

Property Tax Reductions

Senate Bill 1 and Hurricane Harvey



Senator Paul Bettencourt

REDNews Interviews Senator Paul Bettencourt for an update

BY MICHAEL PAVIA

Senate Bill 1

Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), is proposed legislation allowing for property tax rate elections if county property tax revenues exceeded 4% of what was taken in the year before. Basically, as values go up, SB1 proposes to roll back tax rates to provide property tax relief. SB1 proposed to decrease the rollback rate from the current 8% to 4%. The Texas Senate endorsed SB 1. Members from the Texas House and Senate met in a special session on July 26th to vote on the rollback. According to Senator Bettencourt, Speaker of the House Joe Straus was unwilling to appoint a conference committee so the bill was defeated.

Per Lieutenant Governor Patrick, "Whenever the Senate convenes again, either a special or regular session, it is our intention to pass that bill one more time. There will be a lot of reform measures associated with it, as well. Governor Abbott is supportive and is hopeful that it will pass."

Senator Bettencourt is hopeful that another legislative session will be called in the near future. However, he suspects it will be delayed until the business of recovering from Hurricane Harvey is over.

"We're going to be doing interim hearings next year. Lieutenant Governor Patrick restarted the Property Tax Reform Committee, and made me chairman, so we're going to be back out and doing hearings. There's no question that Governor Abbott's and Lieutenant Governor Patrick's intention is to pass property tax relief and reform, and that's what I'm supposed to be doing," says Bettencourt. "I will present the bill again and I think it will pass out of the Senate."

SB1 Modifications

"The protest deadlines have been moved up. The new deadline is May the 15th instead of May 31st for both commercial and residential property" says Bettencourt.

"City, county, and special district taxes have been growing twice as fast as the school taxes over the last ten years. The issue is coming to a boil. Wherever I travel in the state, property taxes are on people's minds. I'm confident that if people speak out on this issue it will make a difference. It's essential that they talk to their House representatives", concludes Bettencourt.

Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief

What is the law and the process for Harvey Disaster relief?

Reappraisal of Property Damaged in Disaster Area: Texas Tax Code - TAX § 23.02 states: The governing body of a taxing unit that is located partly or entirely inside an area declared to be a disaster area by the governor may authorize reappraisal of all property damaged in the disaster at its market value immediately after the disaster.

Taxing entities that have asked for Disaster Reappraisal are Fort Bend County, Montgomery County, Katy ISD, Spring Branch ISD, as well as several smaller taxing entities such as the City of Shoreacres. Harris County is not on the list. "Even with the titanic tax increases in Harris County, Judge Ed Emmett won't change his public policy, and he's still opposing disaster reappraisal" according to Senator Bettencourt. Disaster reappraisal can

be triggered at any time; there's no statute of limitations.

Should damaged property owners send a notice to the appraisal district or contact their House representative? Bettencourt told REDNews, "No, they have to talk to their ISDs, school trustees, and city or county commissioners. Unless the taxing jurisdiction triggers it, it won't happen. If the taxing jurisdiction triggers disaster reappraisal then the owner should submit that information. If the taxing jurisdiction has not triggered disaster reappraisal there is no value in submitting your damage information. For example, Spring Branch ISD triggered disaster reappraisal. Those notices were in the mail in December. But you didn't have to do anything to get it." It will remain important to have documentation with pictures, insurance claims and FEMA claims. ■

Conclusions: Whether you're a business or a home owner, or if you suffered damage from Harvey, you deserve a break. It's critical to contact your county or elected representatives and share your concerns.

Please make your voice heard!

Need help identifying who to contact for your county or your state representatives? At these links you are able to input your address and it will identify your county, state, and federal representatives.

www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/Home.aspx