

problems, adding that a let-

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Chamber of Commerce of Walker County

County commission agrees to let AlaTax collect fuel revenues



*Chairman
Bruce
Hamrick*

By ED HOWELL
Eagle News Editor

The Walker County Commission agreed to allow AlaTax to start collecting revenue from the county fuel tax, probably starting in February.

The commission listened to a request from Pete Yonce, executive director of AlaTax, who asked to take over collection and administration of the tax. Figures from the commission indicate that the average revenue from gasoline and diesel taxes rough-

ly average between \$63,000 to \$70,000 a month.

"We do this for about 30 cities and counties now. It's proven to be very effective for those who do it with us," Yonce said.

Yonce said one of the problems for counties and cities is that there are so many different fuel taxes to collect from, including off-road diesel, diesel and gasoline. Also, one needs to have all the resources to deal with all the products that are being distributed.

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Commission

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AlaTax sends the forms to dealers, who remit payment back to AlaTax. Yonce said the company already deals with a number of companies because of other contracts, and usually the company and distributors have no problem calling each other on the phone with a question or problem, he said.

Deposits are made electronically to cut down on paperwork, he said, adding that the deposits can be divided up into however many accounts the county desires. One county divides its sales tax revenue into 13 accounts, he said.

This frees up the commission to handle other work by giving the work to an experienced company, he said.

"This is something for a fair amount of money that you can outsource," he said. "This is one less thing that can bog down administratively."

AlaTax, which already does business with the county to collect other revenues, will charge 1.85 percent of the fuel tax revenue collected.

Yonce also indicated the company can help with compliance issues, as it makes 5,000 to 10,000 calls a month just on taxpayer compliance. Traditionally, compliance improves once the company

takes over collections, Yonce said, adding the company could also help with auditing.

Walker County Commission Chairman Bruce Hamrick said he preferred to have a one-year contract to collect the revenue, which Yonce said was a good idea. He said the company can handle contracts for up to three years, although the company could not start Jan. 1.

"It would probably be in February. You have to give taxpayers 30 days notice," he said.

In another matter, the commission agreed to give Hamrick the authority to purchase voter machines from approved bid lists, pending on the state finalizing the process for approval of some voting machines for the disabled. Commissioners, who plan to buy off of an Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) bid list, said they were working off a tight Feb. 1 deadline.

The regular voting machines is guaranteed to be reimbursed by the state 100 percent, in part because Walker County is not in compliance now with precinct tabulation. However, Probate Judge Rick Allison said Secretary of State Nancy Worley is concerned

that there may not be enough funds to reimburse the county for the high-priced disabled-friendly voting machines. He said those reimbursements may have to be divided up by population, although state officials are studying the situation.

Mike Smith of the Independent Living Center raised concerns about "an oversight" by the county concerning the bid actions, explaining later he was concerned in part about whether it could be handled through a bid list handled by the ACCA. However, county officials later explained that state law allows counties to purchase together in bulk through the ACCA in order to lower costs. Allison and Hamrick gave approval to do so at a state meeting.

Smith raised the question of whether the commission was purchasing equipment that had not been certified yet, but Hamrick said the county will not purchase any machines unless certification problems are worked out within a state commission overseeing the process. Allison said any county that buys equipment that is not certified will not be reimbursed by the state in the end. Hamrick

said in the end he feels that the machines will be certified.

"There's nothing illegal about what we're doing," Hamrick said.

County officials reported a called meeting had been scheduled concerning machines for the disabled. They said there have been a number of delays and problems on the state commission's handling the certification of potential machines to be used, even as legal deadlines for next year's elections draw near.

In other action:

- Hamrick commended Commissioner Dual Tubbs, who was absent from the meeting. Hamrick said Tubbs was absent because he was delivering toys and other goods that day to the hurricane-stricken Gulf Coast region.

- The commission approved a bid from Star Fire Equipment Service of Holly Pond for hazardous material response equipment. The response kits, obtained using Homeland Security grant funds at no cost to the county, will be used to handle hazardous material to distribute to county volunteer fire departments.

Jasper

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to possibly lure a potential business

The board's current plans include constructing a spec building within the

begin developing the expanded portion of Oak Hill Cemetery in preparation for the sale of plots, which should begin in