

Chapter IV

Public Relations

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8.00 Plan Purpose

The district has developed this public relations program to promote effective communications between the district and the public to:

- Provide current and useful information on appraisal policies and practices, including:
- Information regarding available exemptions and special valuations;
- Appraisal methods and value determinations,
- Taxpayer valuation appeal process,
- Regular business hours and holidays,
- The district's reappraisal plan,
- Estimated and certified values for taxing jurisdictions, and
- The district's plan for operations during crises situations; and
- Create public awareness of the importance of the property tax in funding local government services;
- Receive comments and questions regarding the district and its operations.

8.01 Public Relations Officer

The Chief Appraiser will serve as the primary spokesperson for the district; however, the Chief Appraiser may designate any qualified staff member to represent the district.

Employees of the district are prohibited from speaking on behalf of the district without the consent and approval of the Chief Appraiser.

8.02 Communications Initiated By The District

The public relations officer, or designated representative, will strive to publicly communicate the role of the appraisal district and the services it offers.

- Regular communication topics include:
- Exemption and special valuation availability, qualifications, and filing requirements,
- How the district determines property values,
- How taxpayers may appeal property values,
- How the public may request public records;
- Estimates of Values for taxing jurisdictions;
- Certified Values for taxing jurisdictions;
- Issuance of Annual Summary Appraisal Report;
- Reappraisal Plan activities;
- Public access to the district's:
- Board of Directors,
- Appraisal Review Board, and
- Agricultural Advisory Board; and
- Any other matters regarding the appraisal district or property tax system that the Chief Appraiser chooses to provide information.

8.03 Communication Media

The public relations officer will provide information to the public through:

- The district's website,
- Press releases and new articles published in the local official news publications,
- Publications and pamphlets prepared by the district or the Property Tax Assistance Division (PTAD), available on the website and in the office.
- Public speaking opportunities at workshops and forums (sponsored by the district or community organizations),
- Workshops and forums (sponsored by the district),
- Public designated computers (in the district's public area),
- Programs and public service announcements broadcast on local radio station, and
- Internet social media pages created for the district's purposes.
- All correspondence must be generated in a professional manner in accordance with the district's public correspondence policy.

8.04 Communications Initiated by the General Public

The district will accept comments from the public through oral comment, email, letter, or on the district's Public Comment Card.

Any written comment regarding the district will be responded to in the written manner in which the comment was received (letter, email, telephone call, etc.)

Comments received in person will be addressed by the Taxpayer Service Clerks or the Chief Appraiser (individually or as Public Relations Officer) verbally when practical, or in an agreed format if further review and evaluation of the comment is needed.

8.05 Responses To Public Comments/Questions

All comments will be reviewed and evaluated to determine appropriate public responses. The district will maintain a copy of all written comment communication according to its Records Management Schedule and Plan.

All responses to public comments or inquiries must be generated in accordance with the district's public correspondence policy.

Correspondence addressing policy issues must cite controlling rules, statutes, or professional standards.

8.06 Responses to Criticisms

Responses to criticisms should be addressed promptly and be resolved in a non-judgmental way.

Appropriate responses will be generated by the District as outlined in (numbered section for responses to comments from the public).

CAD staff members must inform area supervisors and the Chief Appraiser (as Public Relations Officer) of all critical or confrontational comments received from the public.

Written documentation of the criticism and the solution to the situation should be presented to the Chief Appraiser (as Public Relations Officer) immediately after the criticism has been received. The district has prepared a *Confrontation Report Form* for this purpose. These forms are kept in the district's records system according to the Records Management Schedule and Plan.

8.07 Staff Briefings/Training for Public Related Matters

All staff members are required to receive the Texas Attorney General's Public Records training.

The public relations officer will regularly prepare training sessions for the district's staff regarding employee demeanor with the public and ways to improve the organization's image with the public.

The Public Relations Officer will deliver notice to all staff members via email and in regular staff meetings regarding:

- Recently issued press releases,
- CAD generated pamphlets and publications,
- Scheduled public workshops and meetings, and
- Other current events or topics affecting the public and CAD operations.

8.09 General Schedule of Events

The district will generally provide public service according to the following schedule. However, variations from the schedule may occur due to public inquiry, legislative changes, and other events that necessitate the need for public awareness.

(A) Board of Directors Meetings

Regular meetings of the board of directors are held on the second Wednesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the district's office at 218 North Mount Street, in Fairfield. Public notice of each meeting is posted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with at least seventy-two hours prior to the meeting at:

- The county courthouse
- The district office, and

- The district's website www.freestonecad.org.

Special meetings may be held at any time at the call of the Secretary of the Board as long as the seventy-two meeting notice requirement is met.

In situations where the public welfare is in jeopardy, such as in response to a disaster or emergency, the board may meet with less than seventy-two hour meeting notification.

(B) Appraisal Review Board

The ARB typically meets once quarterly to hear motions to correct the appraisal roll and timely filed taxpayer protests. Meetings of the ARB must be held in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with at least Seventy-two hours notice of the meeting.

As with the board of directors, agendas for meetings are posted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with least seventy-two hours prior to the meeting at:

- The county courthouse
- The district office, and
- The district's website www.freestonecad.org.

Taxpayer protests are typically heard in July each year. The posted agenda for these meetings includes a schedule of hearings by property owner name and hearing time.

Additionally, the ARB allows time at each meeting to hear unscheduled taxpayer protests. In such cases, the property owner will be asked to waive the right to fifteen days notice of the hearing.

(C) Agricultural Advisory Board

The AAB typically meets during the third week of March annually to review the Chief Appraiser's data regarding typical agricultural practices in the county and owner operating expenses.

Agendas for meetings are posted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with least seventy-two hours prior to the meeting at:

- The county courthouse
- The district office, and
- The district's website www.freestonecad.org.

(D) Brochures and Pamphlets

The Chief Appraiser periodically reviews the district's brochures and pamphlets to ensure that the information published in them is accurate and lawful. Pamphlets are available throughout the year on the district's website and in the district's office.

(E) Public Notification of Exemption and Special Use Valuation Availability

The district typically provides public notice of exemption and special valuation availability each year in March by quarter page advertisement in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle.

This notice is posted on the district's website throughout the year for public access and review.

In addition, the district notifies new property owners each year of the exemptions that previous owners have claimed on property. Included with these letters is an application for that exemption/special valuation.

Exemption/special use valuation applications are available on the district's website and in the district's office.

(F) Notice of Exemption/Special Valuation Application Requirements

Each appraisal year, between December and January, the district mails notice to property owners of the requirements to reapply for exemptions and special valuations. This notice is provided to both new property owners and to those where a suspected change in qualification has occurred.

(G) Special Business Hours

The district is typically open for business from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday (except for on holidays).

In addition, the district is open one Saturday morning per month, between January and April each year, to allow property owners the opportunity to conduct business with the district in person during non-business hours.

Property owners are provided notice of these special hours by advertisement in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle. Additionally, notice is included with exemption and special valuation application letters mailed to property owners in January each year.

(H) Public Notification of Property Inspection

The district mails a postcard to property owners at least two weeks in advance of an on-site inspection. Property owners have the opportunity to request to be present for inspection or to deny the appraisal district access for an on-site inspection. However, when an on-site inspection is not possible, the district will conduct an inspection of the property from the nearest public roadway and from aerial photography in the district's possession.

(I) Public Review of Proposed Valuations

Each year in beginning in April, the district provides Notices of Appraised Value to property owners where:

- There has been a change in ownership,
- There has been a value increase of at least \$1,000 over the previous year's valuation, and
- There has been a change in the qualification of exemptions or special valuations.

Included with these notices are instructions for filing protests regarding the proposed valuations and other related topics regarding the valuation and taxation of an owner's property.

The district also publishes a quarter page advertisement in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle to notify other property owners who may not have received notices of the opportunity to protest their property valuations.

(J) Reappraisal Plan

The district's current reappraisal plan is available for public inspection on the district's website and in the district office throughout the year.

The district must adopt a reappraisal plan by September 15 of even numbered years. That plan must include a schedule of appraisal related activities for the following two years.

The board must publish public notice of a hearing to adopt the reappraisal plan at least ten days prior to the hearing. The notice is published in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle. The notice is also posted on the district's website.

(K) Public Speaking Opportunities

The district welcomes the opportunity to publicly speak at meetings of civic clubs, lodges, church groups, and other organizations or groups regarding property tax related matters.

All invitations for such speaking engagements must be made through the Chief Appraiser who will determine the best employee to represent the district.

Since these opportunities are invitation related, there is no specific timeline for these activities.

(L) Staff Development

The district provides continuing education to its staff members from a variety of sources ranging from locally sponsored workshops to seminars and workshops sponsored by organizations including:

- The Texas Attorney General,
- The Texas Library & Archives Commission,
- The Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division,
- The International Association of Assessing Officers,

- The Texas Association of Appraisal Districts,
- The Texas Association of Assessing Officers,
- The Texas Municipal League, and
- Other organizations that provide training for appraisal and customer service related topics.

A schedule of such training opportunities is posted on the district's local intranet site for easy access to both the district's staff and the general public.

(M) Issuance of Reports

A variety of reports are issued by the Chief Appraiser annually.

- Certified Estimates of Value - issued to each of the taxing jurisdictions by May 1 annually as required by state law.
- Certified Appraised Values - issued to each of the taxing jurisdictions by July 25 annually as required by state law..
- Summary Appraisal Report - issued annually along with the value certifications as of July 25 in accordance with Standard 6 USPAP.
- Annual Report - issued annually as of July 25 as required by state law.
- Public Funds Investment Quarterly Report - issued by the 10th day of the month following the end of each calendar quarter as required by the Public Funds Investment Act.

Each of these reports is available for public inspection both in the district's office and on the district's website www.freestoncad.org