



# Chapter IV

## Public Relations & Communications



October 2019



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## Section 1.00 - Plan Purpose

The district has developed this public relations program to promote effective communications between the district and the public to:

Provide current and useful information on appraisal policies and practices, including:

- Information regarding available exemptions and special valuations;
- Appraisal methods and value determinations,
- Taxpayer valuation appeal process,
- Regular business hours and holidays,
- The district's reappraisal plan,
- Estimated and certified values for taxing jurisdictions, and
- The district's plan for operations during crises situations; and
- Create public awareness of the importance of the property tax in funding local government services;
- Receive comments and questions regarding the district and its operations.

## Section 2.00 - Public Relations Officer

The Chief Appraiser will serve as the primary spokesperson for the district; however, the Chief Appraiser may designate any qualified staff member to represent the district.

Employees of the district are prohibited from speaking on behalf of the district without the consent and approval of the Chief Appraiser.

## Section 3.00 Communications Initiated By The District

The public relations officer, or designated representative, will strive to publicly communicate the role of the appraisal district and the services it offers.

- Regular communication topics include:
- Exemption and special valuation availability, qualifications, and filing requirements,
- How the district determines property values,
- How taxpayers may appeal property values,

- How the public may request public records;
- Estimates of Values for taxing jurisdictions;
- Certified Values for taxing jurisdictions;
- Issuance of Annual Summary Appraisal Report;
- Reappraisal Plan activities;
- Public access to the district's:
- Board of Directors,
- Appraisal Review Board, and
- Agricultural Advisory Board; and
- Any other matters regarding the appraisal district or property tax system that the Chief Appraiser chooses to provide information.

## Section 4.00 - Communication Media

The public relations officer will provide information to the public through:

- The district's website,
- Press releases and new articles published in the local official news publications:
  - The Freestone County Times,
  - The Fairfield Recorder, and
  - The Teague Chronicle.
- Publications and pamphlets prepared by the district or the Property Tax Assistance Division (PTAD), available on the website and in the office.
- Public speaking opportunities at workshops and forums (sponsored by the district or community organizations),
- Workshops and forums (sponsored by the district),
- Public designated computers (in the district's public area),
- Programs and public service announcements broadcast on local radio station, and
- Internet social media pages created for the district's purposes.
- All correspondence must be generated in a professional manner in accordance with the district's public correspondence policy.

## 4.01 Website Requirements

The district is responsible for maintaining two distinctly different websites – one for general appraisal district information – and one specifically designed to meet the requirement for Truth in Taxation notification.

### General Website

The district's general website will provide information to the public regarding:

- Methods of contacting the district,
- A property appraisal record search,
- Maps,
- Report of:
  - Public Funds Investment Officers Quarterly Activity,
  - Utility Usage
  - Annual Summary Appraisal Report, and
  - Annual Mass Appraisal Report;
- Application forms for exemptions and special valuations;
- Staff email directory;
- Public notices for meetings of the:
  - Board of Directors,
  - Appraisal Review Board (ARB), and
  - Agricultural Advisory Board;
- Publications and brochures regarding property tax matters; and
- Other information and documents that are of public interest regarding the appraisal district's activities.

### Truth In Taxation Website

The district's Truth in Taxation website must contain a searchable database where property owners can:

- Review proposed tax rates,
- Be informed of public hearings and meetings of each taxing jurisdictions and the location of those events, and
- Estimate their taxes based upon the proposed rates, the no new revenue rate, and the voter approval rate.

This district is responsible for providing the website and property database. The tax assessor for each jurisdiction is responsible for entering proposed tax rates. Each jurisdiction will be responsible for posting public notice of meetings.

Access to the website for the administrative purposes will be assigned by the Chief Appraiser.

## Section 5.00 - Communications Initiated by the General Public

The district will accept comments from the public through oral comment, email, letter, or on the district's Public Comment Card.

Any written comment regarding the district will be responded to in the written manner in which the comment was received (letter, email, telephone call, etc.)

Comments received in person will be addressed by the Taxpayer Service Clerks or the Chief Appraiser (individually or as Public Relations Officer) verbally when practical, or in an agreed format if further review and evaluation of the comment is needed.

### Section 5.01 - Agents

A property owner may designate another person to act as the agent of the owner for any purpose concerning his property. *PTC*

*Section 1.111a*

An agent may be granted general power authorizing the representation of the property owner in all property tax matters concerning the property or in any one or combination of the specific powers listed below:

- File protests and appear before the ARB
- Receive confidential information
- Receive all property tax notices and other communications for a property, including appraisal notices, ARB orders, hearing notices, tax bills, and collection notices,
- Negotiate and resolve disputed tax matters
- Any other action specified by the property owner.

The designation must be in writing, signed by the property owner or other person so authorized, and must clearly indicate that the person is authorized to act on behalf of the property owner in property tax matters relating to the property or the property owner. *PTC* Section 1.111b

The appointment of agent is not binding on the District until the designation form is filed with the District. *PTD* Rule 155.44c

A tax agent will not be allowed to represent the property owner in any capacity until such time as the Appointment of Agent form is filed with the District,

#### (A) Appointment Form

A property owner must use an Appointment of Agent Form to designate an agent for property tax matters. A designation on any other form will not be accepted. *PTD* Rule 155.44a

An agent designated to represent a property owner must use an Account Update for Agent-Represented Property Form to provide the District with information concerning changes, additions, or deletions in the properties for which the agent is authorized to represent the owner. PTD Rule 155.44n

Unsigned Appointment of Agent forms are not valid and no consideration will be given to the agent until the form is signed by the property owner.

#### (B) Designation Period

The designation of an agent remains in effect until revoked in writing by the property owner and filed with the District. A designation may also be made to expire according to its own terms, but is still subject to prior revocation by the property owner. PTC Section 1.111(c)

#### (C) Designation Period

An owner may not designate more than one agent to represent the property in connection with any single duty.

If two or more designations have been filed on the same property, the designation bearing the later date of appointment revokes the form bearing the earlier date, as of the date the form bearing the later date is filed. PTC Section 1.111d

A property owner may, however, designate different agents for representation in different capacities on a single item of property or on different aspects of a particular case. PTD Rule 155.44f

### Section 5.02 - Electronic Communication Methods

The general public may contact the district through its general email account:

[general.info@freestonecad.org](mailto:general.info@freestonecad.org).

District personnel may communicate with the public via email in response to all inquiries or public comments.

The Appraisal Review Board (ARB) may receive communication through its general email account, [arb@freestonecad.org](mailto:arb@freestonecad.org).

### Section 5.03 - Electronic Communication Limitations

Property owners may file official documents i.e. exemption and special valuation applications, renditions, protest forms, or other forms required by the district by:

- Fax to 903-389-5955 or
- email at [general.info@freestonecad.org](mailto:general.info@freestonecad.org)

District employees may communicate with the public via personal business email accounts provided by the district but may not encourage the filing of official documents through any other email account other than through [general.info@freestonecad.org](mailto:general.info@freestonecad.org).

Document delivery and notification requirements can be found in Section 10.00 of this chapter.

## Section 6.00 - Communications With Designated Agents

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Communications between the district and designated tax agents will be treated in the same manner as communications between the district and the property owner.

## Section 7.00 - Responses To Public Comments/Questions

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All comments will be reviewed and evaluated to determine appropriate public responses.

All inquiries initiated by the general public, regardless of communication method, should be answered in a professional manner within ten days of receipt.

Responses to inquiries may include:

- The provision of requested information,
- A statement that the information is not available for public disclosure or inspection,
- A statement that the district does not have the ability to answer the inquiry, or
- Any other statement in response to the inquiry deemed appropriate by the Chief Appraiser.

Correspondence addressing policy issues must cite controlling rules, statutes, or professional standards.

All written communication between the general public and the appraisal district, other than email, must be written in a professional manner, using official CAD letterhead.

When prompt response (within ten business days) is possible, the requested information should be forwarded to the inquirer as soon as possible, often within the same day.

All email must be written and sent in a professional manner, as described in FCAD's *Tips for Creating and Sending Professional Email*.

## Section 7.01 - Archival of Written Inquiries & Communication

In all instances, all written comments, inquiries, or requests for information, including emails, should be preserved as provided in the district's records management plan (see in *FCAD Official Policies, Chapter VI Section 3.00*).

Inquiries for public information should be made and handled according to district's policies for public access to records, as provided in *FCAD Official Policies, Chapter VI Section 2.00*.

The district will maintain a copy of all written comment communication according to its Records Management Schedule and Plan.

## Section 8.00 - Responses to Criticisms

Responses to criticisms should be address promptly and be resolved in a non-judgmental way.

Appropriate responses will be generated by the District as outlined in *FCAD Official Policies, Chapter 1 Administration Section 2.15 Complaints from the Public*.

CAD staff members must inform area supervisors and the Chief Appraiser (as Public Relations Officer) of all critical or confrontational comments received from the public.

Written documentation of the criticism and the solution to the situation should be presented to the Chief Appraiser (as Public Relations Officer) immediately after the criticism has been received. The district has prepared a *Confrontation Report Form* for this purpose. These forms are kept in the districts records system according to the Records Management Schedule and Plan.

## Section 9.00 - Staff Briefings & Training for Public Related Matters

All staff members are required to receive the Texas Attorney General's Public Records training.

The public relations officer will regularly prepare training sessions for the district's staff regarding employee demeanor with the public and ways to improve the organizations image with the public.

The Public Relations Officer will deliver notice to all staff members via email and in regular staff meetings regarding:

- Recently issued press releases,
- CAD generated pamphlets and publications,
- Scheduled public workshops and meetings, and

- Other current events or topics affecting the public and CAD operations.

## Section 10.00 - General Public Notifications

The district will generally keep the public informed of its activities and requirements via its website, social media, newspapers, direct mailings and other approved means as required by the open records and open meetings acts. However, variations from the schedule may occur due to public inquiry, legislative changes, and other events that necessitate the need for public awareness.

### 10.01 - Board of Directors Meetings

Regular meetings of the board of directors are held on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the district's office at 218 North Mount Street, in Fairfield. Public notice of each meeting is posted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with at least seventy-two hours prior to the meeting at:

- The district office, and
- The district's website [www.freestonecad.org](http://www.freestonecad.org).

Special meetings may be held at any time at the call of the Secretary of the Board as long as the seventy-two meeting notice requirement is met.

In situations where the public welfare is in jeopardy, such as in response to a disaster or emergency, the board may meet with less than seventy-two hour meeting notification.

### 10.02 - Appraisal Review Board

The ARB typically meets once quarterly to hear motions to correct the appraisal roll and timely filed taxpayer protests. Meetings of the ARB must held in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with at least Seventy-two hours notice of the meeting.

As with the board of directors, agendas for meetings are posted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with least seventy-two hours prior to the meeting at:

- The district office, and
- The district's website [www.freestonecad.org](http://www.freestonecad.org).

Taxpayer protests are typically heard in July each year. The posted agenda for these meetings includes a schedule of hearings by property owner name and hearing time.

Additionally, the ARB allows time at each meeting to hear unscheduled taxpayer protests. In such

cases, the property owner will be asked to waive the right to fifteen days notice of the hearing.

### 10.03 - Agricultural Advisory Board

The AAB typically meets during the third week of March annually to review the Chief Appraiser's data regarding typical agricultural practices in the county and owner operating expenses.

Agendas for meetings are posted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act with least seventy-two hours prior to the meeting at:

- The district office, and
- The district's website [www.freestonecad.org](http://www.freestonecad.org).

### 10.04 - Brochures and Pamphlets

The Chief Appraiser periodically reviews the district's brochures and pamphlets to ensure that the information published in them is accurate and lawful. Pamphlets are available throughout the year on the district's website and in the district's office.

### 10.05 - Public Notification of Exemption and Special Use Valuation Availability

The district typically provides public notice of exemption and special valuation availability each year in March by quarter page advertisement in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle.

This notice is posted on the district's website throughout the year for public access and review.

In addition, the district notifies new property owners each year of the exemptions that previous owners have claimed on property. Included with these letters is an application for that exemption/special valuation.

Exemption/special use valuation applications are available on the district's website and in the district's office.

### 10.06 - Notice of Exemption/Special Valuation Application Requirements

Each appraisal year, between December and January, the district mails notice to property owners of the requirements to reapply for exemptions and special valuations. This notice is provided to both new property owners and to those where a suspected change in qualification has occurred.

### 10.07 - Special Business Hours

The district is typically open for business from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday (except for on holidays).

In addition, the district is open one Saturday morning per month, between January and April each year, to allow property owners the opportunity to conduct business with the district in person during non-business hours.

Property owners are provided notice of these special hours by advertisement in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle. Additionally, notice is included with exemption and special valuation application letters mailed to property owners in January each year.

### 10.08 - Public Notification of Property Inspection

The district mails a postcard to property owners at least two weeks in advance of an on-site inspection. Property owners have the opportunity to request to be present for inspection or to deny the appraisal district access for an on-site inspection. However, when an on-site inspection is not possible, the district will conduct an inspection of the property from the nearest public roadway and from aerial photography in the district's possession.

### 10.10 - Public Review of Proposed Valuations

Each year in beginning in April, the district provides Notices of Appraised Value to property owners where:

- There has been a change in ownership,
- There has been a value increase of at least \$1,000 over the previous year's valuation, and
- There has been a change in the qualification of exemptions or special valuations.

Included with these notices are instructions for filing protests regarding the proposed valuations and other related topics regarding the valuation and taxation of an owner's property.

The district also publishes a quarter page advertisement in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle to notify other property owners who may not have received notices of the opportunity to protest their property valuations.

### 10.11 - Reappraisal Plan

The district's current reappraisal plan is available for public inspection on the district's website and in the district office throughout the year.

The district must adopt a reappraisal plan by September 15 of even numbered years. That plan must include a schedule of appraisal related activities for the following two years.

The board must publish public notice of a hearing to adopt the reappraisal plan at least ten days prior to the hearing. The notice is published in the Fairfield Recorder, Freestone County Times, and Teague Chronicle. The notice is also posted on the district's website.

### 10.12 - Public Speaking Opportunities

The district welcomes the opportunity to publicly speak at meetings of civic clubs, lodges, church groups, and other organizations or groups regarding property tax related matters.

All invitations for such speaking engagements must be made through the Chief Appraiser who will determine the best employee to represent the district.

Since these opportunities are invitation related, there is no specific timeline for these activities.

### 10.13 - Staff Development

The district provides continuing education to its staff members from a variety of sources ranging from locally sponsored workshops to seminars and workshops sponsored by organizations including:

- The Texas Attorney General,
- The Texas Library & Archives Commission,
- The Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division,
- The International Association of Assessing Officers,
- The Texas Association of Appraisal Districts,
- The Texas Association of Assessing Officers,
- The Texas Municipal League, and
- Other organizations that provide training for appraisal and customer service related topics.

A schedule of such training opportunities is posted on the district's local intranet site for easy access to both the district's staff and the general public.

### 10.14 - Issuance of Reports

A variety of reports are issued by the Chief Appraiser annually.

- Certified Estimates of Value - issued to each of the taxing jurisdictions by May 1 annually as required by state law.
- Certified Appraised Values - issued to each of the taxing jurisdictions by July 25 annually as required by state law. When the ARB has not approved the records by July 25, the Chief Appraiser must deliver certified estimates of value to each of the taxing jurisdictions by July 25 until the certified values are available.

- Summary Appraisal Report - issued annually along with the value certifications as of July 25 in accordance with Standard 6 USPAP.
- Annual Report - issued annually as of July 25 as required by state law.
- Public Funds Investment Quarterly Report - issued by the 10th day of the month following the end of each calendar quarter as required by the Public Funds Investment Act.

Each of these reports is available for public inspection both in the district's office and on the district's website [www.freestonecad.org](http://www.freestonecad.org)

### 10.11 - Public Notice of Truth In Taxation Information Availability

The district must notify all property owners of publication of proposed tax rate information by US Mail by August 7.

## Section - 11.00 Document Delivery Provisions

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All reports, applications, statements, or other documents or papers, and other written business communications between the district and individuals, companies, or their agents, whether it concern the appraisal of property or the administration of the district, may be delivered by one of the following methods:

- First Class Mail and Certified First Class Mail delivered to 218 N Mount Street, Fairfield TX 75840;
- Email to [general.info@freestonecad.org](mailto:general.info@freestonecad.org);
- Fax to 903-389-5955; or
- Common or Contract Carrier delivered to 218 N Mount Street, Fairfield TX 75840.

A property tax form is not invalid or unenforceable solely because the form is a photocopy, facsimile, or electronic copy of the original.

### 11.01 - Electronic Signatures

A property tax form that requires a signature may be signed by means of an electronically captured handwritten signature.

### 11.02 - Delivery Limitations

Documents that must be delivered or returned in a specific manner or format as required by another provision of FCAD Official Policies must be delivered or returned in that specified manner.

### 11.03 - Timeliness of Delivery

Documents that have a specified filing or delivery date as outlined in the district's policies and procedures are considered delivered on time if:

- It is sent by regular, first-class mail, properly addressed with postage prepaid, and it bears a post office cancellation mark of the deadline date or earlier. PTC Section 1.08
- It is emailed or faxed before midnight of the filing or delivery deadline, *or*
- *It is delivered during normal business hours by a common or contract carrier with delivery receipt required.*

### 11.04 - Effect of Holiday or Weekend

The filing or delivery deadline for documents will be extended to the next regular business day if the deadline falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or legal state or national holiday. PTC Section 1.06

### 11.05 - Delivery of Notice

Notices and other forms of written communication **delivered by first class mail** are presumed to be delivered when deposited in the mail. PTC Section 1.07(c)

Notice and other forms of written communication that are **delivered by electronic communication**, including fax or email, are presumed delivered when sent with no delivery errors returned to the sender.

An owner of a residence homestead may request that all notices be delivered by email. The request may be written or made via the district's website. Before delivering a notice by email, the district must send the owner an email confirming the owner's request. An owner's request remains in effect until it is revoked in writing.

A notice that is delivered by this method is presumed delivered until the district receives a confirmation email that the email was undeliverable. In such cases, the original email, along with the "undeliverable email" should be attached to the CAMA documents for all affected parcels and mailed to the last known address of the property owner or agent of record.