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Winter road repair work tops Pulaski Fiscal Court agenda

By JANIE SLAVEN Commonwealth Journal

Pulaski County Fiscal Court met in special session Wednesday morning to close out necessary business for February.

As with the first meeting of the month (Feb. 13), much of the discussion was devoted to road issues.

Picking up from that last meeting's discussion over purchasing a new piece of equipment which the road department can use for pothole repair, the court split 4-1 on the purchase of a Falcon six-ton asphalt recycler.

"I know we've had a serious problem after this winter with the freeze-thaw cycle," Judge-Executive Steve Kelley said. "We've got a lot of potholes, probably more than I've seen in my three years...We're going to have a busy time trying to fill these holes over the next few months."

Magistrate Jimmy Wheeldon reported on a demonstration he had seen of the machine. "I think it'd be a time-saver," he said, explaining that now crews lose about 90 minutes per trip if they have to return to the road garage after running out of paving material.

Wheeldon added that the equipment currently being used could be retained to double-up on projects. "The way my roads have broken down the last three weeks, they could spend the next month on mine and never get caught up," he said.

Magistrate Mike Strunk agreed but added that accountability is needed "for fixing [potholes] the right way."

Deputy Judge Dan Price added that the proposed equipment would allow crews to use asphalt (hot mix) in the winter months rather than chip and seal (cold mix).

But Magistrate Glenn Maxey remained unconvinced, asking if the officials had looked at other types of equipment.

Wheeldon said they had looked at the "total patcher" (also discussed two weeks ago) but it seemed cost prohibitive.

Price explained that the total patcher would require a CDL driver with a single-axle dump truck as well as a type of rock material called "washed 8s" — which are unavailable in the winter months.

The total patcher also costs some \$150,000 as opposed to approximately \$29,000 for the recycler.

Strunk made the motion to purchase the recommended six-ton recycler, with a second from Magistrate Mike Wilson. Maxey was the sole magistrate to oppose the purchase.

Strunk asked if it would be possible to reconsider purchasing the total patcher if the recycler doesn't work out. He said that, like Maxey, he's lobbied for that piece of equipment for years.

"I like the price of this one better than the total patcher,"

Magistrate Jason Turpen added.

Judge Kelley agreed that while he thought the total patcher is a good product, it would be more cost effective to try the recycler.

Earlier in the meeting, Aaron Dockery of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet presented the District 8 office's recommendations for Rural Secondary Roads spending in the coming 2018-19 fiscal year.

Dockery said the county has tentatively been allocated a total \$2,120,885 (subject to change upon state budget finalization). The district office will hold \$1,060,400 for routine maintenance while another \$530,221 in FLEX funding can be used by the county for county roads.

That leaves \$994,789 to be used on rural secondary roads. KYTC's recommendations include resurfacing: Ky. 3189 (Pulaski County Park Road) from Ky. 80 to end of state maintenance, Ky. 804 (Garland Bend) from US 27 to Lakeshore Drive, Ky. 1247 from US 27 to Ky. 635 and Ky. 1003 from Whetstone Creek Church to Ky. 80.

Though free to make their own recommendations to KYTC headquarters in Frankfort, fiscal court approved the District 8 list on a motion from Strunk seconded by Maxey.

Dockery's presentation was followed by one from Carolyn Kelly of a national nonprofit transportation group known as TRIP. Kelly distributed a report on road and bridge conditions throughout District 8 (to be featured in greater detail in a later edition).

Kelly said her organization looks not only at the road/bridge conditions but also traffic congestion, highway safety, economic development and transportation funding.

Based on a survey of the Kentucky Magistrates and Commissioners Association, TRIP determined that while 29 percent of county roads throughout District 8 need to be resurfaced, available funding can only cover three percent. Similarly, 13 percent of county roads should be reconstructed but funding is available for less than one percent of those projects.

"Despite some of the deficiencies that we note in the new TRIP report...", Kelly said, "it's important to note that these deteriorated roads and bridges are not at all a reflection of the ability or capabilities of the local municipalities, counties or state department of transportation.

"In fact, these organizations are doing a tremendous job with the funds they have available. But the reality is that the state faces a significant and growing transportation shortfall..." Kelly concluded.

Magistrate Wheeldon asked if there were options to obtain additional funding but Kelly responded that TRIP's role is more of an advisory nature.

"We're here to provide the data so that those decisions can be made," she said of local leaders choosing which projects to prioritize.

The report can be accessed at tripnet.org.