

Fisher County Appraisal District

Public Relations Plan

Fisher County Appraisal District seeks to inform its constituents by engaging in a proactive communications program. These include property owners, civic and professional organizations, lending institutions, developers, attorneys, real estate appraisers and brokers, governmental agencies and policymakers, tax representatives, and the media. This program recognizes that one of the most effective and quickest ways to communicate appraisal district policies and activities to citizens is by working in partnership with the news media.

POLICY

The appraisal district recognizes that residents, businesses, taxing units, and other customers have a right to know what is occurring in the Appraisal District; that District management and employees have an obligation to see the taxpayers are kept systematically and adequately informed; and that Fisher County Appraisal District ultimately benefits from ensuring that taxpayers get all information, good or bad, directly from the District itself. To this end the Appraisal District affirms the following:

Fisher County Appraisal District shall maintain an effective two-way communication system between the Appraisal District and its various constituencies which ensures:

- dissemination of accurate, timely information about Appraisal District policies, programs, services, procedures, achievements, decisions, critical issues, etc.;
- explanation of decisions and actions taken by the Appraisal District;
- minimization of rumors and misinformation;
- program and practices designed to provide an open climate which elicits ideas, suggestions, and reactions from the community and employees alike;
- an effective working relationship with the news media.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Customer Service

The District will maintain a customer service division with specifically trained staff to answer general inquiries and assist taxpayers who visit the Appraisal District office. The customer service division will also assist taxpayers via phone and email. At the Appraisal District office, the customer service division will provide public access terminals that will allow taxpayers to inspect District records.

STAFF INTERACTIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

Fisher County Appraisal District personnel are expected to perform their duties on behalf of the District in accordance with the law and the highest ethical standards. Furthermore, it is the policy of the District that the relationship between the District and the general public it serves should be improved at every opportunity. District employees will treat members of the public with patience, self-control, sincerity, dignity and tact. Every District employee is urged to

exhibit at all times a willingness to listen and a desire to understand completely the viewpoint of any citizen addressing him and to display at all times an attitude of helpfulness.

The attitude and conduct of each District employee should at all times be such as to promote the goodwill and favorable attitude of the public toward the District, its employees, programs, and policies, and to keep above any question the integrity of its employees in relationship to their job.

Initial Contact with the Public

When a customer contacts the appraisal district office, the first staff member they talk to represents the entire appraisal district. First impressions last, and can have an impact on all future contacts with the public. By using each initial contact begin building a strong relationship, the appraisal district can be positioned for success.

The initial customer contact can occur through several different formats (email, telephone call, personal appointment).

Always make eye contact with the customer the first second that they come in. Even if you are with another customer or on the phone, make eye contact, and acknowledge that they are there immediately. A simple gesture tells the customer that you see him and will be for right with him. A friendly greeting immediately disarms the person and sets him at ease. It sets the tone for the rest of the interaction. No matter what the customer's emotional state, this will make things better. This is probably the single most important point for appraisal district staff to remember while greeting customers.

Every person who comes into the appraisal district office must be greeted in the friendliest way possible: new customers, old customers, customers who come in all the time, all of them. Repair people, delivery people, people who are lost and need directions, everyone. Remember, even if the person who comes in is not and never will be a customer, they will still relate their experiences with the appraisal district, good or bad, to everyone they speak with.

Every staff member at the appraisal district is considered a greeter. If the opportunity is presented, each staff member's responsibility is to engage the customer by providing immediate assistance or directing them to the correct department that will answer their question. If there is going to be a wait, tell the customer about it. Explain why there is a wait, and every 10 to 15 minutes give the customer an update. Always tell the truth about how long the wait will be. Saying it will be "just a few more minutes" when you know it will be half an hour only makes things worse.

Public Interest Materials

The District shall create letters, brochures, flyers, handouts, and other materials to provide general information to the public describing the function of the District, District policy and procedures, and other matters of interest to the public.

Press Releases

Most proactive media contact is initiated through the Chief Appraiser. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities should submit a request to the Chief Appraiser as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of their activities. Departments should not initiate news media contacts before notifying the Chief Appraiser. The District will regularly review the Appraisal District Public Information Packet published by the Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division and implement the recommendations as necessary.

Speaking Engagements and Public Outreach Meetings

The District will work in conjunction with government agencies to provide information to constituents on matters related to property tax policy. This may include attending hearings, meetings, or other events scheduled by the governmental body. The District will provide interviews and promotional material on public access stations operated by government agencies. The District will coordinate with the Fisher County Courthouse Offices to schedule and hold public outreach seminars at local libraries. The district will also participate in meetings with neighborhood associations, professional and other organizations.

Internet

The Appraisal District recognizes the internet as an effective way of informing the residents, businesses, taxing units, and other customers of the Appraisal District. A well-designed website can help the appraisal district create a favorable image, overcome misconceptions and prejudices, foster goodwill with the taxpayers, promote Appraisal District products and services, proactively detect and deal with issues, educate the public on appraisal policies and procedures, and provide transparency in an efficient and cost-effective manner. To leverage this valuable resource, relevant appraisal and property tax information shall be available on the district website in a content driven manner so that information can be quickly accessed, retrieved, and reviewed.

Media Inquiries

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the appraisal district and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate. Because the media often works on tight deadlines, it is important that all departments respond as soon as possible when the Chief Appraiser requests department information or a spokesperson for the media.

Review Process

The Chief Appraiser shall establish a communications review process to review and evaluate organization wide communication efforts and implement improvements where indicated. This review process can include departmental performance statistics, customer service surveys, customer interviews, peer review, and direct observations.

SPECIFIC PLAN ACTIONS

In general, the district will follow the timeline below; however, the district must remain flexible and react to changes and constituent needs as they arise. Therefore, the timeline can and should be altered to respond to individual and specific circumstances, and additional customer service and public relations needs as they are identified.

January – December

- The Chief Appraiser shall attend legislative committee hearings, commissioners court, city council, school board, and other governmental body meetings, and meetings of professional groups, neighborhood associations, and other constituent groups, as invited, to provide information and testimony on matters related to property tax policy.

January

- Review and development of public information brochures and other materials related to property exemptions, renditions, and special appraisals. Care and attention will be paid to updates for internal procedural changes and/or changes prompted by legal opinion and/or new legislation.
- Publish notice in local newspapers about the availability of electronic communications.
- Published notice in local newspapers about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions, and agricultural appraisals.

February – March

- The District shall conduct Open Meeting and Public Information training for all District staff. Training may include training videos and other materials developed by Attorney General's office as well as internally developed materials.
- The District shall conduct Customer Service training for all district staff. Training may include external training courses the internally developed training materials.

March – April

- Review and development of public information materials related to appraisal procedures, notices, protests, and evidence production. Care and attention will be paid to updates for internal procedural changes and/or changes prompted by legal opinion and/or new legislation.

April

- Update phone system messages to focus on upcoming notice of appraised values and protest season.
- Coordinate with the County tax office to record “Tax Facts” public service program which airs on the County’s public access channel.
- Publish notice in local newspapers about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions, and agricultural appraisals.
- Prepare press release for notices of appraised values and protest process.

April – May

- Coordinate with the County Tax Office to schedule and hold joint public outreach meetings to explain appraisal processes, exemptions, notices of appraised value, and the protest process and other matters related to property tax appraisal and collections.

May

- Publish notice in local newspapers about taxpayer protests and procedures.

June – July

- Chief Appraiser shall provide weekly, to the staff, appraisal review board chairperson, and chief financial officers of taxing units, status updates on the District’s certification efforts.

July – August

- During strategic planning sessions - evaluation, review, and planning/implementation of customer service and communication recommendation.

September

- Provide public notice of hearings for the Written Plan for Periodic Reappraisal and the CAD Annual Budget.

October

- Update phone system messages to focus on field activities, and questions that arise annually due to tax bill mailing.

November – December

- Review, update, and development of website content, specifically sections explaining Appraisal District policy and procedures, to include but not limited to, frequently asked questions, tax information, forms, District statistics, and property information.

IMPORTANT TEXAS PROPERTY TAX CODE DATES AND DEADLINES:

The Fisher County appraisal district recognizes the importance of the following dates and will utilize the public relations plan to deliver superior customer service to the taxpayers throughout property tax calendar year.

January 1 – Date that current year taxable values and qualification for certain exemptions are determined (except for inventories appraised September 1) (Sections 23.01, 23.12).

April 15 - Last day for property owners to file for rendition reports unless they requested a filing extension in writing (Section 22.23).

April 30 – Last day for property owners to file these applications or reports with the County Appraisal District: Some exemption applications (Section 11.43); Applications for special appraisal or notices to chief appraiser that property no longer qualifies for 1-d and 1-d-1 agricultural land, timberland, restricted-use timberland, recreational park scenic land and public access airport property (Sections 23.43, 23.54, 23.75, 23.84, 23.94, 23.9804).

April 30 – Last date for chief appraiser to certify estimate of taxable value to taxing units (Section 26.01).

May 15 - Last day for property owners to file renditions and property information reports if they requested an extension in writing. For good cause, chief appraiser may extend this deadline another 15 days (Section 22.23).

May 15 - Last day (or as soon as possible) for chief appraiser to mail notices of appraised value, denial of exemptions, and denial of special appraisal (Sections 11.45, 23.44, 23.57, 23.79, 23.85, 23.95, 23.9805, 25.19).

June 1 – Last day for property owners to file protest with the appraisal review board (or by 30th day after notice of the appraised value is delivered, whichever is later) (Section 41.44).

June and July – Appraisal Review Board hearings are conducted.

July 20 – Date appraisal review board must approve appraisal records, but may not do so if more than 5 percent of the total appraised value remains under protest (Section 41.12).

July 25 – Last day for the chief appraiser to certify appraisal roll to each taxing unit (Section 26.01).

August 31 – Last day for property owner to give, in writing, correct address to the appraisal district for tax bill; penalties and interest waived if the bill is not sent to the correct address 21 days before the delinquency date (Section 33.01).

September 15 – Last day for county appraisal district board of directors to adopt the annual county appraisal district budget, unless a district has changed its fiscal year (Section 6.06).

September 29 – Last day for taxing units to adopt current year tax rate, or no later than 60th day after the chief appraiser certifies appraisal roll to a unit. Failure to adopt by these required dates results in a unit adopting the lower of its effective tax rate for this year or last year's tax rate; units governing body must ratify new rate within five days (Section 26.05).

October 1 – Date tax assessor mails current year tax bills (or soon after) (section 31.01).

PERSONNEL POLICIES RELATED TO PUBLIC RELATIONS:

Organizational Environment:

Fisher CAD shall develop and maintain an organizational environment where all Appraisal District staff members are aware that they share the responsibility for communication of Appraisal District policies, programs, and activities to residents, businesses, taxing unit officials, and other members of the community. Responsibility for cultivating this environment and conveying these responsibility shall rest with the Chief Appraiser, Division Directors, and Appraisal District Management Team.

Appraisal District Spokespersons:

The chief appraiser is the Appraisal District's media relations officer and principal spokesperson. When and as delegated by the Chief Appraiser, other authorized spokespersons are:

- Deputy Chief Appraiser
- Senior Litigation Attorney
- Human Resources Officer
- Records Manager
- Chief Appraiser's Administrative Assistant
- Division Directors

Media Inquiries:

The Chief Appraiser is responsible for the Appraisal District's media relations and any media inquiries received by other Appraisal District staff should be referred immediately to the Chief Appraiser. An appropriate response to the media would be, "I'm sorry. I don't have the full information regarding that issue. I will give your request to the Chief Appraiser, who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available." Please obtain the reporter's name, phone number, topic of story, and deadline.

Sensitive or Controversial Issues:

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive controversy of issues should always be referred immediately to the Chief Appraiser and the employee's Department Head.

Litigation and Personnel Issues:

Generally, the business conducted by the Appraisal District is public, and therefore, is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation, and certain personnel-related information are exceptions.

Inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation should be referred to the appraisal district's Senior Litigation Attorney and the Chief Appraiser. Inquiries regarding personnel related information should be referred to the human resources department and the Chief Appraiser.

Personal Points of View:

It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the Appraisal District's official policy. Therefore, Appraisal District employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use it may not use official Appraisal District stationary. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as the Appraisal District employee in any personal letter or email to the editor, he or she must include language with states that the views set forth in the letter do not represent the views of the Appraisal District, but rather, are the employee's personally held opinions. Similar disclaimers must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for radio or television program unless the employee is officially representing the Appraisal District. Employees who are representing the appraisal district in any of the above formats must identify themselves as an official spokesperson for the appraisal district.

General or Routine Issues:

Broadcast media: calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) should always be referred immediately to the Chief Appraiser.

Local print media: calls from local print media regarding most departmental issues and programs may be handled by each department's Director or Assistant Director. The Chief Appraiser should be informed of these media request---including the reporter and topic---either before or immediately following these interviews.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

All records of the Fisher County Appraisal District are public information in accordance with applicable Open Records Act unless specifically identified as confidential. Confidential records include:

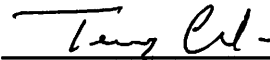
- Rendition statements or information given to the appraisal district with the promise the information would remain confidential and not open to public inspection (Section 22.27 (a)).
- Information relating to real property sales prices, description, characteristics and other related information (Government Code 551C).
- An application for agricultural-use designation (1-d) is confidential and not open for public inspection (Section 23.45 (a)).
- A driver's license number, personal identification certificate number, or Social Security number provided in an exemption application is confidential and not open for public inspection (Section 11.48 (a)).
- The home address of a current or former peace officer as defined by Article 2.12, Code of Criminal Procedure, a County jailer as defined by Section 1701.001, Occupations Code; an employee of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice; a commissioned security officer as defined by Section 1702.002, Occupations Code; a victim of family violence as defined by Section 71.004, Family Code, if as a result of the act of family violence against the victim, the actor is convicted of a felony or a Class A misdemeanor; a federal judge: a state judge, or the spouse a federal judge or state judge; a current or former employee of a district attorney, criminal district attorney, or county or municipal attorney whose jurisdiction includes any criminal law or child protective services matters; an officer or employee of the community supervision and corrections department established under Chapter 76, Government Code, who performs a duty described by Section 76.004 (b) of that code; a criminal investigator of the United States as described by Article 2.112 (a), Code of Criminal Procedure; a police officer or inspector of the United States Federal Protective Service; a current or former United States attorney or assistant United States attorney and the spouse and child of the attorney; a current or former employee of the office of the Atty. Gen. who is or was assigned to a division of that office the duties of which involve law enforcement (Section 25.025 (a)).
- Information in the appraisal records for violence shelter centers and sexual assault programs is confidential and not open for public inspection (section 25.026 (b)).
- The appraisal district shall stay informed on updates to confidential information laws. Each legislative session may add or delete circumstances under which information shall be confidential.

The Fisher County Appraisal District will refer all requests for public information to the chief appraiser. In order to provide property information, the person making the request must be able to provide the account number, legal description, physical address or the name of the property owner. Charges for public information are maintained by the chief appraiser in accordance with the Texas Administrative Code. The chief appraiser, at his or her discretion, may waive charges for taxing units, governmental agencies, or other organizations benefiting the taxing entities of Fisher County or the Fisher County Appraisal District.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED ON THIS THE 4th DAY OF June, 2019.



Chairman, Board of Directors



Secretary, Board of Directors