

# St. Charles fire district to ask for tax increase

By James Fuller | Daily Herald Staff

The St. Charles Countryside Fire Protection District knows it takes way too long for fire and rescue personnel to respond to an emergency call in its coverage area.

It knows this because residents told them so in a recent survey. Now residents will get to decide if the possessions and lives they could lose in an emergency are worth paying for better protection.

District trustees decided in a unanimous vote to place a tax increase referendum on the April ballot. The tax increase would fund the construction of at least one new fire house. However, trustees haven't figured out exactly how much it would cost to build the fire house yet. The price tag on the tax increase won't be locked in for another month or so.

Residents in the district are served by the St. Charles Fire Department. However, there is a special district because the homes are located in a 34-square-mile of unincorporated area in St. Charles, Elgin, South Elgin, Bartlett, West Chicago, Elburn and Campton Hills. Only residents served by the district would be impacted by any tax increase.

The new fire station would decrease average response times from the current of nine minutes. In 10 minutes, a flash fire can result in a total loss of property or death during an event such as a heart attack, according to district statistics. Many calls in the district right now see a total response time of 11 minutes or longer. The goal for the new fire house is to cut responses down to about six minutes. About 90 percent of homeowners in the district said that was the response time they'd like to see in the recent survey. There are about 600 homes in the district.

"The citizens spoke, and we listened," said District President Ed Malek in a written statement Wednesday. "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."