

OCHILTREE COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT
PUBLIC RELATIONS POLICY

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Mission Statement

The Ochiltree County Appraisal District believes that the most important asset of the District is its people. The District exists for the purpose of providing appraisal services to the property owners and taxing units within our county. Ochiltree County Appraisal District employees have an obligation as public servants to earn and keep the public's trust and confidence.

General Public Relations Policy

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

- Providing open and honest communication with the public and taxing units
- Providing information in a timely manner
- Promoting an effective working relationship with the news media
- Providing taxpayers and taxing units superior customer service with respect, compassion and dignity
- Explaining the Texas property tax process through educational outreach
- Providing a qualified, knowledgeable, and productive workforce
- Providing an accurate level of detail in all aspects of the appraisal Process
- Committing ourselves to the highest level of ethical and professional standards
- Conducting ourselves without the appearance of favoritism, undue influence or impropriety.

Public Relations Standards

Our goal at the Ochiltree County Appraisal District is to conduct our public relations in a professional manner. Because of this, the basis for our Public Relations

procedural manual complies with the standards set forth by the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) and the Uniform Standards of Appraisal Practice (USPAP). These standards should be followed at all relevant times in accordance with current law and as appropriate in any given situation.

Public Relations Officer

The Chief Appraiser serves as the District's Public Relations Officer and spokesperson for the District. The Chief Appraiser may, as deemed appropriate, assign the duties to another senior staff person. The Public Relations Officer oversees the coordination of interviews, the writing and distribution of news releases, newsletters, reports, and correspondence; the posting of information on the District's website; the editing of special publications and annual reports; the release of information to media outlets; and sees that any other necessary components of the District's Public Relations Program have been accomplished.

All requests for media inquiries, whether received by phone, in writing, or by email, are submitted to the Public Relations Officer for a response. Requests for interviews are sent to the Public Relations Officer for scheduling.

Public Records

Most of the District's records, with limited exceptions due to confidentiality, are available to the public. Requests to view, inspect, or obtain these records are handled according to the Public Information Act. Requests for public information must be made in writing and submitted to the Chief Appraiser who also serves as the District's Public Information Officer.

The Ochiltree County Appraisal District follows the guidelines and practices of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission for document retention policies. The District has adopted a records retention policy based on these guidelines.

Appraisal Staff Appearance & Identification

Proper staff appearance and attire are found in the dress code section of the District's Employee Handbook. It is the District's intent that work attire should complement an environment that reflects an efficient, orderly, and professionally operated organization. Dress, appearance, and hygiene should not be offensive or distracting to the public or other employees. Employees should be well groomed and good personal hygiene habits must be maintained.

Field appraisers should always be identifiable while working in their assigned areas. Each appraiser should have their TDLR identification card with them at all times when engaging in District business. Appraisers are encouraged to wear official shirts or jackets with Ochiltree County Appraisal District's logo while completing field assignments.

Vehicle identification should be attached to the appraiser's vehicle when the appraiser is working in the field. In an effort to avoid damage to or loss of vehicle identification, it should be attached to the appraiser's vehicle when the appraiser reaches his/her general working area. Identification does not need to be on the appraiser's vehicle while in route to the area where the employee will be working.

Assessment Hearings & Appeals

Property owners shall be made aware of the rules and procedures for appealing appraisals. They will receive written notice of their hearing time and date and may request written hearing procedures. Information on what constitutes a valid appeal shall also be made available. During this process, taxpayers shall be treated with courtesy and respect. New information presented during the appeals process shall be evaluated thoroughly and objectively.

Conflict Resolution & De-escalation

The District provides the following suggestions for responding to unhappy property owners:

- A friendly and respectful greeting may put a person at ease.
- Take time to listen and be genuinely interested in what they have to say.
- Sometimes it is necessary to let the person vent their frustration. Try not to interrupt and let them have their say.
- Hearing criticism that has a basis can serve to identify a shortfall in our office and can result in enhancements to the affected process.
- Criticism without basis may stem from misinformation or lack of understanding. In these cases, a calm explanation may be enough to address their concern.
- Try not to be argumentative and remain calm yourself.
- Ask what you can do to help. Finding a path to a resolution is the goal.
- The owner's preferred resolution may not always be a possibility but doing your best to show that you are doing everything in your power may lower tensions.
- Express empathy, but do not take things personally.

These types of situations will come in all varieties and must be dealt with on a case-by-case
basis. What works for one person may not be the best solution for all. Above all, use your judgment,
instincts, and common sense based upon the factors immediately at hand to resolve a volatile situation.

Should the situation become potentially dangerous, staff members may summon law enforcement
personnel via 911 or other methods available. Any instances of this nature shall be well documented and immediately reported to the Chief Appraiser.

Endorsements & Political Statements

Appraisal District employees must not use their position to influence political outcomes. Our policy is that no employee shall give any endorsement or make any political statement on behalf of the District, and that the District must not issue any pollical statement or endorsement. Any public statement considered necessary to issue must be written or approved by the Chief Appraiser.

Employee Media & Social Media Guidelines

The District's Employee Handbook addresses the approved use of personal devices or emails at work. All appraisal district business shall be conducted through official phone numbers, email addresses, or letterhead. At present, the Ochiltree County Appraisal District does not have any of its own social media accounts. The creation of any account may be approved by the Chief Appraiser if they deem it appropriate or necessary.

Online Use of Jurisdiction names & identities

The District's Employee Handbook prohibits employees from conducting regular District business from personal devices or email addresses. Employees may be allowed to post information or statements made by the District only with the Chief Appraiser's approval.

Guidelines and Authorization Process for Use of Intellectual Property, Logos, Trademarks, and Copyright

The guidelines and an authorization process for the use of any intellectual property, logos, trademarks, and copyrighted material will be as set by the Chief Appraiser as they may deem necessary from time to time in order to see that such property and/or property rights are protected. All such guidelines will be in accordance with Federal and Texas State laws regarding protection of Intellectual Property.

Public Relations Calendar

January

- Review and development of public information brochures and other materials related to property exemptions, renditions and special appraisals.
- Publish notice in local newspapers about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions and agricultural appraisals.
- Collect and assist taxpayers with their property taxes.

February – March

- Review and development of public information materials related to appraisal procedures, notices, protests and evidence production. Care and attention will be paid to updates for internal procedural changes and/or changes prompted by legal opinion and/or new legislation.

April

- Publish notice in local newspapers about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions and agricultural appraisals.
- Prepare press release for notices of appraised values and protest process.
- Provide preliminary estimates of value to all school districts and any municipality and the county if they chose not to waive the estimate of value.

May

- Provide telephone and in office assistance to taxpayers having questions about the protest process.
- Hold informal meetings with taxpayers that are considering a protest.

June and July

- Appraisal Review Board Hearings Conducted in early July.
- July 20 - Date the ARB must approve appraisal records unless more than 5 percent of total appraised value remains under protest (Sec. 41.12).
- July 25 - Last day for chief appraiser to certify appraisal roll to each taxing unit (Sec. 26.01).

August and September

- Continued interaction with taxpayers on delinquent taxes, supplements, address changes and late filed exemptions.

October, November, and December

- New tax statements for the current year are mailed October 1 or as soon as possible thereafter.
- Send letters to new owners with homestead exemption forms and productivity applications.

Contact List

Ochiltree County Appraisal District Office –
(806) 435-9623, ocadappr@ochiltreead.org

Interim Chief Appraiser, Marlee Jones –
(806) 435-9623, mjones@ochiltreead.org

Pritchard & Abbott (Mineral/Industrial Appraisals & Ag Values) –
(806) 358-7837

Important Websites

Ochiltree County Appraisal District – www.ochiltreecad.org

Ochiltree County Court House – www.co.ochiltree.tx.us

Texas Comptroller – www.comptroller.texas.gov

Comptroller Tax Assistance - https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/property-tax

Attorney General of Texas – www.oag.state.tx.us

Texas Legislature Online – www.capitol.state.tx.us

U.S. Department of Agriculture – www.nass.usda.gov

Perdue Brandon Fielder Collins & Mott LLP – www.pbfcm.com

Pritchard & Abbott, Inc. – www.pandai.com