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Tax hike vote needed for faster response times

BY DAVE GATHMAN
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ST. CHARLES—The 20,000 people who live in the St. Charles Countryside Fire Protection District will have a property tax increase referendum on their ballot in April to pay for speeding up ambulance and firefighters' response time by building at least one more fire station.

The district's board voted unanimously Saturday "to raise funds to reduce the time it takes for emergency crews to reach home, schools and businesses within the district."

The district covers 34 square miles of land that are served by the St. Charles city fire department but are not inside the city limits.

That includes parts of unincor-



Lives are at risk when emergency services cannot respond in less than 10 minutes, which is clearly more often the case or homeowners in the furthest boundaries of the district."

Ed Malek, board president, St. Charles Countryside Fire Protection District

porated St. Charles, Elgin, South Elgin, Bartlett, West Chicago, Elburn and Campton Hills.

Board President Ed Malek said the decision was spurred by a recent study of how long it takes emergency crews to respond and by a survey of 600 homeowners.

"The citizens spoke and we listened," said Malek. "Lives are at risk when emergency services cannot respond in less than 10

minutes, which is clearly more often the case for homeowners in the furthest boundaries of the district."

Malek said the exact amount of funds the district will request will be determined in the next month or two. Board members specified that they want to reduce the emergency response time to 6.5 minutes for 75 percent of calls, as opposed to the current 2008 average of 9 minutes or lon-

ger for 53 percent of the time.

According to district estimates, 4 additional minutes must be added to the response time for an operator to answer a 911 call, sound a station alarm, and for the crew to mobilize and depart the station.

Officials state that half the district's 911 calls take 13 minutes or longer before medical or fire services are performed on site. The survey indicated that

82.7 percent of SCCFPD residents believed a response time between 5 to 7 minutes, or total elapsed time of 9 to 11 minutes, is acceptable.

For the 2008 year to date, 511 out of 953 calls took 11 minutes or more in their elapsed time.

Board members noted that a flashover can happen in 6 to 10 minutes, turning a small fire into an uncontrollable blaze.

A person in cardiac arrest will die or experience severe brain damage in less than 6 minutes.

Ninety percent of homeowners surveyed said it was important to reduce the emergency response times.

To view the complete survey or get more information about the referendum, visit www.sccfpd.org/index.php.