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Citizen Control: Johnson County’s Appraisal Board Revolution

Concerned taxpayers in Johnson County are set to control 100 percent of the Central Appraisal District board of directors.

3 min read

Brandon Waltens | July 8, 2024



For the first time ever, Texas voters had the chance to choose who should represent them on their local appraisal district boards.

Appraisal district boards are the agencies that set property values used by local governments to calculate tax bills. These boards have traditionally consisted of five members elected by the taxing units inside the district, as well as the county tax assessor-collector who serves as a non-voting member.

For the first time, voters in counties with a population of 75,000 elected three members to the board. While this is short of a majority of the board, for a group of concerned taxpayers in Johnson County, the election was part of a process they had begun years ago.

With property tax rates and appraisals skyrocketing, in 2019, Craig Hundley said he had enough.

“I was just sick of this corrupt clandestine Central Appraisal District operation. Nobody knew what was going on. Nobody knew there was a CAD board of directors. Nobody knew how they were elected,” Hundley explained.

Hundley said he and his friend Dan Roberts began heavily researching the Johnson County CAD because they saw people lose their homes.

“I just really got sick over it. So we started filing open records requests, and we found out that the CAD Board of Directors was elected by the taxing entities. There’s 5,000 votes in the county, and every entity gets so many votes,” said Hundley. “Well, I noticed also they never had to run for office. They were just rubber-stamped by the taxing entities. And our first year, we ran two people. Every entity we went to basically laughed at us, and I think we garnered 240 votes total out of all the entities. Sure enough, they got all their people back on.”

Rather than giving up, Hundley and his allies like Russell Bennett and Greg Cooper doubled their efforts. In the following years, they began working to make inroads with the local officials who would vote for the CAD board of directors.

In 2023, the group had a slate of candidates.

“So we had to start all over again, going to all these taxing entities. Now remember, none of their people ever campaigned. They didn’t have to campaign. And we campaigned, and we convinced them to support their constituents, and that we need citizens looking over our money,” said Hundley.

Their first breakthrough came from the Johnson County Commissioners Court.

“I think they had 1,100 votes total, the largest voting bloc. They gave all the votes to put one of our members, Amy Lingo, on the CAD board. Then they gave all the remaining votes to our second guy, which was about 300 votes.”

Hundley said that’s when they took off running.

“We just started hitting all the entities. There are some small city councils and stuff, they may have had 10 or 30 votes. And we call that the low-hanging fruit. So we went and got all those small votes we could get our hands on.”

School districts, however, proved a bigger challenge.

“For whatever reason, school districts, they opposed this very strongly,” said Hundley.

While Cleburne ISD and Burseson ISD worked to get their chosen candidates placed on the board, the group found success with Mansfield ISD.

“They always felt like they had been ignored. And we showed up to speak to them, and they gave us 100% of the vote. And all of our members won in a landslide election,” Hundley explained.

The group swept the election this year, with their three candidates winning unopposed.

“So now we’ve got six on the CAD board. They had one resign last week. And I’m waiting for the resignation of the other one. And we will have 100% citizen control.”

With their recent victories, the group recognizes that controlling property tax appraisals is only one element to reining in and ultimately eliminating property taxes as local entities set their tax rates based on appraisals.

“The higher the appraisals went, the taxing entities would, in effect, raise taxes, but they are lowering a tax rate,” said Greg Cooper, the head of the Texas Transparency Project. “They’re claiming a win out of technically raising your taxes.”

Helen Kerwin, the incoming state representative for Johnson County, said their work is a great step in the right direction, especially given the strain that property taxes put on her soon-to-be constituents.

“I was hearing about so many property tax issues. Valuations from seniors who are about to lose their homes. Young families couldn’t afford it. It’s just escalating,” said Kerwin.

The most impressive part, she said, however, is the transparency.

“It is just opening up another bureaucratic part of our government for our citizens to have a voice,” said Kerwin. “Here we are in little Johnson County right in the middle of Texas. And I mean, to me, the victory achieved is just massive.”

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Brandon Waltens

Brandon serves as the Senior Editor for Texas Scorecard. After managing successful campaigns for top conservative legislators and serving as a Chief of Staff in the Texas Capitol, Brandon moved outside the dome in order to shine a spotlight on conservative victories and establishment corruption in Austin. @bwaltens

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