

APPRAISAL DISTRICT FORCED TO DELAY OPENING

The Brazoria County Appraisal District planned to open its doors to the public for customer service functions on June 8th – however because of a delay in receiving supplies to install safety features that opening has been postponed until the following Monday June 15th.

“You make plans – then something out of your control happens and then you have to change plans,” Chief Appraiser Cheryl Evans said. The district is installing protection at the front counters to ensure public safety, however a delay in the construction has bumped when the office doors will be opened.

“We have continued working full staff,” Evans said. “And most of the feedback from the public has been remarkable – thanking us for taking extra measures to keep them safe.”

When the district office opens, it will be at a limited capacity. “We will only be allowing 4-6 people into the lobby at a time,” she said.

Evans said as of now there will be no face to face informal meetings with appraisers. “State law does not mention the informal meetings that have been traditionally handled in person,” she said. BCAD staff handles them as a courtesy. “The only thing the tax code provides is the formal hearing with the appraisal review board.” Evans said the formal hearings are currently being conducted by phone and Zoom. In person formal hearings can be requested and will be scheduled later when some of the current limitations are lifted.

“We don’t want to take a risk with the public’s health or the safety of our employees.”

Normally during this time there could be up to 300 people in our office in one day, she said. “That would not be safe for anyone. We followed the same procedures other appraisal districts in the state did.” Opting to keep their doors closed to foot traffic for safety reasons. “It was out of public concern,” she said.

District staff continue processing exemptions, protests, name changes and all other activities by email, phone, and mail. “We are getting the job done,” she said.

Texas appraisal districts asked lawmakers to amend some of the state mandates regarding values and deadlines in the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak. “Nothing was done on the state-level, so we had to follow the law and go about our jobs and adapt,” she said.

“What is happening right now is horrible – however appraisal districts are under a state mandate to appraise property at market value as of January 1st each year. Without a special resolution from the governor, we have to continue to follow the tax code,” she said. Evans said that if this crisis has a negative impact on the real estate market it will be seen in the appraisals for January 2021.

The district put in place extra telephone capabilities to allow appraisal staff to contact property owners without the need for them to make a trip to the office. In addition, all properties can be protested electronically - except for personal property, industry, and minerals.

Evans stressed that all district functions can be handled by phone or email even when the doors are open. "No property owners are required to come in as in years past, she said. "Property owners have been thanking us for not making them come in to file a protest. I think most of the public appreciates our efforts to protect them."

"Our appraisers will diligently try to resolve as many protests as possible through an informal process," she said - adding that the public's patience is appreciated. "We will contact you by phone, email or by regular mail if you prefer", she said.

Evans strongly encourages property owners who are at higher risk to take advantage of her staff's willingness to reach out to them instead of them having to go into the office. She also said that there will be limitations on how many can occupy space in the office, so she discourages parents from bringing children with them.

"Our staff will continue to work hard for the public we serve, and our first goal is to keep them safe."