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NEWS RELEASE

COMMISSIONERS COURT TO CONSIDER ETHICS REFORM PACKAGE TODAY

*Proposal Would Include Voluntary Lobbyist Registration,
Ethics Training and Web Posting of Financial Disclosure Forms*

Harris County Commissioners Court is scheduled to take up consideration this morning of a five-part ethics reform package designed to clarify public expectations and requirements of county employees and officials and to substantially increase transparency in Harris County government.

The proposals, proposed by Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, are an outgrowth of a series of recommendations made by the independent five-member Citizens Task Force on Ethics Reform appointed by Emmett last year to review “best practices” in government and private sector ethics. After repeated reviews by the county’s lawyers, the Harris County Attorney’s Office reported earlier this year that Commissioners Court may implement five of the task force’s recommendations. Other recommendations likely would require the passage of enabling legislation by the state Legislature.

“Harris County employees and elected officials are already complying with state law and exhibiting ethical behavior, but there have been substantial changes in technology and in county processes since the county’s Code of Ethics was last reviewed in 1994,” said Emmett. “I want county residents to rest assured that their employees and officials have the most up-to-date training and that their government is as transparent as it can be. It’s time for us to take this significant step forward.”

The proposals – which include voluntary lobbyist registration, the immediate Web posting of all required personal and financial disclosure forms, adoption of a Statement of Ethics, establishment of a Harris County Ethics Committee, and implementation of employee ethics training – have been reviewed by the Harris County Attorney’s Office, which opined earlier this year that Commissioners Court is authorized to implement all five of the recommendations.

Commissioners Court will consider the measures at its regularly scheduled meeting at 10 a.m. today in the Commissioners Court courtroom on the ninth floor of the Harris County Administration Building at 1001 Preston in downtown Houston.