the production of income." The summary reads: "Section 1(d), Article VIII, Texas Constitution, currently authorizes the legislature to exempt from ad valorem taxes certain tangible personal property, but excludes the legislature from exempting tangible personal property structures used or occupied as residential dwellings. The proposed amendment amends Subsection (d) to exclude from being exempt only those structures used or occupied as residential dwellings that are substantially affixed to real estate. The amendment repeals Section 1(j), Article VIII, Texas Constitution, which authorizes the legislature to allow a taxing unit, other than a school district, to exempt travel trailers from ad valorem taxes."

Approval of the proposed amendment will eliminate the mandatory school taxes on travel trailers and will allow them to be treated in the same category as a motor vehicle or other noncommercial personal property. This bill will rectify the unintended effect of the 2001 amendment and end the double tax on travel trailers.

Polk County has already taken all trailer owners off the tax rolls and is working out procedures for refunds. They have shown a clear intent to abide by the repeal in advance of the constitutional amendment. After all, the changes to the tax code have already been signed into law. Still, it will be crucial to get Proposition 5 passed to fully ensure the forward motion of the refund process. Escapees RV Club rarely suggests to its members how they should vote, but because this tax is what we feel is an unfair RV-specific tax, we are advising all RVers to take time to vote in the September 13 election and vote "Yes" on Proposition 5!

A Message from Polk County Judge John Thompson

As you know, the upcoming Special Election date, September 13, 2003, brings with it the opportunity for a constitutional resolution of the trailer tax issue with the passage of Proposition 5—exempting from ad valorem taxation those travel trailers that are not held or used for the production of income. The Escapees organization has done an excellent job of informing you, the members, and working with local government and legislators to resolve this issue. We, in Polk County, were glad to be a part of the effort.

Another important issue for Polk County on the September ballot will be the Bond Election in which we are seeking voter approval to issue \$12 million for the construction of a Judicial Center adjacent to the Courthouse and to fund sorely needed improvements at the Law Enforcement Center, Tax Office, Sub-Courthouses, Precinct Offices and the County's Temporary Office Facility.

I feel strongly about this bond election being the appropriate time and approach for addressing the County's facility needs. Unlike the 2001 bond issue, in which we sought to construct a Judicial complex that would service Polk County well into its future, this plan has been scaled down to meet the immediate and pressing need to provide courtroom space for our two District Courts, the County Court at Law, our Justice Courts operating in Livingston and special courts being held on a regular basis. The Courthouse itself, built in 1924 to serve a population of 16,000 and presently housing twelve Departments, simply cannot accommodate the current volume of judicial activity. The Voters' approval of this Bond Issue will allow the construction of a facility that will provide sufficient Courtroom space, secure building and courtroom access for the safe transport of prisoners, safe accommodation of jurors and the public, compliance with ADA access requirements and sufficient office space for Court related departments.

The funds will also allow us to make desperately needed repairs to other County facilities. Bond funding will allow functional and ADA required improvements. It will allow roof repair/replacement at four County buildings. It will replace outdated and inefficient HVAC systems and rid older buildings of materials identified as containing asbestos.

Taking advantage of a currently favorable financial market will allow Polk County to sell these bonds at an extremely low rate, fund the proposed construction and improvements, meet the resulting debt requirement without increasing the County's tax rate—and repay the debt in 15 years.

I would ask that you give strong consideration to the needs Polk County faces as you vote in September. As always, we appreciate your community involvement and your interest.

Sincerely,



John P. Thompson
County Judge, Polk County, Texas

County Bond Issue

In order to help you better understand the bond issue, we have permission to reprint this excerpt from a news report on July 24, 2003, from the *Polk County Enterprise*.

“LIVINGSTON—A county bond issue will share the ballot with 22 proposed amendments to the state constitution in an election to be held Sept. 13. The Polk County Commissioner’s Court voted unanimously to call the bond election. Voters will be asked to vote for or against the issuance of bonds not to exceed \$12 million.

“Combining the county bond issue with the statewide amendments on the ballot will save the cost of a separate election. If voters approve the issue, funds not to exceed \$10 million will be used to construct a 56,300-square-foot judicial center on county-owned property immediately south of the courthouse square.

“The center would include two 75-seat courtrooms for district courts, a 36-seat courtroom for justice-of-the-peace courts and a 150-seat courtroom that would be used primarily for jury assembly, but could also be used during high-profile trials that draw large crowds. It would also house all court-related agencies, including the district clerk’s and district attorney’s offices and the court department of the county clerk’s office.

“The proposed judicial center is scaled back from the 79,500-square foot, \$13.4 million facility rejected by voters in May 2001.

“The remaining amount of the bond issue, not to exceed \$2 million, would go toward capital improvements to existing county-owned facilities. The tentative schedule of renovations would include work at the Dunbar Complex and gym; the Regional Health Center; Polk County Law Enforcement Center; the old hospital building, which now houses several county offices; road and bridge offices in Precincts 2, 3 and 4; Onalaska and Corrigan sub-court-houses; tax office and data processing.

“Several county officials whose offices will be impacted by the project spoke on behalf of the issue. No one spoke against the issue, although there was discussion of dividing the judicial center and renovation work into two separate issues on the ballot. The court opted to combine both parts of the project into a single issue not to exceed \$12 million.”

Upcoming Election Information

September 13, 2003, Election

The constitutional amendment, Proposition 5 (SJR 25), will be on this ballot. (See page 1.) Please take time to vote!

- Aug. 27Early voting begins
- Sept. 5.....Last day to apply for ballot by mail
- Sept. 9.....Last day of early voting
- Sept. 13.....Election day

Important Voter Resources

Applications fax line: 936-327-6874
County Clerk/Voting Info.: 936-327-6804 or 936-327-6805
Texas State Elections: 800-252-VOTE (8683)
www.escapees.com/website/voterinfo.htm

Voting By Mail

When you apply for a ballot by mail, you must first request an application. Once your application is received by the County Clerk, a ballot will then be mailed to you.

The ballot must be mailed to an address outside of Polk County, unless you are 65 (or older) or disabled (no proof necessary); however, you must indicate your reason for applying for an absentee ballot, e.g. disabled, away traveling, etc.

Escapees Mail Service members who will be traveling out of state may have their ballots sent to the following address:

Your Name
c/o Escapees RV Club
PO Box 1578
Shepherd, TX 77371

This special box is for Escapees members who will be away traveling and do not have a secure temporary mailing address that they are comfortable using. Escapees Mail Service agents will forward these ballots to you, but it is important to recognize that this can cause an additional time delay. It is always best to have your applications and ballots sent directly to you if at all possible.

Remember, you must request your application first, send it back to the County Clerk, receive your ballot, and mail it back to the County Clerk (see address below for returning ballots), all before the election deadline.

Mail application requests and return ballots to:

Early Voting Clerk
PO Drawer 2119
Livingston, TX 77351-9401