

## Community to decide on Fire District referendum

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Wed Jan 14, 2009, 05:03 PM CST

St. Charles, IL -

Better fire protection for residents in St. Charles' outlying areas will come at a cost.

Officials of the St. Charles Countryside Fire Protection District believe after a 600-person telephone survey that residents will be willing to pay the price, which is more than \$2 million.

Passage of a Fire District referendum would mean a \$14 tax increase for residents of a \$350,000 home.

With a steady influx of residents in the western portions of the district — Campton Hills, Wasco and South Elgin — district President Ed Malek said more residents would like to see the majority of response times improve to 6 1/2 minutes instead of the current average of 9 minutes. Malek said each extra minute drastically reduces rescue and ambulance services in life-threatening cases, including cardiac arrest.

District board members approved referendum language Monday night that will allow residents to vote on the question in April.

"I think we share the values of the community," Malek said. "That's fire safety and better awareness."

The district covers 34 square miles including St. Charles Township, Wayne, Campton Hills and parts of South Elgin, Elgin and Bartlett.

Fire Protection Board members also said they would like to educate the public on the district's functions and basic fire safety. The survey's findings are alarming: Many residents do not have fire detectors, smoke alarms or fire extinguishers in their homes.

"The (district board) identified poor communication and a lack of public awareness as our (top priorities)," Malek said.

Wayne resident Dale Seidel and Campton Hills resident Jon Wolfe adamantly disagreed.

The two residents believe that a tax increase could add an unnecessary burden in an already tough economic time. They are also concerned that increased taxes could lead to other taxing bodies' increases down the road.

"And now the three-man Fire Protection District Board decides ... in these times of foreclosures, decreasing real estate values, failing businesses and skyrocketing unemployment, to gorge (itself) with (a) modest helping of our money," Seidel said.

Wolfe said findings of the telephone survey are limited and not an accurate barometer of needs, although Malek said the survey indicates that Wolfe and Seidel are in the minority.

"I really have a problem going for a referendum based on a survey and not based on what people actually experienced in this Fire Protection District," said Wolfe, who has lived in the Campton Hills area for 25 years.

Board members said the district is trying to keep costs low but has a duty to respond to the needs of residents. Board member Terry Jeglum said if residents indicate they would like better fire-protection services, then the question should be placed on the ballot.

"The point is all of us are struggling with the economy," Jeglum said, "but we have a charge; our charge is our constituents.

"We have to find out where we're going to go."