

## ATASCOSA COUNTY JUDGES REPORT

On the front page of the Pleasanton Express last week, there was a story about the cooperative fire contract the City of Pleasanton has had with the county for quite a few years. When I became County Judge, I found that the amount had not been increased in recent history. The purpose of the contract is to provide some compensation to the Volunteer Fire Departments for fire suppression work in the county, outside of any incorporated areas (cities). So, for several of the years out of the last seven, I have made modest increases. We now contribute roughly \$200,000 per year to various county fire departments. When I took office, we were paying Pleasanton \$14,000 per year, and the contract just offered to the now paid city FD was for \$32,000.

When Commissioners Court considered the new contract for 2022, Pleasanton requested \$15,000 more based on increased expenses and increased call volume outside the city limits. I am sure the city has increased expenses since they decided to go to a paid fire department. However, the numbers compiled by the County Fire Marshal show an actual decrease in calls since 2019. No one from the city came to Commissioners Court to present the reason for their request and explain the \$15,000. Commissioners Court approved the contract funds as they were. However, the city rejected the county's contract offer of \$32,000 and sent me a letter that reiterated increased costs and more calls. I have written the City Manager (and copied all city elected officials, the city Fire Chief, and the City Attorney), offered to put the request back on our agenda for consideration if the city will send someone to present their case. I have received no response to date.

So, based on the issue passed unanimously by the City of Pleasanton, the contract was rejected. The city council set a Dec. 2 date to stop city fire suppression calls outside the Pleasanton city limits. Fire suppression coverage for the unincorporated areas outside the city is extremely important to the county; therefore, we have been working on setting up coverage from Campbellton VFD, Leming VFD, Jourdanton VFD and Poteet VFD. We will use the \$32,000 to offer some compensation to them for this.

I will be remiss if I do not point out that the county spends approximately \$300,000 for 24/7 emergency EMS personnel plus equipment stationed in Pleasanton. Public safety is essential to us, but money is not unlimited.