



DECIDING THE FUTURE

JOIN US

Two opportunities
to learn about your
fire and emergency
medical protection.

7-8pm Wed. April 3
Twin Creeks Country Club
3200 Twin Creeks Club Dr.

3pm Sat. April 6
Twin Creeks Hall
13400 FM 2769
(formerly Enchanted Tavern;
in connection with VNA
Annual Meeting)

Town Hall Meetings to share challenges facing ESD14

Travis County Emergency Services District No. 14 invites residents to participate in two meetings to discuss fire protection and emergency medical response.

Travis County ESD No. 14 is the grassroots government responsible for emergency response. It funds the Volente Fire Department.

The first meeting is 7 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, April 3, at the Twin Creeks Country Club, 3200 Twin Creeks Club Drive. The second is at 3 p.m. Saturday, April 6, during the

Volente Neighborhood Association Annual Meeting at Twin Creeks Hall (formerly the Enchanted Tavern), 13400 FM 2769.

ESD14's Board of Commissioners has called an election for May 11, asking voters to approve a sales and use tax of one percent in the district.

The State Comptroller's Office estimates the sales tax will raise \$80,000 a year for the district.

A declining tax base and a 33 percent decline in revenues has

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Cedar Park plan will leave fire dept. high and dry

Like the docks that are stranded on land now that Lake Travis is less than half-full, Travis County ESD No. 14 could be left high and dry by legislation that is making its way through the Capitol.

Six bills have been filed at the request of the City of Cedar Park. If they become law, ESD14 will face a loss of 60 per cent of its total tax base after two rounds of annexations.

The bills contemplate an agreement – called a Strategic Partnership Agreement or "SPA" – between the City of Cedar Park and development districts on the east side of ESD 14, including the Twin Creeks and Bella Vista neighborhoods.



Cedar Park will annex two Water Control and Improvement Districts (1F and 1G) and the Bella Vista Municipal Utility District for limited purposes. As part of the SPAs, the City of Cedar Park will provide fire protection and collect sales taxes.

In November, Cedar Park Asst. City Manager Josh Selleck attended the ESD's monthly meeting and informed commissioners of the city's plans to annex the areas and remove them from the district.

Faced with the eventual loss of 60 percent of its property taxes, the ESD Board called an election, asking voters to approve a one percent sales tax

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Who provides our fire protection?

A: Travis County Emergency Services District No. 14 is the grassroots government responsible for fire protection and emergency medical first response in 18 square miles of western Travis County, including the Village of Volente. The ESD is overseen by five commissioners appointed by the Travis County Commissioners Court. They are Tom Stevenson, Tom Moody, Ken Beck, Al Blunt and Veronica Frederick.

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 300 ESDs in Texas, 14 in Travis County.

Q: Where does our local ESD get its money?

A: ESD14 levies a property tax of 10 cents per \$100 property value. That means that a home valued at \$250,000 on the tax rolls pays \$250 a year to know that trained, professional-grade firefighters will be at the door within minutes in an emergency.

Under the state constitution, that's the limit on any ESD's property tax rate. ESD14 is maxxed out on its property tax rate.

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

A: ESD14 is facing the loss of 60 percent of its tax base over two years. In the latest round of annexations, the City of Cedar Park reached annexation agreements with water districts in the Twin Creeks area.

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

A: The State Comptroller's Office estimates that the tax will raise about \$80,000 a year.

Q: How will the money be used?

A: The sales tax will help maintain the level of services in the face of a dramatic decline in the ESD's tax base with the imminent removal of much of the eastern portion of the district.

Q: Why not just cut back?

A: The fire department scrubbed its budget after the first round of annexations; still its level of service compares favorably to municipal departments which require two- to three times the property tax effort of ESD14. Reducing the three-person crew would have significant impact on the quality of service the department provides.

Q: How will this affect my taxes?

A: Most residents of ESD14 will probably notice little change. 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 Village of Volente is already at the maximum sales tax rate, and its citizens are not eligible to vote in the ESD's tax election.

Since there are few businesses in the remaining area of ESD14, most residents shop in Austin, where the sales tax is already at the maximum.

The sales tax, commissioners believe, will also reduce the burden on property taxpayers as visitors to the district will help pay for the protection they receive. When ESD14 firefighters respond to an auto accident or help pull someone out of Lake Travis, they don't ask for IDs.

MEETINGS *From Page 1*

forced the ESD to dip into reserves to provide its services, and a new challenge is arising, with proposed limited-purpose annexation of much of the eastern portion of the district [See Story, Page 1]. Under proposed legislation, the City of Cedar Park could force the ESD to remove tax base from the district, bringing the total loss to 60 percent over two years.

If the sales tax is unsuccessful, ESD commissioners may have to cut the number of paid firefighters per shift by a third.

"Voters will decide the future of their fire protection and emergency medical response on May 11," said Fire Chief Walter Groman. "We hope these meetings will give them the information they need to make an informed decision."

Need a speaker? We can help

If your church, club, civic group or youth group needs a speaker, ESD14 and the Volente 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, contact Fire Chief Walter Groman at 258-1114.

The doughnut that's getting eaten

-  ESD 14
-  PROPOSED ANNEXATION
-  BALCONES PRESERVE (tax exempt)

ANNEX *From Page 1*

May 11. Early voting in that election begins April 29.

“The irony is that the people in the annexation areas will vote on the ESD’s sales tax, but once they’re annexed, they’ll pay Cedar Park’s sales tax...without a vote,” said Fire Chief Walter Groman.

The district was already pinched. Revenues dropped 33 percent from 2012 to 2013, and the district had to dip into reserves for more than 20 percent of its budget.

Unlike many other Travis County ESDs, ESD14 can’t count on development to grow the tax base.

Some 55 percent of the ESD is within the tax-exempt Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, which will remain undeveloped. However, ESD14 is responsible for battling wildland fires in the Preserve when they occur.

As the 2011 Labor Day fires demonstrated, wildland fires move with astonishing speed, and Volente Fire Department is the first line of defense to prevent the spread of fire from the Preserve to the Village of Volente, Bella Vista, Twin Creeks, Deer Creek and other neighboring areas.



ESD poised to respond quickly to medical calls

Along with fighting fires, the Volente Fire Department, funded by Travis County ESD No. 14, provides first response to medical emergencies in the district.

In fact, almost 70 percent of the calls the fire department answers are medical, often related to traffic accidents on highly traveled, commuter-frequented roads such as FM 2769 (Volente Road) and Bullick Hollow Road.

VFD firefighters provide the initial treatment while awaiting an ambulance.

That’s important, because the average time it takes an Austin-Travis County EMS ambulance to get to a destination in the ESD is 20-25 minutes.

“Minutes count in a medical emergency,” observed Fire Chief Walter Groman, “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.

‘In an emergency, every minute counts.’

— Walter Groman
Fire Chief

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TRAVIS COUNTY ESD NO. 14 VOLENTE FIRE DEPARTMENT

15406 FM 2769
Volente, TX 78641
Administration – 512-258-1114

www.VVFD.net

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Drought, fire danger predicted to worsen

Weather forecasters say that drought conditions in our area are likely to persist and intensify.

Western Travis County is already in a “moderate” drought. The Climate Prediction Center at the National Weather Service says that the dryness will persist or get worse through May 31.

Dry weather means more risk for wildfire. Take a moment to remind yourself of precautions you need to take.

TEN SIMPLE STEPS TO PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM WILDLAND FIRE

Wildfire can strike your home if you have not taken some steps to protect your house and property. The actions and precautions listed below are designed to help you prepare your home and lessen the threat of wildland fire damage to you and your property.

1. Propane tanks should be far enough away from buildings for valves to be shut off in case of fire. Keep area around the tank clear of flammable vegetation.
2. Store gasoline in an approved safety can away from occupied buildings.
3. All combustibles such as firewood, wooden picnic tables, boats and stacked lumber should be kept away from structures.
4. Clear roof surfaces and gutters regularly to avoid build-up of flammable materials such as leaves and other debris.
5. Remove branches from trees to a height of 15 feet or more.
6. Clear a fuel break of at least three times the fuel length around all structures.
7. Have fire tools handy such as: a ladder long enough to reach your roof, shovel, rake and a bucket or two for water.
8. Place connected garden hoses at all sides of your home for emergency use.
9. Assure that you and your family know all emergency exits from your home.
10. Assure that you and your family know all emergency exits from your neighborhood.

MINUTES *From Page 3*

After ten minutes, few resuscitation attempts are effective.

Much of ESD14, notably the Village of Volente, is surrounded by Lake Travis and cut off from major development by the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve. Apart from the Volente FD station in Volente, the nearest fire station is 15 to 20 minutes away from the western part of the ESD.

ESD14 and the VFD provide three paid, full-time firefighters around the clock to respond to emergencies in the district. These firefighters are supplemented by trained volunteers.

Recognizing the comparative isolation, the ESD14 Board and Volente FD have made sure their firefighters have a higher level of training than many other Travis County ESDs.

Many Volente FD firefighters are intermediate level emergency medical responders, just one notch below the paramedics on an Austin-Travis County EMS ambulance.

As with volunteer fire departments across the nation, Volente fire department faces challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

As the average population ages, fewer are able to meet the physical requirements of the fire department. Those that are in the prime ages for volunteering are often time-stressed from commuting to work or dealing with young families.

The higher level of training required for both medical and fire calls can be daunting for volunteers, but some VFD volunteers continue to serve in invaluable support roles.