

# SPOTLIGHT

Texas is made up of 254 counties, each with a team of locally elected and appointed county officials serving their community. Polk County's elected offices include a County Judge and four Road & Bridge Commissioners that make up the Commissioners Court, the County Court at Law Judge, four Justices of the Peace, four Constables, a County Clerk, District Clerk, District Attorney, Treasurer, Tax Assessor-Collector and Sheriff.

There is no hierarchy in county government, so the only boss of these elected officials is ***You, the People.***

There are two District Court systems that serve Polk County, the 258th and the 411th Courts, which are responsible for appointing our County Auditor. The County Judge appoints the Emergency Management Coordinator, and all other officials are appointed by the Commissioners Court to run various county departments. These include Aging Services Director, Environmental Enforcement Officer, Fire Marshal, Grant & Contract Coordinator, Human Resources Manager, IT & Systems Administrator, Maintenance Superintendent, Museum Curator, Permits/Inspections Supervisor, Social Services Director and Veterans Services Officer. Learn more about your local offices by reading this latest installment of

## ***Spotlight on Polk County:***

*Polk County Judge*

101 W. Church St. Ste. 300, Livingston, TX 77351

936-327-6813

# Polk County

## **SPOTLIGHT** ON POLK COUNTY: *County Judge, Sydney Murphy*

As County Judge, I recognize how fortunate I am to have a team that is 100% committed to this county. We truly enjoy coming to work and being here for every Polk Countian that calls, emails, or walks through our door, accomplishing a lot individually and as a team.

The County Judge has three primary duties, one of which is to preside over the Commissioner's Court. The job that never seems to end is preparing the Agenda for Commissioner's Court, which is held every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, plus additional meetings scheduled as needed. The Commissioner's Court is unlike any other court in the county. Rather than hearing civil or criminal cases, the purpose of this court is to make business decisions necessary for county operations. Every regular meeting has a consent agenda, where regularly recurring county business can be approved without discussion unless needed, followed by a number of items that must be discussed and considered individually. This includes everything from consideration of various grants or contracts to county regulations and policies, and quite a bit in between. Most elected officials and department heads, at some point, will need items placed on the agenda for the court's approval. Several hours a day are typically spent working on items that will eventually show up on a court agenda. This office prepares the agenda and provides the information necessary for the court to make well-informed decisions. The agendas are filed at least 72 hours before any meeting of the Commissioner's Court and posted to the County's website, [www.co.polk.tx.us](http://www.co.polk.tx.us), and Facebook page, Polk County, Texas. The meetings are open to the public and can also be watched online on the Polk County Commissioners Court YouTube channel, which can also be accessed via the County's website and Facebook page.

In counties of our size, the County Judge is also the Chief Budget Officer, so we are intimately familiar with the budget process. My office begins preparing the budget for the next fiscal year (October 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30<sup>th</sup>) by mid-February. Each elected official and department head receives a Budget Request Packet by March 1<sup>st</sup> so that their requests can be submitted to us by April 1<sup>st</sup>. We set aside time to meet with any office that requests a meeting to review their requests, and then we truly start building the budget in earnest, determining what requests will provide the most value to county residents as well as what funds must be set aside to perform tasks mandated by the State Legislature - a list that grows every other year! The proposed budget is discussed at length during Commissioner's Court meetings from May through July, and is ultimately adopted, along with the Tax Rate to support the budget, in mid-August. In the months that follow, we incorporate verbiage into our budget document to articulate the changes from year to year. This paints a picture for the average reader that isn't necessarily clear from reading the line item budget unless you really know what you're looking at. Once published, we are officially in the Budget "Off-Season" for about two whole months. Woo-hoo!

Last but not least (especially this year!), the County Judge serves as the head of emergency management. In Texas, county judges have responsibility for emergency preparedness and response within local jurisdictions. We have an appointed Emergency Management Coordinator to manage day-to-day program activities, and she is doing an incredible job for Polk County. Her office works very closely with my own to prepare for potential disasters, maintain a state of readiness and jump into action whenever calamity strikes. So far, between COVID-19, the tornado that devastated our county in April, and a near miss from Hurricane Laura, 2020 has really kept us on our toes. We take strides every day to be more prepared than we were the day before. You can stay up to date on all news from emergency management by visiting their website, [www.PolkCountyOEM.com](http://www.PolkCountyOEM.com), and Facebook page, Polk County Emergency Management, Texas, and register on Alert Me Polk County to never miss an emergency notification.