Fuel costs push levy higher

LEXINGTON—Dawson County commissioners finished what one board member called a “grueling budget process” on Friday, approving the county’s $8.46 million tax request for the 2012-13 fiscal year.

“There were a lot of requests we had to deny,” said Lexington commissioner Bill Stewart.

With revenue down and fuel costs continuing to rise, Stewart explained that the county had little choice but to increase the levy.

“The cost of fuel really hurts the county,” he said. “The roads department, the sheriff’s office, the weed district ... everything they do takes fuel. There’s nothing we can do about the cost of diesel and we don’t know where it’s going to stop.”

In addition, commissioners had to plan for higher costs in the court system. Stewart said there has already been one costly trial and surely it will not be the last for the budget year.

Commissioner Dennis Rickertsen of Overton said the budget process was a delicate one but the board tried to keep employee wages competitive.

“We didn’t try to balance the budget on the employees’ backs,” he said. “We tried to treat them fairly.”

The budget includes $9.22 million to cover salaries and benefits.

In other county business, commissioners:

suggested to Dawson County Transit director Barb Hollenbeck that she coordinate a meeting involving all transportation interests in the county to gather input on the possible merger between the bus system and Kearney's RYDE program.

heard the monthly crime report from sheriff Gary Reiber, which included 1,555 calls to dispatch, 1,027 total services and 235 new inmate bookings for the month of August.

authorized county surveyor Jake Ripp to sell excess equipment valued less than $2,500. Ripp said items include an old plotter and a blue-line machine.

tentatively set an auction date for Oct. 15 for a 24-foot by 60-foot tract of county-owned land at the south base of the Overton walk-over. Adjacent landowner Joe Zerr told the board last month that he hoped to make an addition to his home and in the process learned land he thought he had owned actually belonged to the county. State statute requires sale of the land rather than abandonment.

approved a request for a caterer's license by Seth McFarland, owner and vineyard manager at Mac's Creek Winery & Vineyards. McFarland told the board he requested a catering license instead of a restaurant license because it would allow the winery to apply for an unlimited number of special permits for tastings.

voted to extend an interlocal agreement and approved a memorandum of understanding for a 15-county south central planning, exercise and training area for emergency management agencies. County emergency management director Brian Woldt said the agreement allows the counties involved to share equipment and radio frequencies.

appointed Stewart and PJ Jacobson to serve as the catastrophic leave board to hear all requests from employees who want to use their accumulated hours through the newly developed paid time off policy. Using commissioners rather than elected officials ensures a single standard among offices, they said.