

Brazos County Precinct 4 Volunteer Fire Dept.



# *Deciding the Future*

## **You're invited: Town Hall Meeting March 2 to discuss challenges facing ESD4**

Brazos County Emergency Services District No. 4 (ESD4) invites residents to participate in a Town Hall Meeting to discuss the future of fire protection and emergency medical first response in our area.

The meeting is scheduled at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 2 at Station No. 1, 3098 Fazzino Lane, just off SH21, east of SH OSR.

ESD4 is the grassroots government responsible for fire protection in the western portion of Brazos County, generally between Bryan and the Brazos River. ESD4 contracts with the Brazos County Precinct 4 Volunteer Fire Department.

ESD4's Board of Commissioners has called an election for May 6, asking voters to approve an increase in the maximum permissible tax rate from

3 cents per \$100 of property value to 8 cents per \$100 of property value.

At its Feb. 9 meeting, the Board of Commissioners that oversees ESD4 passed a resolution stating that, if the May 6 proposition passes, it would not

increase the tax rate beyond 6 cents per \$100 in the next two years unless unforeseeable circumstances threatened the financial stability of the ESD.

The owner of a home on the tax rolls for \$100,000

**Continued on Page 3, "MEET"**

**TOWN HALL MEETING  
7-8pm Thurs. 3/2  
Station No. 1  
3098 Fazzino Lane**

## **Growing pains**

*More people,  
more calls for help,  
more strain on VFD*

Last May, Texas A&M announced a \$150 million effort to turn its old Riverside Campus into a major research and development hub, eventually serving as many as 10,000 students.

Unlike the Texas A&M main campus, the newly renamed RELIS Campus won't get its fire protection from a municipality. It will be protected by Brazos County ESD No. 4.

**Continued on Page 3, "GROWTH"**



**Volunteer firefighters work to contain a fire at a storage shed. Even a routine call can turn dangerous, requiring firefighters to wear protective bunker gear. ESD4 hopes to replace aging equipment with new items that comply with national safety standards.**

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## about your emergency services

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

**A:** Brazos County Emergency Services District No. 4 (ESD4) is the grassroots government responsible for fire protection and emergency medical response in 120 square miles of western Brazos County, between Bryan and the Brazos River. The ESD is overseen by five commissioners appointed by the Brazos County Commissioners Court.

### **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. Brazos County ESD No. 4 provides fire protection through a contract with Brazos County Precinct 4 Volunteer Fire Department.

### **Q: Where does our ESD4 get its money?**

**A:** ESD4 levies a property tax of 3 cents per \$100 property value. That means that a home valued at \$100,000 on the tax rolls pays \$30 a year to know that trained firefighters with specialized equipment will be at the door within minutes when there's an emergency. Under the Texas Constitution, no ESD may set a tax rate more than 10 cents per \$100 property value.

### **Q: Why is the ESD calling an election to raise the tax rate ceiling?**

**A:** The district has been at or under the 3 cents per \$100 tax rate since it was created as a Rural Fire Prevention District in 1990.

A lot has changed since 1990. The Bryan-College Station area has experienced rapid growth, and that has spilled out into the area served by ESD4. That growth has strained ESD4's ability to protect citizens.

With more people in the area, there are more calls for help. That means that putting more miles on fire engines and more wear-and-tear on firefighter safety equipment.

And there's more growth coming: Texas A&M has announced it will invest \$150 million in the RELLIS Campus (formerly the Riverside Campus), which is in the heart of ESD4. That will bring new faculty, staff and thousands of new students who are not admitted to the A&M main campus. Even though the RELLIS Campus is protected by ESD4, it pays no property taxes since it's state property.

To meet the current, unmet needs of its fire department and to be able to meet the challenges of future growth, ESD4 needs additional resources.

### **Q: How will this affect my property taxes?**

**A:** Although the ballot will say that voters are considering a raise of the tax rate ceiling to 8 cents per \$100 of property value, the ESD Board's analysis does not show the need to go above 6 cents per \$100 in the foreseeable future. The Board has gone on-record, passing a resolution stating that, barring unforeseen emergencies, the tax rate will not exceed 6 cents per \$100 for the next two years. The impact of that increase to a \$100,000 home is about \$30 a year, or \$2.50 a month.

### **Q: Won't the growth pay for itself?**

**A:** While the growth will add to the property tax base, the increased demand to maintain services will likely outpace the growth in tax revenues.

For example, growth brings more traffic. That will mean more traffic accidents for Brazos Pct. 4 VFD to handle. More traffic also increases the time it takes to get to emergencies, so ESD4 may be forced to identify new, strategic locations for new fire stations.

### **Q: If ESD4 only needs 6-cents-per-\$100 for the next two years, why not call the election for that amount, rather than 8-cents-per-\$100?**

**A:** ESD4 could have asked repeatedly for voter approval to raise the tax rate ceiling, but there are downsides to that. There's a lag between voter approval and actual receipt of increased revenues. With projected growth, ESD4 may not have the luxury of waiting.

And elections are expensive. The ESD4 Board would rather spend money on firefighter safety gear than calling elections.

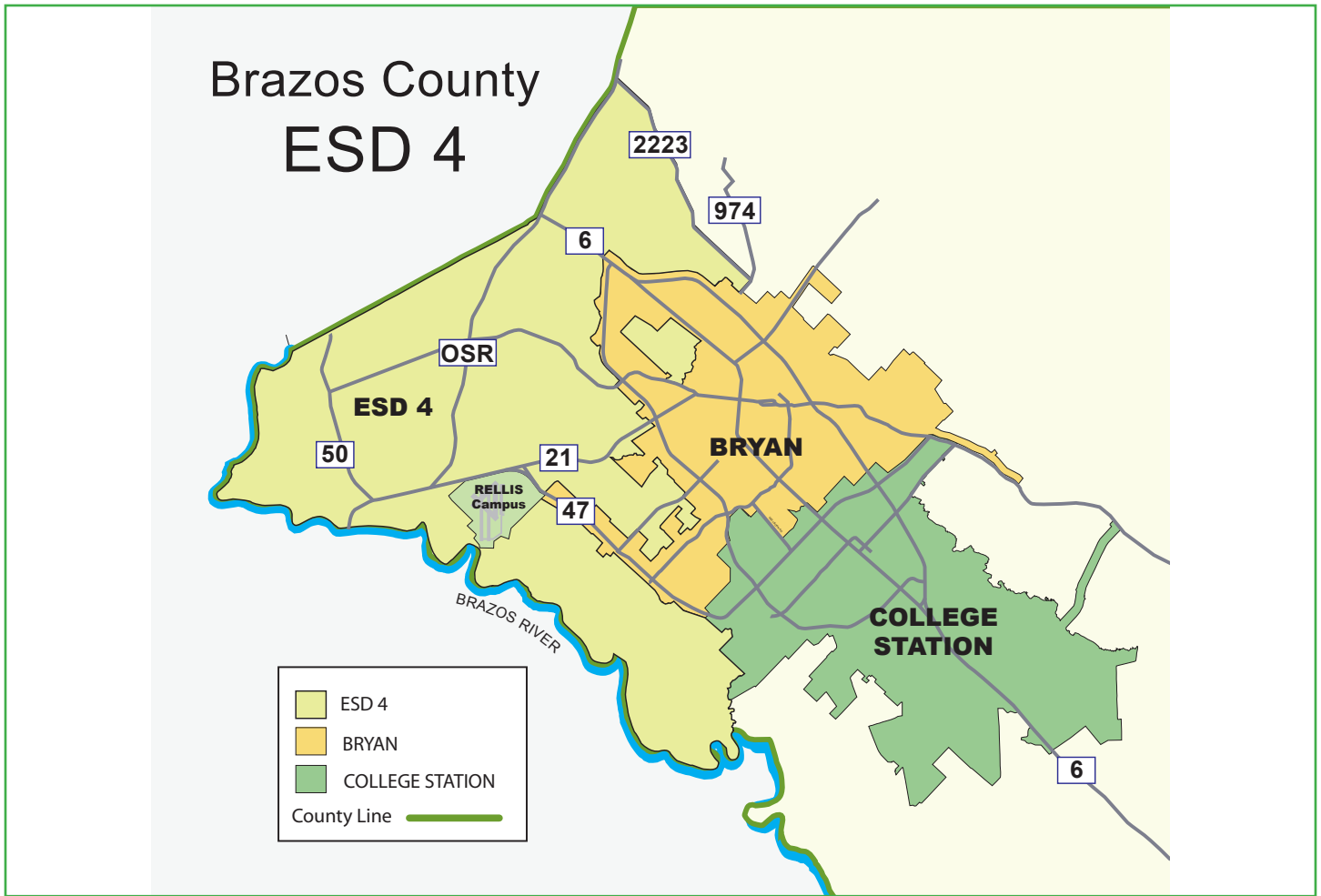
ESD4 Commissioners, who set the tax rate, are taxpayers in the district, too, and they have a history of conservative budgeting. Just because the tax rate ceiling is at one level, doesn't mean they'll go to that level unnecessarily.

### **Need a speaker? We can help**

If your church, club, civic group or youth group needs a speaker, ESD4 and the Brazos County Precinct 4 Volunteer Fire Dept. help.

We'll be happy to tell you about the services we provide at less than half the cost of many municipal fire departments. We can explain the challenges we face.

To arrange a speaker, call 979-739-1610.



## **GROWTH** *From Page 1*

Along with students, there'll be faculty and staff. A&M hopes to attract a host of technology companies for high-level product development and testing in areas like self-driving cars and robotics.

The new campus will likely mean new residential development and more traffic along Brazos County roads.

"We've got to be ready," said Fire Chief Dan Williams, "Our volunteer fire department will have to step up its game."

While growth could mean a larger tax base for ESD4 (the RELLIS Campus itself is state property and tax exempt), that growth could be short-lived if it draws the attention of the City of Bryan.

Texas cities have broad authority to annex land – without residents' consent – into their city limits. Some cities have been known to "cherry-pick" when they annex, taking in high-dollar commercial property while leaving residential areas that are more costly to serve.

Once annexed into a city, the area would no longer pay taxes to the ESD.

"We hope to have enough flexibility in our tax rate ceiling to continue protecting the public, no matter how growth develops around the RELLIS Campus," said ESD4 Commissioner Joe Ondrasek.

## **MEET** *From Page 1*

currently pays \$30 a year to know that trained firefighters will be at the door within minutes if there's an emergency. If the tax rate increases to 6 cents per \$100, the same home would pay \$60 a year in taxes, an increase of \$2.50 a month.

ESD4 has been operating at or under the 3-cent-per-\$100 ceiling since 1990. With increased development in the area around Bryan and College Station, the fire department's needs are growing faster than the revenues to meet the needs.

One need is a replacement for a fire engine that has been in service since 1990. The aging vehicle has been in the shop repeatedly and can no longer be relied upon.

"Every time we take it out to a fire, we wonder whether it will last long enough to get back," said Fire Chief Dan Williams.

Fire engines routinely cost between \$350,000 and half-a-million dollars.

**BRAZOS COUNTY  
EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT NO. 4/  
BRAZOS COUNTY PRECINCT 4 VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPT.**

P.O. Box 4186  
Bryan, Texas 77805

[www.precinct4.com](http://www.precinct4.com)

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

*JOIN US 7:00pm MARCH 2 AT STATION NO. 1, 3098 Fazzino Lane  
FOR A TOWN HALL MEETING ON YOUR FIRE PROTECTION*

*Para obtener una copia de esta informacion traducida al español,  
favor llame a telefono (979)739-1610*



## About the tax rate ceiling

When voters created Brazos County Emergency Services District No. 4 (ESD4) in the 1990s, it was originally a “rural fire prevention district” or “RFPD.”

Under the Texas Constitution, the maximum tax rate it could charge was 3 cents per \$100 property value. A home on the property rolls with a value of \$100,000 paid \$30 a year for fire protection.

In 2003, the State Legislature converted all rural fire prevention districts to emergency services districts. ESDs, under the Constitution, could tax up to 10 cents per \$100. But when it converted the RFPDs, the Legislature said they would have to call and win an election to go above the old rate of 3 cents per \$100. ESD4 stayed at the 3 cent rate ceiling, and the owner of a \$100,000 house continued to pay \$30 a year.

ESD4 has now called an election May 6, asking voters to approve a new tax ceiling of 8 cents per \$100. That’s the maximum tax rate, not necessarily the rate that will be charged. The ESD4 Board has gone on record that, barring unforeseen emergencies, it will not exceed a tax rate of 6 cents per \$100, if voters approve the increased tax cap. The owner of the \$100,00 would pay \$60 a year, an increase of \$2.50 a month.

## Minutes count

*ESD4 races the clock  
to get help to you*

Heart attack. Stroke. Motor vehicle accident. They’re scary words; they’ll change your life.

The events are time-sensitive and require a high level of initial care to improve survivability. Among the grim figures that ESD4 responders deal with every day:

- **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.**

ESD4 responded to 541 emergency calls in 2016. Almost 56 percent of those calls were medical emergencies.