

Hawkins City Council

Public hearing

Tax increase draws none;

Stray Cats draw a dozen

By JOHN SPARKS

Meeting in regular session, Monday, September 21, the Hawkins City Council held a second required public hearing on the tax increase for the 2010 fiscal year. And, like the first meeting, no citizens showed to discuss or protest the tax increase. The council agenda also included an item concerning an overabundance of stray cats in the Hawkins Library-First Methodist Church-First Baptist Church neighborhood.

The tax increase is minor, just 1.97 percent to .5176 cents per hundred valuation. This means a Hawkins homeowner with property valued at \$100,000 will pay \$63 more than last year to support the city's operating budget. None in the packed council chambers came to learn more about the tax increase however. They were there to discuss the proliferation of stray cats in the near east side of the city.

One homeowner was quite nervous and emotional, but she expressed her experience with problems brought on by the cats that keep her awake at night, defecate in her flower beds, damage her air conditioning unit and attack her own pet cat. She was concerned and upset that the city's librarian was feeding the cats. Her complaints prompted Mayor Sam Bradley to cease the practice at the library. "What you do at home is your business," he said, "but you are not to feed the cats at the library."

Several of those in attendance spoke to defend the actions of Pamela McKenzie, the librarian. John Flynn, president of the library board of directors said "the board supports her behavior." He extolled her service to the community not only as librarian, but for her efforts to trap the stray cats, have them spayed and neutered and place them with local citizens. He said more than 100 strays have gone through Pam's process. "Pam has done most of this with her own money," Flynn said.

Sandy Hocking, the Winnsboro coordinator of Animal Preservation of East Texas (APET), confirmed McKenzie's continuing and diligent work. Hocking also said APET offers a low cost spay and neuter program to Hawkins residents at \$20 for females and \$30 for males. Deborah Montana said the spay and neuter program is the most effective way to attack a problem like the Hawkins neighborhood is experiencing. She said female cats typically have three "litter seasons" each year, birthing six cats with usually three females. She walked the council members through the reproduction math showing that one mother cat could be responsible for 19 female cats in a twelve month period.

Several citizens offered advice to the complaining citizen bedeviled by the cats. Cayenne pepper generously applied to flower beds will discourage the cats and there are inexpensive electronic devices that discourage cats from areas within a private property.

After several other citizens spoke up in behalf of the librarian and her cat control program, the council agreed to reconsider the problem and place the item on the agenda for the next meeting on October 5 after some additional research into control methods.

The council also raised the water rates ten cents per 1,000 gallons of usage and raised service charges by 25-cents. The cleaning fee for water systems was raised to \$25 from \$15.

Hawkins will join other East Texas cities in protesting proposed rate increases by Southwestern

Electric Power Co. The growing list of cities binding together in the effort known as CARD (Cities Advocating Reasonable Deregulation) includes among others: Mineola, Winnsboro, Pittsburgh, Gladewater, Mt. Pleasant, Longview and Kilgore.

In other matters, the council:

- approved an interlocal agreement with Wood County for library services with the county providing a \$7,000 operating grant.
- approved an interlocal agreement with Wood County for animal control.
- appointed the Mayor to supervise an interlocal agreement with Wood County regarding dirt work at the sports park.
- agreed to furnish safety goggles to city employees.
- approved a proclamation of enforcement of new state law prohibiting use of cellular phones in school traffic zones.
- voted to support the candidacy of J. Stoker for the board of trustees of Texas Municipal League region 15. Stoker is City Manager of Gladewater.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Hawkins City Council is scheduled for Monday, October 19 at 6 p.m. A special meeting of the council can be called with 72 hours public notice.