

Fire Commissioners Column.....

Bill Madison

If you have not already sent in your ballot for the fire levy, please do so ASAP. The ballots must be postmarked by August 18th. As I have already said, this is an important community issue and a crossroads issue for the fire district. If we are successful, we will be able to continue current operations from our eight fire stations. If we fail, we will be forced to make some changes that will undoubtedly reduce service and slow responses to emergencies. I hope everyone will research the issue carefully and make an informed decision on the future of the district.

Some have tried to compare their personal budgets with the fire district budget. I think this is an apples to oranges task that isn't valid. If you have a gas guzzler car and fuel prices go up 55% as they did last year, you can trade it in for a more efficient model. Fire trucks don't get very good mileage, however we don't have many options. If health care costs for a family go up often you can shop for lower premiums. The fire district has long term contracts with our employees and when health care costs increase markedly, as they have over the past five years, we have few options. If your travel expenses go up too much, you can stay at home and take fewer trips. When the number of 911 calls go up over 50% in five years we have no options. Bottom line: costs we cannot control have gone up more than our income. Something has to change.

One concern about the fire district budget I recently read, thought that the interest costs for loans on fire trucks was too high. That is simply not accurate. Fire trucks are expensive and no one goes out and pays cash for them. The district has carefully considered our need for reliable equipment and shopped wisely for the best deal available. We pay the lowest interest rates available to municipal corporations, much lower than individuals are eligible for. State law determines how much debt the fire district can incur. We have incurred obligations considerably less than that limit.

I also read that someone was concerned that the district purchased fire trucks that were too fancy or had more equipment that was necessary. That is not the case. If you look around you'll notice there is a significant difference between the equipment our fire district uses and the fire trucks in the City. Our needs are different, our fire trucks are different and ours are significantly less expensive.

The district has done much to educate the voters. I hope you have had all your questions answered. If you came to the public forums or any of the commissioners meetings I think you probably have. If you haven't voted, now is the time. We want to continue to provide the best possible service to the community and need your support to do so. Thanks again for your careful consideration on this important issue.