



REPORT FROM TRAVIS COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT NO. 9

DECIDING *the* FUTURE

YOU'RE INVITED!

Town Hall Meeting on your fire protection Feb. 7

Travis County Emergency Services District No. 9 (ESD9) will host a town hall meeting at 7 p.m. Feb. 7 at Valley View Elementary, 1201 S. Capitol of Texas Hwy., to discuss your fire protection and emergency medical response.

ESD9 is the grassroots governmental entity that funds and operates the Westlake Fire Department to provide fire protection and emergency medical first response to an estimated 17,000 residents in central Travis County, including the cities of West Lake Hills and Rollingwood.

ESD9 Commissioners are considering calling an election for May 6 asking voters to consider a local sales tax of one-and-one-

**Attend the meeting
at 7:00 pm Feb. 7 at
Valley View Elementary
1201 S. Capitol of Texas Hwy.**

half percent. That would raise the sales tax from 6.75 percent to 8.25 percent [See "Sales Tax Basics," Page 4]. Purchases in West Lake Hills and Rollingwood would not be affected, because each city already collects the maximum sales tax allowed by law. Because of this, voters in West Lake Hills and Rollingwood would not be eligible to vote in an ESD9 sales tax election.

The additional sales tax is projected

to raise about \$500,000 a year to replace property tax revenues lost when the City of Austin annexed Lost Creek Municipal Utility District. In spite of the fact that the City of Austin collects the property tax from the area, ESD9 will continue to provide fire protection in Lost Creek through the Automatic Aid system in effect in Travis County.

Under Automatic Aid, the closest emergency services organization responds to an emergency, even if the site of the emergency is not in the organization's jurisdiction.

"Automatic Aid can help our fire department sometimes, but, because of the geography in the West Lake Hills area, we end

Continued on Page 3, "MEET"

Getting squeezed

Growth, annexations put a pinch on ESD9

Like many other ESDs close to major cities, Travis County Emergency Services District No. 9 is feeling the squeeze.

As Austin grows around ESD9, there are more people for the Westlake Fire Department to protect – more commuters racing along Bee Caves Road to get to MoPac, more traffic accidents that require both fire suppression and medical first-response.

But as areas grow, the City of Austin eyes the property taxes they can contribute to the city's treasury. Once the City of Austin annexes an area, it's removed from ESD9's tax rolls.

The tax that the City receives is barely a rounding error for the multibillion-dollar municipal budget. For ESD9, the lost tax can hamper its ability to

Continued on Page 3, "SQUEEZE"



Traffic accidents challenge firefighters' fire suppression and medical skills.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

about your fire protection and EMS

Q: Who provides our fire protection and emergency medical first response?

A: Travis County Emergency Services District No. 9 (ESD9) is the grassroots government responsible for fire protection and emergency medical first response in 15 square miles of Travis County, including the cities of West Lake Hills and Rollingwood. ESD9 is overseen by five commissioners appointed by the Travis County Commissioners Court. ESD9 operates the Westlake Fire Department.

Q: What is an emergency services district?

A: Emergency services districts are political subdivisions of the state of Texas like school districts. An emergency services district (ESD) can provide fire protection, emergency medical response or both. There are more than 320 emergency services districts in Texas, including 14 in Travis County.

Q: Where does our local ESD get its money?

A: ESD9 levies a property tax of 7.299 cents per \$100 property value. (Put another way, if you have taxable property worth \$100, you would pay just more than seven cents in tax.)

Currently in ESD9, a home valued at \$300,000 on the tax rolls pays \$218.97 a year – less than \$19 a month – to know that trained firefighters and emergency medical technicians will be at the door within minutes in an emergency.

The state constitution limits emergency services districts to a tax rate of 10 cents per \$100 of property value. ESD9's tax rate is the lowest tax rate of all Travis County ESDs.

Q: Why is the ESD considering calling a sales tax election?

A: ESD9 hopes to find revenues to continue providing fire protection and emergency medical services after losing a substantial portion of its property tax base when the City of Austin annexed Lost Creek Municipal Utility District.

The only other viable alternative to increase revenues is raising the property tax. The members of the ESD Board of Commissioners don't want to raise property taxes.

Despite the loss of the Lost Creek area tax base, ESD9 must continue to employ firefighters and provide them the tools they need to protect the District. Although ESD9 no longer receives property tax revenue from the annexed area, it is still responding to calls in the former MUD because of the Automatic Aid system in effect in Travis County.

In its long-term strategic plan, ESD9 has identified the need to replace two front-line engines in the coming years. Fully equipped fire engines such as those that need to be replaced can routinely cost as much as half-a-million dollars.

ESD9 also hopes to begin planning a new, strategically placed fire station that can more efficiently serve the areas remaining after future Austin annexations.

Q: How much money will the sales tax increase provide?

A: An estimated \$500,000 a year.

Q: Will this affect my property taxes?

A: No. Travis County ESD No. 9 hopes to avoid a property tax increase.

Q: Can the election affect my homeowner insurance?

A: Possibly. Many insurance companies rely on an independent rating agency – the Insurance Services Office, Inc. or ISO – to determine the risk of fire damage in an area. The lower the ISO rating, the lower homeowner premiums are, generally. ESD9 works hard to maintain a low rating for the district and low premiums for homeowners.

Staffing, equipment and stations are key components of the ISO rating, and ESD9 hopes to maintain its assets to assure the lowest possible homeowner insurance premiums.

Q: How is sales tax collected?

A: Sales tax is collected when a person purchases a taxable item. The maximum sales tax that can be collected is 8.25 percent – 6.25 percent goes to the State; two percent is reserved for local jurisdictions. The Westbank Community Library District already collects a half-percent sales tax in an area roughly contiguous to Eanes ISD.

If voters approve a one-and-a-half percent sales tax in Travis County Emergency Services District No. 9, most residents of ESD9 will probably notice little change. Most residents shop in Austin, West Lake Hills or Rollingwood where the sales tax is already at the maximum 8.25 percent.

The sales tax, commissioners believe, will reduce the burden on property taxpayers as visitors to the district – such as drivers passing through on Loop 360 – will help pay for the protection they receive. When ESD9 responds to an auto accident, we don't check IDs before we help.

ESD9 medical calls mean shift in mission

Although its name says “fire,” most of the calls that the Westlake Fire Department responds to are medical.

Of 1,079 emergencies between Jan. 1 and mid-December 2016, 65 percent involved emergency medical care.

With additional resources, ESD9 and the Westlake Fire Department hope to develop special two-person squads to respond to medical calls. The squads would use smaller, SUV-type vehicles that can better navigate the narrow roads in ESD9’s hilly terrain and reduce wear on expensive fire engines.

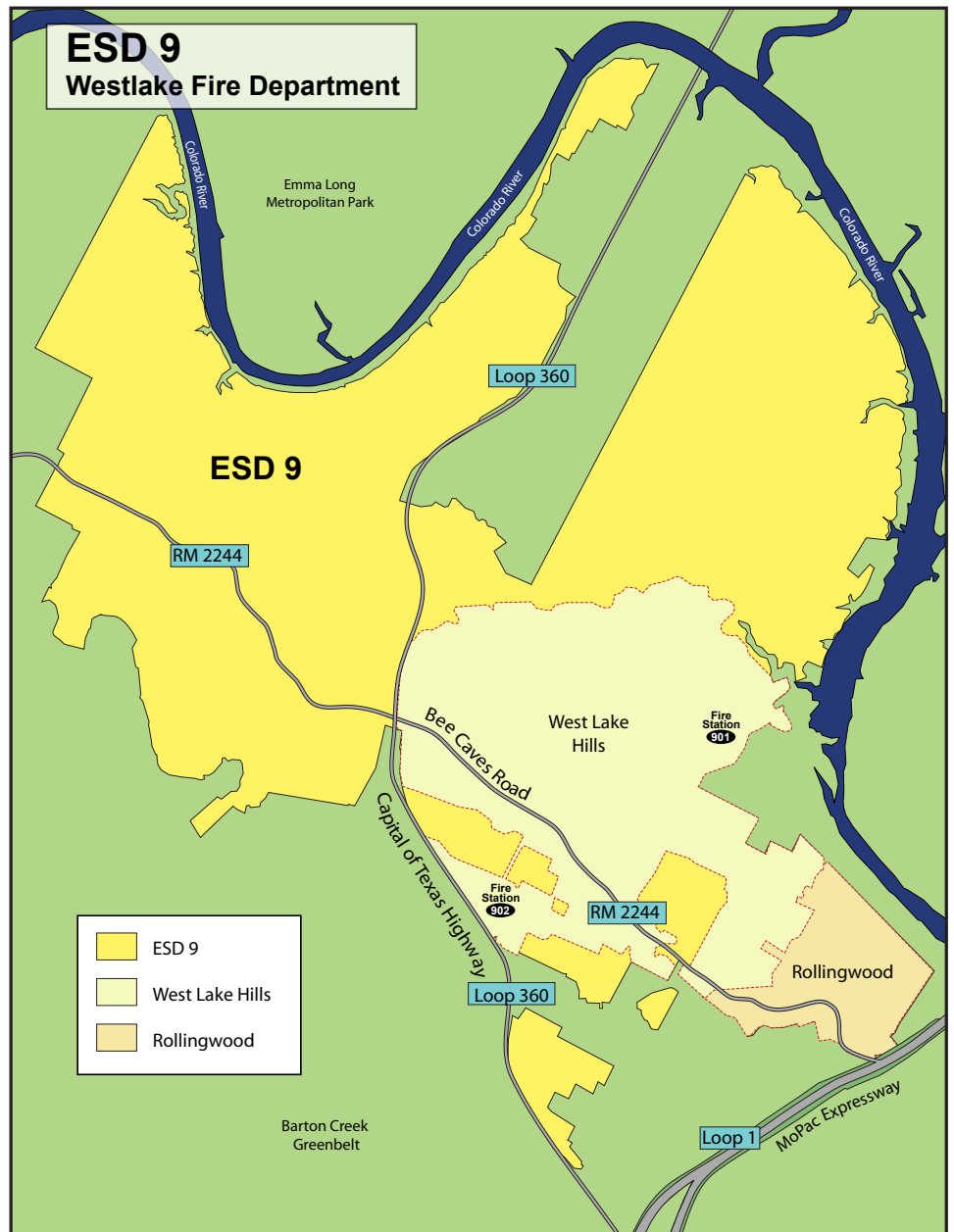
“We know we must adapt our mission to the needs of our citizens,” Fire Chief Mike Elliott said.

Need a speaker? We can help

If your church, club, civic group or youth group needs a speaker, Travis County ESD No. 9 and the Westlake Fire Dept. can help.

We’ll be happy to tell you about the services we provide. We can explain the challenges we face in providing municipal-quality fire protection at less than half the cost of many municipalities.

To arrange a speaker, call your Fire Department at 512-539-3400.



MEET *From Page 1*

up responding to more City of Austin calls than the City responds to ours,” said Fire Chief Mike Elliott.

The only alternatives to the loss of the Lost Creek MUD tax base are to raise the property tax on remaining ESD9 residents; to cut expenses and reduce services; or to add a sales tax.

The additional sales tax funding will also allow ESD9 to replace aging fire engines and begin planning for a new, centrally located station. The new station would allow the Westlake Fire Department better access to areas served after future Austin annexations.

“We hope that residents will want to learn more about the challenges facing their Fire Department and attend the Feb. 7 Town Hall Meeting,” Chief Elliott said.

SQUEEZE *From Page 1*

sustain the services its residents have come to expect.

When the City of Austin annexed Lost Creek Municipal Utility District in December 2015, it removed about 11 percent of ESD9’s annual budget. Even though the City of Austin is now responsible for providing fire protection in Lost Creek, ESD9 is still responding to fire calls because of the Automatic Aid system in place in Travis County.

ESD9 is looking for alternatives since, thanks to annexation, it’s providing the same services for 11 percent less money.

Texas cities have broad powers to annex territory adjacent to the city limits – the area called the “extraterritorial jurisdiction” or “ETJ.” A majority vote in the 11-member City Council can put thousands of homeowners on the path to paying city taxes and to being subject to city laws they had no say in writing.

With the exception of the cities of West Lake Hills and Rollingwood, all of ESD9 is in the Austin ETJ, and continued growth could put more areas on the City’s annexation plan.

**TRAVIS COUNTY ESD NO. 9
WESTLAKE FIRE DEPT.**

PO Box 162170
Austin, TX 78716

Administration- 512-539-3400

www.westlakefd.org

PRESORTED FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
AUSTIN, TX
PERMIT NO. 1

*JOIN US 7pm FEBRUARY 7 AT VALLEY VIEW ELEMENTARY, 1201 S. CAPITOL OF TEXAS HWY.
FOR A TOWN HALL MEETING ON YOUR FIRE PROTECTION & EMS SERVICE*

*Para obtener una copia de esta informacion traducida al español,
favor llame a telefono 512-539-3400*



SALES TAX BASICS

In Texas, the sales tax on covered items cannot exceed 8.25 percent. Of that, 6.25 percent goes to the State of Texas. The remaining two percent is reserved for local governments, such as ESDs.

Currently in our area, consumers pay 6.75 percent in sales tax – 6.25 percent goes to the state, and the Westlake Community Library District collects a one-half-percent sales tax.

Most residents are used to paying the 8.25 percent, because much of their shopping is in Austin, West Lake Hills or Rollingwood, which are already at the maximum. As such, residents in West Lake Hills and Rollingwood would not be eligible to vote in an ESD9 sales tax election.

Sales tax reduces the reliance on property tax to fund ESD9's firefighting and emergency medical response through Westlake Fire Department.

When a visitor – driving along Loop 360, say – purchases a taxable item during the trip through ESD9, the sales tax helps reduce the burden on property taxpayers if the visitor needs emergency assistance.

Minutes count

ESD9 strategies reduce time to receive help

When it comes to fire protection, quick response is essential to save lives and protect property.

In a wildland fire, the burn area can double between thirty seconds and four minutes. At that rate, a one-acre fire can become a 16,000-acre fire in an hour.

When responding to an emergency medical services call, the need for speed is even more critical. Travis County ESD No. 9 knows that minutes count:

- **The chances of survival of a heart attack drop seven to ten percent every minute.**
- **Within four to six minutes, permanent brain damage can occur, and the patient can die.**
- **After ten minutes, few resuscitation attempts are effective.**