

**WALLER COUNTY
APPRAISAL
DISTRICT
PUBLIC RELATIONS
PLAN**

**P O BOX 887
HEMPSTEAD, TEXAS 77445**

**www.waller-cad.org
PHONE: 979-921-0060**

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MISSION STATEMENT

To provide a well-managed office that will serve the public and taxing authorities with expert, qualified staff that will result in:

- 1) Assessment of the taxpayer's property to be fair and uniform**
- 2) Providing taxing authorities with a well maintained appraisal roll**
- 3) Meeting or exceeding the requirements of the Texas Property Tax Code for all levels of assessment and uniformity.**

The Waller County Appraisal District (WCAD) seeks to inform its constituents by engaging in a pro-active communications program. These include property owners, civic and professional organizations, lending institutions, developers, attorneys, real estate appraisers and brokers, governmental agencies and policy makers, 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 their appraisal district; that District management and employees have an obligation to see that taxpayers are kept systematically and adequately informed; and that WCAD 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:

- Dissemination of accurate, timely information about WCAD policies, programs, services, procedures, achievements, decisions, critical issues, etc;
- Explanation of decisions and actions taken by WCAD
- Minimization of rumors and misinformation
- Program and practices designed to provide an open climate which elicits ideas, suggestions, reactions from the community and employees alike;
- An effective working relationship with the news media

PROFESSIONAL STANDARD

A proactive public relations program is essential to public awareness of the assessment process and of the importance of the property tax in funding local government services.

IAAO's Standard on Public Relations is the basis for the Waller County Appraisal District Public Relations Plan. This standard outlines the requirements for developing and maintaining an effective plan.

"The International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) is the internationally recognized leader and preeminent source for innovation, education, and research in property appraisal, assessment, administration, and property tax policy."

<http://www.iaao.org>

SPECIFIC PLAN ACTION

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 special circumstances, and additional customer service and public relation needs as they are identified.

January – December

- The chief appraiser shall attend legislative committee hearings, commissioner's 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.
- Publish 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 may conduct Customer Service training for all district staff or allow the staff to attend external training courses offered in Customer Service..

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

- 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.

May

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

June – July

July - August

- During this time- evaluations of personnel, review customer service and communication recommendations.

September

- Provide public notice of hearings for reappraisal plan and annual budget.

October

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.

SPOKESPERSON(S) FOR MEDIA

It is crucial that a spokesperson or persons be assigned the responsibility of all communication with the media. The Chief Appraiser is the appraisal district’s media relations officer and principal spokesperson. When and as delegated by the Chief Appraiser the following are authorized spokespersons for the Waller County Appraisal District below.

Chief Appraiser:

Chris Barzilla
900 13th Street
Hempstead, Texas 77445

chrisb@waller-cad.org
979-921-0060, ext. 401

Asst. Chief Appraiser: Becky Gurrola beckyg@waller-cad.org
900 13th Street 979-921-0060, ext. 402
Hempstead, Texas 77445

Director of Appraisal: Doyleen Fairchild doyleenf@waller-cad.org
900 13th Street 979-921-0060, ext. 403
Hempstead, Texas 77445

The Chief Appraiser is responsible for the appraisal districts 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 (or other authorized spokesperson) who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available." Please obtain the reporter's name, phone number (cell too if "in the field"), topic of story and deadline.

Sensitive or Controversial Issues:

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Chief Appraiser and the Deputy Chief Appraiser.

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 Attorney and the Chief Appraiser. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be referred to the Chief Appraiser or the Deputy 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 official appraisal district stationary. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as an appraisal district employee in any personal letter or email to the editor, he or she must include language which states 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 a 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 the Chief Appraiser. The Chief Appraiser should be informed of these media requests---including the reporter and topic.

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.

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 Comptrollers 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 also participate in meetings with neighborhood associations, professional and other organizations, as invited.

Internet:

WCAD 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 districts website (www.waller-cad.org) 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 WCAD 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 the appraisal district staff respond as soon as possible when the Chief Appraiser requests department information.

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.

PLAN FOR EMERGENCIES

HOW TO HANDLE BAD PRESS

There may be a time when the Waller County Appraisal District is confronted with an unflattering article. Whether the district deserves it or not, the negativity reflects badly on the appraisal districts image and could affect the attitudes of the taxpayers towards the district.

WHAT TO DO WHEN A CRISIS OCCURS

One would hope that it all would die down. Sometimes bad press isn't quite as bad as one might think. Then again, if the district shoots off a reply it could end up making the situation worse by adding fuel to the flames. Keep a cool head and follow procedures to deal with the situation most effectively.

PROCEDURES

1. Determine who is to receive all communication with the media.
2. Express your regret concerning the crisis. Taxpayers do not want to see the appraisal district pointing fingers during a crisis. Be confident in that the district understands what is at stake, apologize, and take action before being forced to do so by legal means.
3. Explain to the public what your plans are and let the taxpayers know how you are going to rectify the damage.
4. Plan a structure to disseminate your message to the media. Send your media press releases out all at once, and if the releases will be ongoing, send them out at the same time every day.

If a story has reached the taxpayers and looks as if it is doing some damage, a good way to counter is to compose our own response. Try not to get emotionally involved- this is unprofessional and the district might say something it might later regret. The media likes objective facts and statements, so they're also more likely to print something that is calm and to the point.

Stick to all the facts involved and address each negative point of the original bad PR piece. Explain why the appraisal district made the mistake (if the district made one) and how the district is going to correct the problem-give the taxpayer a reason to trust us.

"IF YOU MESS UP, FESS UP."

Good communication is always the key, so prepare your answers and deliver them in a timely, reassuring manner.

Dealing with Hostile / Angry Customers

Customer service isn't always a cheery interaction, and almost anyone who serves the public occasionally faces an angry or rude customer. Whether the blame falls on the appraisal district actions, issues over values, or just a bad day, how the district handles a problem customers can make a bad situation worse.

Public Safety Navigation

Some Waller County Appraisal District employees and guests can react with anger because of difficulty finding help with their situations, emotional pain or discomfort, fear, and anxiety.

1. React and respond to the individual in a calm but firm manner.
2. Use lower volume of voice to help the customer calm down.
3. Listen to all demands.
4. Do not tolerate abusive behavior.
5. Make command statements in a firm but non-challenging tone, saying what you want or do not want.

“I understand that you are upset.” “It sounds like you really are angry about this.” “I do not want to argue with you.” “I want you to leave.”

6. Think over situations that could occur and how you would react. Go through the movements you would need to make to get help or get out of the situation. Practice. One strategy might be to keep a desk, chair, or other object between you and the person to keep distance.
7. If you anticipate problems with an individual let co-workers/Sheriff's Dept. / Police Department know about it ahead of time.
8. If you feel you may be in jeopardy, remove yourself from the danger, providing it is safe to do so, and notify Police. 979-826-3332

9. If you observe a hostile confrontation in progress, do not get involved. Calmly move away from the area, providing it is safe to do so. Once clear of it, call Public Safety at 979-826-3332 or 9-1-1 if necessary.
10. Completely describe what you observed, how many individuals are involved, physical descriptions of those individuals and the exact location of the activity.
11. Attempt to bring the person to an isolated area or room.
12. Have at least two people remain with the person at all times until he/she calms down or professional assistance arrives. **DO NOT TRY TO PHYSICALLY RESTRAIN THE PERSON.**
13. Be prepared to seek protection under desks and behind solid walls.

If the taxpayer wishes to file a complaint, have them fill out the Complaint form.

Complaint from the Public

Waller County Appraisal District
Hempstead, Texas 77445

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE COMPLAINANT

Name: _____		Phone: _____	
Last	First	Home	Work
Address _____			
Street	City	State	Zip
E-mail address _____		Cell Phone# _____	

Complaint from the Public

1. The board of directors provides for public complaints or grievances on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board of directors about policies and procedures against the Waller County Appraisal District, Appraisal Review Board and the Board of Directors. Complaints may not be addressed to any of the grounds for challenge and protest before the appraisal review board as set out in Section 41.03 and 41.41, Tax Code. The board intends that, whenever feasible, complaints and grievances are resolved at the lowest possible administrative level.

2.

Correspondence shall be mailed to:
Chairman, Board of Directors
Waller County Appraisal District
P O Box 887
Hempstead, Texas 77445

- (1) The complaint/grievance should be in writing, request placement on the board agenda, along with all documentation, and specify the subject matter to be considered. The request must state who will make the presentation.
- (2) The complaint/grievance should be filed within 15 days of the event or series of events of which the complaint/grievance is alleged.
- (3) The chief appraiser shall have 10 days following the receipt of the complaint to notify the individuals, delegations, or complainants of the date, time and place of the meeting.
- (4) The chief appraiser shall provide the Board with copies of the original complaint/grievance, all responses, and any written documentation previously submitted by the individuals, delegations, complainants, and the administration. The board is not required to consider documentation not previously submitted or issues not previously stated.
- (5) The board's deliberations at its meetings with respect to complaints shall occur in open session, as authorized by the Texas Open Meetings Act, Article 6252-17, Tex.Rev.Civ.Stats.
- (6) The chairman of the board of directors may set reasonable time limits. The Board shall hear the complaint/grievance and may request a response from the appraisal district. The District shall make an audio tape recording before the Board. The Board shall then make and communicate its decision orally or in writing at any time up to and including the next regularly scheduled board meeting.

Exception: However, if the grievance involves a complaint or charge against another District employee or Board member, it shall be heard in a closed meeting unless an open hearing is requested in writing by the employee or Board member against whom the complaint or charge is brought. The employee

will have to follow the guidelines set out in the Employee Handbook adopted by the Board of Directors.

The board of directors shall make to the public and taxing jurisdictions information of public interest describing the functions of the board and procedures for filing and resolving complaints by the board.

The board of directors, at least quarterly and until final disposition of any complaint filed, shall notify the parties to the complaint the status of the complaint unless notice would jeopardize and undercover investigation.

Citizens will not be permitted to enter into discussion or debate as other agenda items are being considered by the board.

BOMB THREAT LEVEL I

Situation arises where no suspicious package or device has been found and the following facts are known:

1. WCAD has not been vandalized, broken into and no alarms were set off the night or weekend of the bomb threat.
2. No known threats have been made against the district, administrators or staff members in the recent past.
3. The bomb threat sounded unrealistic, giggling or laughing was heard in the background.
4. The bomb threat call was short with no follow up calls.

Staff Member Answering the Call

1. Document the bomb threat using the Bomb Threat Check List to identify voice, background noises, etc.
2. While caller is on the phone signal co-worker (with a pre-arranged signal) to alert the Chief Appraiser.

When a threatening call is received, ask the caller the following

(You may catch them off-guard and they may answer some of the questions)

1. When is the bomb going to explode?

2. Where is it right now?
3. What does it look like?
4. What will cause it to explode?
5. Did you place the bomb yourself or did someone do it for you?
6. Why was it put in the building?
7. What is your name?
8. What is your address?

Chief Appraiser or Designee

1. Notify the Hempstead Police Department **979-826-3332** from a different extension number or phone line.

Chief Appraiser or Designee

1. Conduct a visual search of the common areas; restrooms, storage areas, etc to identify suspicious packages or devices.
2. If bomb threat calls continue to come in or circumstances develop that indicates a further developing threat go to **BOMB THREAT LEVEL II**
3. If a suspicious package or device is found contact the chief appraiser and the local police.
4. After search has been conducted and nothing has been found, return to normal functions.

Cellular Phones, Pagers, Two Way Radios, Microwaves and/or other electronic devices are to be turned off and not used in the vicinity of the building.

Bomb threats are delivered in a variety of ways. The majority of threats are called in to the target. Occasionally these calls are through a third party. Sometimes a threat is communicated in writing or by a recording. Statistics indicate if the caller is female, there is a greater chance the call **is not** a prank.

Two logical explanations for calling in a bomb threat are:

1. The caller has definite knowledge or believes that an explosive or incendiary bomb has been or will be placed and he/she wants to minimize personal injury or property damage. The caller may be the person who has placed the device or someone who has become aware of such information.

2. The caller wants to create an atmosphere of anxiety and panic which will, in turn, result in a disruption of the normal activities at the facility where the device is purportedly placed.

Whatever the reason for the report, there will certainly be a reaction to it. Through property training, the wide variety of potentially uncontrollable reactions can be greatly reduced.

Experience shows a majority of bomb threats are perpetrated as a hoax and result in nothing more than a disruption of our routine. **However**, there is always a chance a threat may be authentic and appropriate action must be taken in each case.

All personnel, especially those who answer the telephone, must be instructed of the sequence of actions to be followed in the event a bomb threat is received.

Keep the caller on the line as long as possible and try to determine as many facts as possible.

BOMB THREAT LEVEL II

Situation arises where no bomb or suspicious package has been found but recent development may put administrator on a higher level of alert; such as the following factors or combination of facts:

1. The CAD has been vandalized or broken into (alarm set off) the night or weekend before the bomb threat.
2. Known threats have been made against the CAD, administrator or staff member in the very recent past.
3. A detailed bomb threat is called in with extra follow up calls.

Staff Member Answering the Call

1. Document the bomb threat using the Bomb Threat Report/Check List Form to identify voice, background noises, etc.

2. While caller is on the phone signal co-worker (with a pre-arranged signal) to alert the Chief Appraiser or Designee.

Chief Appraiser or Designee

1. Notify Hempstead Police Department at **979-826-3332** from a different extension number or phone line.

Chief Appraiser or Designee

1. Conduct a visual search of the common areas; restrooms, storage areas, etc to identify suspicious packages or devices.
2. If a suspicious package or device is found contact the police.
3. Evacuate the building or Shelter – In – Place.
4. Advise emergency personnel of the situation and follow their instructions. The Hempstead Police will notify Fire Department and/or bomb squads if necessary.
5. Upon review of conditions, police, fire and chief appraiser will determine when control of the building or parts of the building will be returned to normal conditions.

BOMB THREAT REPORT FORM

These questions are designed to keep the caller on the line as long as possible. Continue to ask the caller questions and wait for answers. Ask the caller to clarify his/her answers.

Questions To Ask:

Date call received: _____ Time call received: _____

Phone number at which call was received: _____ Length of call: _____

Person making the report: _____ Job/Position: _____

Did the voice sound Familiar? { } yes { } no If yes, who did it sound like:

_____ **Caller's**

Mood

excited calm angry

Caller's Voice male female

loud soft raspy rapid speech slow speech

crying laughing normal slurred nasal

whispered familiar disguised deep accent

Background Noises

music radio/TV machinery street noises clear/quiet

PA system motor local static other voices

street animal house

Exact Wording of the Threat: _____

Did the caller seem familiar with the layout of the building? yes no

Threatening Language: _____

Approximate age of caller: _____

Sex: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

SHELTER – IN – PLACE

Sometimes conditions outside of the district office building threaten the safety of the WCAD employees; e.g. a fire creating toxic smoke, a toxic materials spill, etc. During these conditions, the staff should remain inside of the secured building with all of the building's openings sealed.

The purpose of “shelter in place” is to protect the staff by keeping them inside of the building while preventing toxic or hazardous chemicals from entering the building. H.V.A.C. systems should be shut down and tape or other items should be used to seal around doors and windows, etc.

In the event of a chemical release (HAZMAT) you will be contacted by the chief appraiser or designee and/or the police or fire department that a potentially dangerous situation exists and that you may need to shelter – in – place.

- Contact the chief appraiser/designee
- Turn off the HVAC System
- Begin sealing doors and windows where staff will be exposed
- Make an announcement to tell the staff to initiate shelter-in-place procedures.
- Do not allow anyone to leave or enter the building unless authorized by the chief appraiser, police or fire department personnel

Pre Shelter – in- Place Procedures

1. Identify the area where staff will be housed.
2. Have a shelter-in-place kit by each door that will be sealed off.
3. Shelter – In – Place kit contents include
 - a. Pre-cut plastic to cover the doors
 - b. Duct tape
 - c. Towels (wet towels placed under doors to prevent some of chemicals from entering the building)
 - d. Portable radio with extra batteries
 - e. Flashlight

Traffic accidents happen and sometimes these happen with vehicles carrying hazardous materials and/or chemicals. An accident at a chemical plant or hazardous material stored near your building could also take place. If there is a release of a chemical substance into the air that is hazardous to your health and is possible life threatening there are two ways to protect yourself: evacuation or shelter- in - place

You need to be prepared in the event you are told to evacuate the building or are told to shelter - in - place. Having a disaster plan is the beginning to know what to do and knowing how to shelter - in - place. It is an important piece of information that everyone needs to know. The reason for sheltering in place is to ensure that you have the least exposure to any hazardous chemicals and/or materials that could possibly threaten your life and health.

The first and most important part of sheltering in place is finding a suitable room, inside the building with limited exposure to outside air.

When you go to shelter- in - place and after everyone is in the rooms, the chief appraiser/designee will cover any windows or doors with plastic sheeting and tape, turn off the air conditioner and/or heater and any ceiling fans and place towels and/or rags around the bottom of the door.

The purpose of sheltering in place is to prevent contaminated air from entering the room. **STAY IN THE ROOM UNTIL YOU ARE TOLD BY THE CHIEF APPRAISER/DESIGNEE, POLICE OR FIRE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL THAT IT IS SAFE TO COME OUT.**

SHELTER - IN - PLACE

IT IS THAT SIMPLE!

STAFF PUBLIC RELATIONS/CUSTOMER SERVICE

In many areas customer satisfaction ultimately boils down to the customer's contact with frontline staff.

The Waller County Appraisal District takes great pride in achieving the best results in public relations with the taxpayers in Waller County. There will be times, however, when an individual may need to make an inquiry or file a complaint.

SELECTING AND PREPARING A GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE STAFF

The first step for focusing staff on customer service is hiring the right people.

The Waller County Appraisal District requires that the staff members greeting the public take the Public Relations Seminar along with other personnel that deal with the public. The district also has made available, customer surveys, which also rates the staff on how well the public is being treated. Surveys allow the Waller County Appraisal District to quickly capture vital information with relatively little expense and effort and confront any problems that may seem to arise. The Waller County Appraisal District on a monthly basis meets with staff members. The Chief Appraiser will go over any updates, changes, expectations of staff members, and attitudes. This will allow staff members to learn more about the organization and the work from interaction with coworkers.

STAFF STANDARDS

The appraisal district staff believes that in dealing with the public effectively is to be diplomatic.

Diplomacy Rule #1: Don't Criticize

Criticism is futile because it puts a person on the defensive and usually makes them strive to justify himself. Criticism is dangerous, because it wounds a person's precious pride, hurts their sense of importance, and arouses resentment. The bottom line is that criticism makes people feel bad. So don't do it!

The role to the Waller County Appraisal District staff is to help someone and provide strategies for overcoming problems. That is, the staff will present solutions to the problems.

Diplomacy Rule #2: Be Appreciative

Appreciation should be frequent. It should be both public and within the office atmosphere. Sincere appreciation is always welcome and wanted. Appreciating someone is as simple as saying thanks.

Diplomacy Rule #3: See the Other Person's Point of View

Everyone is entitled to their own, sometime, misguided opinion. Every person has a unique point of view and that it's important to try to figure out WHY they say what they say.

It turns out that if you, the staff, are able to put yourself in the shoes of the taxpayer, it will help you to gain perspective. You'll understand the entire picture just a little better. It will also help you to show genuine concern, which will make the taxpayer feel like you are making an effort to listen and understand their position. Sometimes that's what the taxpayer needs – they just need to feel they have been heard.

After the staff has listened to the taxpayers it is then that the communicator gets their message across without upsetting them. The staff is about being honest without misrepresenting the truth. This means communicating in a way that makes a person feel the interaction was respectful and positive even though they may disagree with what you have told them.

Tip #1: Choose Your Words Carefully

Word choices are extremely important to perceptions. When giving feedback, avoid aggressive language like, "You have to...", "Always...", "Never..." Instead try "You might consider, "I think it might be better if..." and "It looks like." Another strategy is to give your feedback in the form of a question: "Have you thought of changing..."

It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear.

Tip #2: Listen, Think, and Be Open

The appraisal district staff should strive to not let the emotions get the best of them. If the taxpayer's viewpoint offended or angered you, it is important to take a step back, to take a moment to be as objectively as possible assess the situation and if the staff member feels like he/she needs to take a short break from the situation contact the Chief Appraiser to intercede.

Tip #3: Relax Your Body and Your Face

Body language communicates a tremendous amount, so it's important to be relaxed, to be calm, and to have a conversational tone of voice. For those who have expressive faces, you'll need to practice maintaining eye contact with a neutral but pleasant facial expression. Remember to relax any parts of your body that can become tense during difficult discussions, like your hands, shoulders and brows. And finally, avoid waving your hands or pointing at someone, because this is at a minimum distracting, but could be perceived as aggressive.

The appraisal district strives to practice diplomacy wherever it goes whether it is in the office, out in the field and during Appraisal Review Board hearings.

Tip #4: Always treat the taxpayer as you yourself would want to be treated.

Responding to Inquiries and Complaints from the Public

There are times when an individual may make an inquiry with the Waller County Appraisal District or file a complaint.

When complaints or concerns occur, they should be resolved at the lowest possible administrative level through an informal process of cooperative agreement among the affected individuals. However, when the informal process fails to provide resolution, an individual is entitled to file a formal complaint and seek a review of any administrative decisions made by the Chief Appraiser to the Waller County Board of Directors.

How to proceed with the informal process

The Waller County Appraisal District periodically distribute information in the local news papers and forms that need to be completed regarding, exemptions, special valuations, reappraisal notices etc. Staff members may be contacted for informal help with specific concerns via the phone or at the front counter. All staff members should attempt to resolve the concern as amicably and expeditiously as possible. During this informal stage no records are required to be kept. If the district prepares anything in writing, a copy is kept.

The Waller County Appraisal District has made available on its website at www.waller-cad.org additional links, phone numbers and contact information that would be beneficial to the taxpayers in the county.

How to file a formal complaint

When a concern of complaint is not resolved through the informal process, you may initiate the formal complaint process outlined below.

Correspondence shall be mailed to:

Chairman, Board of Directors
Waller County Appraisal District
P O Box 887
Hempstead, Texas 77445

- (7) The complaint/grievance should be in writing, request placement on the board agenda, along with all documentation, and specify the subject matter to be considered. The request must state who will make the presentation.
- (8) The complaint/grievance should be filed within 15 days of the event or series of events of which the complaint/grievance is alleged.
- (9) The chief appraiser shall have 10 days following the receipt of the complaint to notify the individuals, delegations, or complainants of the date, time and place of the meeting.
- (10) The chief appraiser shall provide the Board with copies of the original complaint/grievance, all responses, and any written documentation previously submitted by the individuals, delegations, complainants, and the administration. The board is not required to consider documentation not previously submitted or issues not previously stated.
- (11) The board's deliberations at its meetings with respect to complaints shall occur in open session, as authorized by the Texas Open Meetings Act, Article 6252-17, Tex.Rev.Civ.Stats.
- (12) The chairman of the board of directors may set reasonable time limits. The Board shall hear the complaint/grievance and may request a response from the appraisal district. The District shall make an audio tape recording before the Board. The Board shall then make and communicate its decision orally or in writing at any time up to and including the next regularly scheduled board meeting.

Exception: However, if the grievance involves a complaint or charge against another District employee or Board member, it shall be heard in a closed meeting unless an open hearing is requested in writing by the

employee or Board member against whom the complaint or charge is brought. The employee will have to follow the guidelines set out in the Employee Handbook adopted by the Board of Directors.

The board of directors shall make to the public and taxing jurisdictions information of public interest describing the functions of the board and procedures for filing and resolving complaints by the board.

The board of directors, at least quarterly and until final disposition of any complaint filed, shall notify the parties to the complaint the status of the complaint unless notice would jeopardize and undercover investigation.

Citizens will not be permitted to enter into discussion or debate as other agenda items are being considered by the board.

Open Records Request

POLICY

The Waller County Appraisal District will fully comply with the Texas Open Records Law and will respond to the public requests as soon as practicable and without unreasonable delay, in the manner described below.

PROCEDURES

1. Public records request procedure.

The Director of Appraisal is responsible for coordinating public records requests made to the Waller County Appraisal District. The Director of Appraisal and other staff as appropriate in fulfilling timely requests. All formal public records requests must be submitted in writing by fax or e-mail and directed to:

Director of Appraisal
Public Records Request
Attn: Doyleen Fairchild
P O Box 887
Hempstead, Texas 77445
Phone: 979-921-0060 extension 403
Fax: 979-921-0377
E-Mail: doyleenf@waller-cad.org

2. Initial response to public records requests.

After receiving a request for a public record or document, the Director of Appraisal will respond to the public records request as soon as practicable and without unreasonable delay. The district will respond with one or more of the following.

- A statement that the Waller County Appraisal District does or does not have custody of the requested documents.
- Copies of all requested public records for which the Waller County Appraisal District is exempted from disclosure.
- A statement that the Waller County Appraisal District is the custodian of some responsive records, an estimate of time in which copies will be provided or inspection will be available, and an estimate of the fees the requestor must pay.
- A statement that the Waller County Appraisal District is uncertain whether it possesses any requested records and that it will search for the requested records and respond as soon as practicable.

3. Clarification of public records request.

If the Waller County Appraisal District receives an unusual request or the scope of the request is unclear, the appraisal district may request additional clarification before responding to the request.

4. Charging for public records request.

The Waller County Appraisal District is allowed to recover their actual costs in fulfilling a public records request. If the estimated fee is greater than \$25, the Waller County Appraisal District will provide the requestor with written notice of the estimated amount of the fee. In such instances, the public records request coordinator will not fulfill the request until the requestor confirms in writing that the requestor wants to proceed with the request despite the estimated cost.

WALLER COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT

OPEN RECORDS REQUEST FORM

Requestor Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Work Home Mobile Work Home Mobile

(Please provide the best telephone number(s) to reach you between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Central Time)

Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

Date of Request: _____

I hereby request the following under the PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT pursuant to TEXAS GOVERNMENT CODE Chapter 552:

Requestor Signature: _____

Submit this request to the Waller County Appraisal District P O Box 887, Hempstead, Texas, 77445. The fax number is (979) 921-0377. The phone number is (979) 921-0060.

---Please let us know if you wish to receive your response in a special format or media. ---

NOTE: This form may be copied; however it should not be altered or modified from its existing content. Additionally, certain items requested may be exempted from disclosure under the law and certain costs may be assessed for providing copies of requested information. Please refer to rate schedule on page two.

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL

Date Received: _____ Est. Completion Date: _____

Records Available Yes No (Check One)

Reason for Unavailability: _____

Other: _____

Individual Completing Records Request: _____

MEDIA CONTACT LIST

The Waller Times
2410 Main Street
Waller, Texas 77484 wallertimes@sbcglobal.net 936-372-9448

The Katy Times
5319 East 5th Street
Katy, Texas 77494 timesnews@katytimes.com 281-391-3141

The Hotline Press
1116 Austin Street
Hempstead, Texas 77445 hotlinepress@sbcglobal.net 979-826-8777

The Times Tribune
P O Box 1549
Brookshire, Texas 77423 news.trib@timestribune.com 281-934-4949