

# Comments to the Brown County Commissioners Court

January 27, 2025

Judge Britton, Commissioners, county officials, fellow citizens:

In spite of my comments to this Commissioners Court last February 26<sup>th</sup>, I understand that soon you will be considering for the May 3<sup>rd</sup> ballot a 20 million dollar bond purposed for the building of a YMCA in Early. I do commend you for not encumbering the tax payers, as so many local governments do nowadays, with a less visible Certificate of Obligation. However, I submit to you that this is not the way a YMCA should be financed.

Consider this from its web site: "The YMCA is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all." I would hope that all here would support the intent of this statement and therefore the Young Men's Christian Association's ministry, but – the Texas Constitution, Article 1, Section 6 states, in part, "No man shall be compelled to attend, erect or support any place of worship, [Here's the vital part.] or to maintain any ministry against his consent." A bond for this purpose would compel all who would abstain or vote "No" to, without their consent, support, directly or indirectly, a religious institution's ministry through property taxes. And what of the US Constitution's First Amendment. Knowing these things and your oaths of office, how can you rightly proceed with this bond? Even if a survey shows many citizens like the idea, you must not put before the voters the choice of a temptation of taking an unconstitutional action.

Several other troubling questions come to mind:

1. Since taking something without another's consent is stealing, how can a "Christian Association" espousing "Christian principles" be a party to this action?

January 27, 2025  
(Exhibit #1)

2. The original proposal claimed that the \$900,000 annual operating costs would be paid solely by memberships; but Early City Administrator Aaron told you that in years 6-10 the Memorandum of Understanding covers negotiating a subsidy capped at 20% of operating costs; and Commissioner Kelton, according to the *Brownwood News* you said that after a certain amount of time, the fiscal responsibility would fall on the county in terms of upkeep and updates, which could lead to future tax hikes. So how much is this actually going to cost and who is paying?
3. On what basis is it fair for existing fitness centers, like the recently opened Planet Fitness, to pay taxes to construct and operate a competing establishment?

Here is irony. The Abilene YMCA, with whom this Court and the town of Early entered into a MOU last year, completed a \$5.6 million “large scale renovation and enlargement” of its facilities almost three years ago. The Commissioners Court of Taylor County was not asked for any monetary help. Instead, CEO David Hendricks said, “This was all done with donations from the community.” Why, after using the historical and proper method of financing for itself, would we in Brown County be advised to use a completely different method?

So there we have it. The ball is in your “court” so to speak. Will you please do your duty: live by true Christian, constitutional, and basic American fairness principles, revoke the MOU and decline to put this bond on the ballot?

I intend to present much of this to the Early City Council at its next meeting and will call for the Brownwood City Council to officially come out against this measure should it reach the ballot.

I thank you.