



Public Relations Policy

In keeping with the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) standard for public relations, the District has established this Public Relations Policy for the purpose of promoting effective communication between the DeWitt County Appraisal District and the public. The goal of this plan is to establish and maintain good public relations by providing accurate and timely information to the public on key property tax matters.

Goal:

It is the goal of the DeWitt County Appraisal District to discover, list and appraise all property within the boundaries of the District and to estimate the market value of that property for ad valorem tax purposes, in as accurate, ethical and impartial manner as possible.

It is the responsibility of the District to provide the same level of consideration and assistance to each taxpayer to ensure fair and equal treatment under the *Texas Property Tax Code*. The District shall operate in accordance with accepted appraisal standards as established by The Texas State Comptroller Property Tax Division (PTAD), the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP), and the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO), the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) and all other applicable laws.

General Public Relations Policy:

Property owners have a right to know what occurs in their appraisal district and what the impact of our actions are regarding property taxes. To that end, the District is committed to:

- Providing openness and honesty to the general public and taxing units
- Providing information to the public in a timely manner
- Maintaining a well-trained, knowledgeable and qualified professional staff
- Communicating effectively and respectfully with all taxpayers
- Preserving the public trust through transparency, openness and integrity
- Establishing an effective working relationship with the local media
- Conducting ourselves without the appearance of favoritism, undue influence or impropriety, so as to preserve public confidence and trust.

Our pledge is to serve the public with the highest of ethical standards, diligence, accuracy and professionalism.

Public Relations Officer:

The Chief Appraiser is the official spokesperson for the District and will coordinate interviews, provide written responses to newspapers, magazines and other related public relations venues, as well as approve or disapprove content to be posted on the website. All speaking engagements, public appearances, special events, annual reports and information released to the media should also be approved by the Chief Appraiser or their designee.

Public Relations Guidelines:

All communications with the public should be positive, courteous and educational.

Written information concerning public access to the board of directors, complaint procedures, hearing procedures and taxpayer rights and remedies are available upon request to all clients who visit the District and to any one requesting the information. All information not designated as confidential is available to the public in accordance with the Texas Public Information Act. The District publishes all required articles and public notices as well as other appraisal information in local newspapers, as well as providing information and announcements of open meetings by posting notices as required.

The DeWitt County Appraisal District maintains a website (www.dewittcad.org) which contains contact information for the district, exemption forms, a searchable database of all non-confidential owner information, a detailed interactive GIS ownership map, board of directors meeting agendas, and links to other agencies that provide pertinent property tax information including the County Tax Assessor/Collector and the State Comptrollers website.

While in the field, all appraisal district employees wear identification issued by the District and have their license issued by TDLR and business cards on their person at all times. Magnetic signs identifying the District are to be placed on their vehicle while doing field work. The Chief Appraiser will also contact local authorities to notify them of the areas where the appraisers are working. In addition to being a safety precaution for our employees this policy creates increased visibility for the District and opens the door to opportunities for the appraisers to engage in informed and educational discourse with the public.

Public Records:

Most records, with limited exceptions, held at the District are available to the public. Requests to view, inspect or obtain copies of these records are handled according to the Public Information Act and must be made in writing.

Records Retention:

The DeWitt County Appraisal District follows the guidelines and practices of the Texas State Library (www.tsl.state.tx.us) for document retention and destruction policies.

Public Access and Complaint Procedures:

All meetings of the DeWitt County Appraisal District Board of Directors are open to the public and pursuant to *Section 6.04(d), Texas Property Tax Code*, a reasonable period of time at the beginning of each meeting shall be provided for public comments about the policies and procedures of the District, the Appraisal Review Board, Board of Directors, and any other matter within the Board's jurisdiction. All necessary actions shall be taken to provide public access for any non-English speaking person or person who has any physical, mental, or development disability desiring to appear before the Board. Copies of the Public Access Policy and Complaint Policy are available at the district upon request.

Crisis Management:

All employees of the District are expected to handle all situations in a professional manner. In the event that a crisis should arise, or a taxpayer might become irate with an employee, the employee should remain calm, attempt to diffuse, not escalate the situation if possible and seek help from other employees. This will include contacting emergency assistance through 911 if appropriate and employees should not hesitate to call 911 for the protection and safety of all parties involved.

In the event of a natural disaster or other crisis involving the community, the Chief Appraiser shall be the official spokesperson for the district in all communication with the general public, press, and the DeWitt County Emergency Management Coordinator.

Property Tax Calendar (deadlines important to taxpayers)

January 1: Date that determines taxable value and homestead exemption status.

April 15: Last day for property owners to file renditions or to request an extension for filing.

April 30: Early Protest deadline for residence homesteads – or by the 30th day after a notice of appraised value is mailed to the property owner, whichever is later.

May 30: Deadline for filing written protests to the Appraisal Review Board – or by the 30th day after a notice of appraised value is mailed to the property owner, whichever is later.

October: Tax bills are usually mailed during this month by the Tax Assessor/Collectors office.

January 31: Last day to pay prior year property taxes without penalty and interest.

Specific Public Relation Activities for the District

Annually

The Chief Appraiser or a designee shall attend school board, city council, commissioner’s court or other governmental body meetings, and meetings of other groups, as invited, to address property appraised values or any other matter related to property tax policy.

The district will post the agendas for Board of Directors, the Appraisal Review Board, and the Agricultural Advisory Board.

January

Publish notice in all local newspapers about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions, agriculture appraisals and calculation of value of inventory.

Publish notice in all local newspapers about the availability of Electronic Communications.

April

Publish notice in all local newspapers about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions and agricultural appraisals.

May

Publish notice in local newspapers about taxpayer protests and procedures.

July

Publish notice in local newspapers and advise all taxing entities of Public Hearings and approval of annual budget.

September

Provide reappraisal plan in even numbered years.

November – December

Review, develop and update public information literature, website content, reappraisal plan and any other literature provided for public information and/or office policy and procedures considering changes made by legislature, comptroller's office, and internal policy changes as needed.

In House Training – As needed

The district will conduct in house training to address customer service, open meetings, public service, office and appraisal procedures as well as any other topic as policies change, new employees are hired and as a refresher for all staff members. Staff members may also be required to attend outside classes and seminars as they are offered by approved sources.

Email, Fax and Written Communications:

All written communications, delivered by any means, are a reflection of the District and should be treated in a professional manner by following these guidelines:

- Answer all letters and emails promptly acknowledging those that cannot be responded to immediately;
- State information clearly using layman's terms;
- Respond to all relevant questions;
- Add a personal touch when appropriate;
- Make sure correspondence is positive in nature. Even written communications can convey a negative tone. It is a good policy to have another colleague to review your work.
- Always retain a copy of all correspondence for future reference and;
- When appropriate, use property Tax Code references to help validate what you are trying to convey. Often times it is very helpful for the taxpayer to understand the laws and directives for their particular inquiry.

Educating the Public:

Public services are funded by the tax dollars collected and disbursed by the local taxing entities. We can help taxpayers understand how the appraisal and assessment processes work to establish a tax base and ensure the tax burden is equitably distributed according to the assessed value of all properties in the county. Helping taxpayers understand how the tax rates apply to the value of their property is important. It benefits the taxpayer and the District to have educated participants that understand their part in the fundamentals of property taxation.

Summary:

The goal of the DeWitt County Appraisal District as it relates to public relations is to be transparent in all that we do. Keeping the public informed is paramount to the success of the District. Effective communication results in enhanced credibility of the District and reduces the level of uncertainty and misinformation regarding District operations.