

I attended the September 3<sup>rd</sup> Emergency Services District public hearing on behalf of the HOA. The ESD is the taxing entity to fund our volunteer Fire Department. The primary purpose of this hearing was concerning the tax rate, which is remaining at .03 per \$100 valuation, but because of the increase in our property valuations resulted in increased tax revenue. This required them to have a public hearing. They will vote to adopt the tax rate at their next meeting.

Since no other citizens were there, I was able to have a discussion with all the ESD Commissioners and get some background and what the future plans are for the Fire Department, as well as give them some information on Saddle Creek.

- ESD #1 formed in 1998 with merger of Wellborn and Millican FD
- Currently all volunteer headed by Chief Chet Barker, who works full time for College Station FD
- There are currently 4 fire stations in ESD#1
- Typical year they respond to around 500 calls, up greatly this year with 80 just in August
- Their current budget is \$480,000
- They will be making their final payment on debt next month
- The State rates fire departments with an ISO rating from 1 to 10 (10 being the worst), they had been a 9 or 10 depending on how far away from a fire station you were, but the Chief requested the State inspect and re-rate the department. As of February 2020, they are now rated 5/5Y. They said a lower ISO should lower homeowners insurance premiums.

The Chief estimates they need about 25 volunteers per station, but they have seen a drastic drop in the number of volunteers, now around 25 for all stations total. The volunteers all carry pagers and when they get a call, they have to leave wherever they are, go to the station to get the truck and then respond to the call. He recently approached the ESD Commissioners about putting on some paid staff that will stay at the station. This would decrease response times and help replace the drop off in volunteers. Initially there would be a Chief, then they would add firefighters from local fire departments looking to pick up extra shifts. There would be no training required since they would already be certified.

The problem the ESD is facing is funding. They are currently under an old rule that caps them at .03 per \$100 valuation, while most ESD's around the State are under a .10 cap. The Commissioners indicated that they have managed to build new fire stations and provide the necessary equipment at .03, but that does not provide any funding for paid personnel. Their forecasts show they would need another .02 per \$100 valuation to hire the Chief and pay a rotating crew of part time firefighters to be housed at the stations. A couple of the stations were built with living quarters in anticipation of growth in Precinct 1.

There will be a proposition on the November ballot to allow them move to the new .10 cap, in line with other state ESDs. There should be flyers with all the details of their plan coming in the mail in the next couple of weeks. There is also an open house on October 8<sup>th</sup> from 6:30-8:30 at the Millican fire station for anyone interested. I have contact information for the consultant handling this for the ESD as well as contact information for Chief Barker if we need additional information.