

PFLUGERVILLE RESIDENTS FIGHT PROPERTY TAX INCREASE

Activists now hope to spare ETJ residents from property tax increase

PFLUGERVILLE, Texas, February 6, 2013

Last night, taxpayer relief activists won a victory in their fight against a property tax increase thanks to Pflugerville City Council's decision to deny a petition that would include the City in a new overlay district called Emergency Services District #2A.

The petition, circulated by Pflugerville Fire Department, would have doubled the property tax rate by using a new loophole in state law that allows a second district to be created on top of the current one (ESD No. 2). However, the Council did approve the inclusion of Pflugerville's extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) in the newly proposed district, so activists will testify at the Travis County Commissioners Court on Tuesday, February 12 to spare ETJ residents from a doubled property tax burden.

Those speaking at the Pflugerville City Council meeting last night noted how the petition of only 100 signatures represented less than 0.1% of the residents in ESD No. 2, which has a population of more than 100,000. Most petitions in Pflugerville require 20% of registered voters to get on the ballot.

One Pflugerville resident suggested how the City could keep costs low, "Other local cities have both fire and EMS under one governing organization. Have two separate commissions could result in duplicate infrastructure and headcount that is higher than needed," said Melody Ryan.

Those representing the ESD claimed they expected to draw more than \$1 million in reserves to balance the budget for last year, though an examination of preliminary financial statements filed at the end of the fiscal year indicate that the ESD had a net income of \$87,000 along with a positive net income in all recent years. Additionally, response time decreased considerably since 2006, even though no new stations were constructed.

At a time when taxpayers are tightening their belts due to a sluggish national economy and are facing a new federal tax increase at the beginning of 2013, they are now shouldering the burden of a 4.5% annual pay increase agreed upon by the ESD and the Pflugerville Professional Firefighters Association in 2010. That represents a 50% higher pay increase than Austin public safety employees.

Those defending the taxpayers' wallets suggested additional training for current

employees in Advanced Lift support certification and negotiating aid agreements with the City of Austin instead of expending money into costly and unnecessary new infrastructure. Other funding sources could include fees charged for annual fire inspections and first response EMS calls, which other ESDs currently charge, and higher property and sales tax revenue expected from growth in commercial construction.

Residents in attendance were pleased with City Council's decision. "The decision tonight demonstrates the importance of speaking to your leaders about the issues that are important to you so that you can make an impact. I am pleased that City Council has protected the taxpayers from a large property tax increase and is actively searching for solutions to ensure quality service at a reasonable cost", said Ryan.