

JUDGE'S REPORT

May 2026

In an attempt to address the growing community concerns evolving around the workforce facility project located West of Mobeetie this will be the first of a monthly judge's report that will be published and posted on the county website. The first item that needs to be addressed has to do with the level of control our county officials currently have regarding the workforce facility. That control level is ZERO! The project is being built on privately owned land with private funds. There are no county zoning limitations or restrictions currently in place in Wheeler County. They own the land and can do what they want to do with it and do not have to consult with the County. However, they do have to work with regulating authorities such as TCEQ & the Panhandle Ground Water Authority.

Google representatives requested an introductory meeting with our county's emergency management groups on May 12 and traveled to Wheeler to do so. This meeting was to begin discussing what each of those groups (sheriff's department, hospital, ambulance service & all 6 volunteer fire departments, etc.) will need in order to be able to effectively and efficiently service our county and the residents that will ultimately be occupying the workforce facility and to answer questions the leaders of these organizations have related to the layout and accessibility of the workforce facility. This meeting was not a public open meeting and was not a part of any commissioner's court, nor was it for making any decisions that would affect our county.

One of the matters discussed was the size and maximum capacity of the facility. There are 2,500 single-bed hotel type rooms which will each be appropriately furnished with a sprinkler type fire suppression system. Each room will have a full-sized bed and a bathroom. The facility will be completely fenced and gated with multiple entrances/exits for efficient access to the facility by emergency personnel. Above-ground storm shelters will be located throughout the site with an emergency alert system available through an app and smart TVs being furnished in each room.

According to the representatives, the maximum capacity of the site is 3,500 people. This includes approximately 200 operating staff members (chefs, maintenance, security, medical, etc.). The operating company that will be handling the facility once it is operational is Aramark. There will be main contacts through Aramark for each emergency management group.

There are strict requirements for all employees that choose to live at the facility. Each person wanting to live on site must pass a thorough background check and drug test. There will be no tolerance for fighting, disorderly conduct or other aggressive acts of violence. These are all grounds for termination. Each person residing on site will have a badge with an RFID tag which they will have to scan to enter and exit the facility. This will provide our EMS personnel with real-time data as to the number of individuals on site at the facility at any given time.

On site residents will have access to a small medical facility with a medic. The level of medical treatment available has not been finalized at this time. Additionally, there was discussion related to the possible construction of a helipad for severe emergency situations.

There will be a bus system to transport all general workers to and from the AI data center construction site located in Gray County. While this will not eliminate an increase in traffic on Hwy. 152, it will reduce the amount of traffic from what it would be if every employee drove their own vehicle to and from the construction site.

The representatives stated that there are currently 3 wells located on the site property. They are in the process of “testing” those wells and are applying for the proper permits with TCEQ related to water use. At this time, they are unsure if the current water source(s) will be used or if it will be necessary to explore other options for servicing the facility. While they indicated they do have alternative options for water sources they did not elaborate on what those options were. This is still a concern, and we will have to continue to request information related to this subject. They did emphasize that the water usage is strictly governed by the Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District and TCEQ permits are required. They will have to comply with all the rules and regulations set forth by each of these organizations.

May 1, I was allowed to tour the AI data center construction site in Claude. I’m not sure what to really say about it all. It is very overwhelming to see the scale of construction that takes place at one of these sites. It is definitely impressive as to the organization and efficiency of the site. The day I was there, there were approximately 6,000 workers signed in at the site. There were 5 cafeteria tents, each being the size of a football field to feed the workers once on site. There was a bus system to pick up and deliver the workers from the parking lots to their work sites within the site. This site is open with construction taking place 24/7. Without seeing it for yourself, there is truly no way for me to accurately describe what I observed.

May 6th through the 8th I attended Probate School in Lubbock. This was a very informative event and I feel it introduced me to aspects of probate and guardianship cases that I was unaware of, even with the 28+ years of legal experience. I hope the information I obtained will help to make this part of our county court more efficient.

On Thursday, May 14, I attended an invitation only Texas Economic Development Open House hosted by Google. I went in hopes of being able to obtain better information on how Google may be able to help improve our county’s emergency management services and speak with people who have already benefited from Google’s commitment to their counties and communities. Once the event began, it was gravely evident that the event was designed to praise Google and all they have done for other areas, not to actually provide helpful information to those of us who have questions. This is a battle our county officials will have to continue to fight and pursue.

May 18, I completed the first half of the Texas Association of Counties (“TAC”) New Judge Orientation course. I have discovered that anything TAC requires or sponsors is extremely helpful in learning the ins and outs of my new position.

May 22, I was happy to be able to swear in our new county attorney, Melissa Miles. Melissa is a local homegrown girl who we gladly welcome to our county team. Melissa has a very impressive resume and comes highly recommended. I feel she is already a great asset to our county. A copy of her resume is available at my office should anyone wish to have a copy.

May 28, I attended the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission (“PRPC”) monthly board meeting. I am a board member for PRPC and do my best to represent our area at PRPC meetings and events. For information on PRPC, please visit the PRPC website at www.theprpc.org.

That is all for this report and I look forward to preparing the next report which will be published and posted the first week of July. If anyone has certain questions they would like to see addressed in the next Judge’s Report, please feel free to email those to me at

chalone.hefley@co.wheeler.tx.us. I hope everyone will keep seeking the positive and in all you do, do it with all your heart, as to the Lord. Colossians 3:23

Sincerely,

Chalone S. Hefley
Wheeler County Judge