



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: October 16, 2012

Prepared By/Phone Number: Melissa Velasquez, County Judge's Office

Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head: Samuel T. Biscoe, County Judge

Commissioners Court Sponsor: Samuel T. Biscoe, County Judge

AGENDA LANGUAGE:

Consider and take appropriate action on Fire Chief Ken Bailey's request that we support a proposal for financial assistance for ESD#11, in the event of City of Austin annexation of the area.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

Attached is the letter from Chief Bailey.



Travis County Fire Rescue

Emergency Service District #11

Ken Bailey
Fire Chief

September 11, 2012

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Travis County Judge Samuel T. Biscoe
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

Dear Judge Biscoe,

The establishment of the Circuit of the Americas race track in Southeast Travis County, deep inside the boundaries of Travis County Emergency Service District No. 11, will have a significant positive economic impact on the community and enhance the ability of the District to provide fire suppression and EMS first response services to the 116 square miles located south of the Colorado River and east of Interstate 35 outside of the City of Austin. However, the City of Austin's potential plans for annexation of the track will negate any benefits that the District will realize unless a strategic partnership is created between the City of Austin and the District before annexation.

At stake are the revenues to the District in the form of property tax, which is capped at \$0.10 per \$100 of value, and sales tax, which the District imposes a 1.5%. If the City of Austin annexes the race track facility and removes the area from the District, the District will not realize any revenue from the facility and will be forced to use its limited revenues to ensure continuity of service to the residents of the community whose daily emergency services will be impacted by events held at the track facility. Of course, more people traveling within the District for events will create the potential for more emergency calls and likely increase emergency response times to the citizens who live in and around the area. Simply put, all roads lead to the track and these are the same roads used for responding to everyday emergencies in the District.

On the other hand, revenues from the facility, which is a commercial establishment and not a residential development, were sustained by the District; the District could increase staffing levels at the three current fire stations as well as offset the cost for increasing staffing during high volume events. Higher staffing levels would be part of a District effort to reduce response times and meet the performance goals for major incidents, especially when traffic is anticipated to be congested. Failure on the part of the District to plan, fund and staff for such contingencies will likely negatively impact performance goals and increase response times to the typical citizen living in Southeast Travis County during events.

To add to the complexity of this issue and specifically to the fire protection and EMS first response aspect, Travis County Emergency Service District 11 has a fire station within a stone's throw of the track property and 1.3 miles from the track entrance, while the City of Austin's closest fire station is roughly 8 miles away. The fact that the City of Austin and the District enjoy an automatic aid agreement with each other, meaning that the combined dispatch center will send the closest unit to an incident at the track, the District will still be providing daily service to the track, but without the benefit of tax revenue. Further, the District has already invested significant tax dollars in order to meet the potential risks involved in the mass gathering of 120,000 visitors occupying the racetrack.

Given the fact that any sizable event at the track facility will impact the emergency service district, we propose the following solutions: should the City of Austin annex the track, we request that the City of Austin not de-annex the District, thus leaving the Emergency Service District to remain in place.

Currently if the City was to annex the track and remove the area from the District, they would benefit from a 0.5% sales tax, along with the City property tax revenue. In order to ensure that the City would not lose this sales tax revenue if the track remains in the District, the District would pay the City 33% of the District's 1.5% sales tax through an Interlocal agreement. Consequently, the City would still collect the same revenue in both sales and property tax, thus not losing anything from leaving the ESD in place.

Assuming that an agreement between the City and the District could be established, the District plans to use the revenues from the track to improve staffing to match the City's levels by increasing the staffing levels from three firefighters on each apparatus to four firefighters. This effort would allow the District to meet the State mandated requirement of four firefighters being on scene prior to going into a burning building in a shorter period of time, which will undoubtedly improve the ability of the District to save lives and property. In fact just as recently as July 25th, the City of Austin was awarded a \$5.1 million grant to increase its staffing level on the few remaining apparatus that had less than four firefighters. A move that Fire Chief Kerr said "makes our community safer" and is in line with the national standard. Additionally, there is a benefit to increasing the District's staffing levels for the City as well. Given the District's automatic aid agreement, District units responding within the City would have the same staffing as City units and be better situated to assist the City in areas within the City that are long distances from the City's current fire stations. The District will also be able to serve the track facility on a daily basis and provide enhanced coverage to the track during events, further reducing the burden on City resources.

In closing, our proposal would cost the City nothing, nor would it hamper the City's ability to grow and yet indirectly benefits the City of Austin at the same time. Further, it provides the District with the ability to improve service on a daily basis, properly protect the track facility and maintain our same performance standards during events. In short, it makes our community safer while not requiring the City of Austin to limit its growth potential and thus realize its revenue goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ken Bailey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ken Bailey

SUPPLEMENT

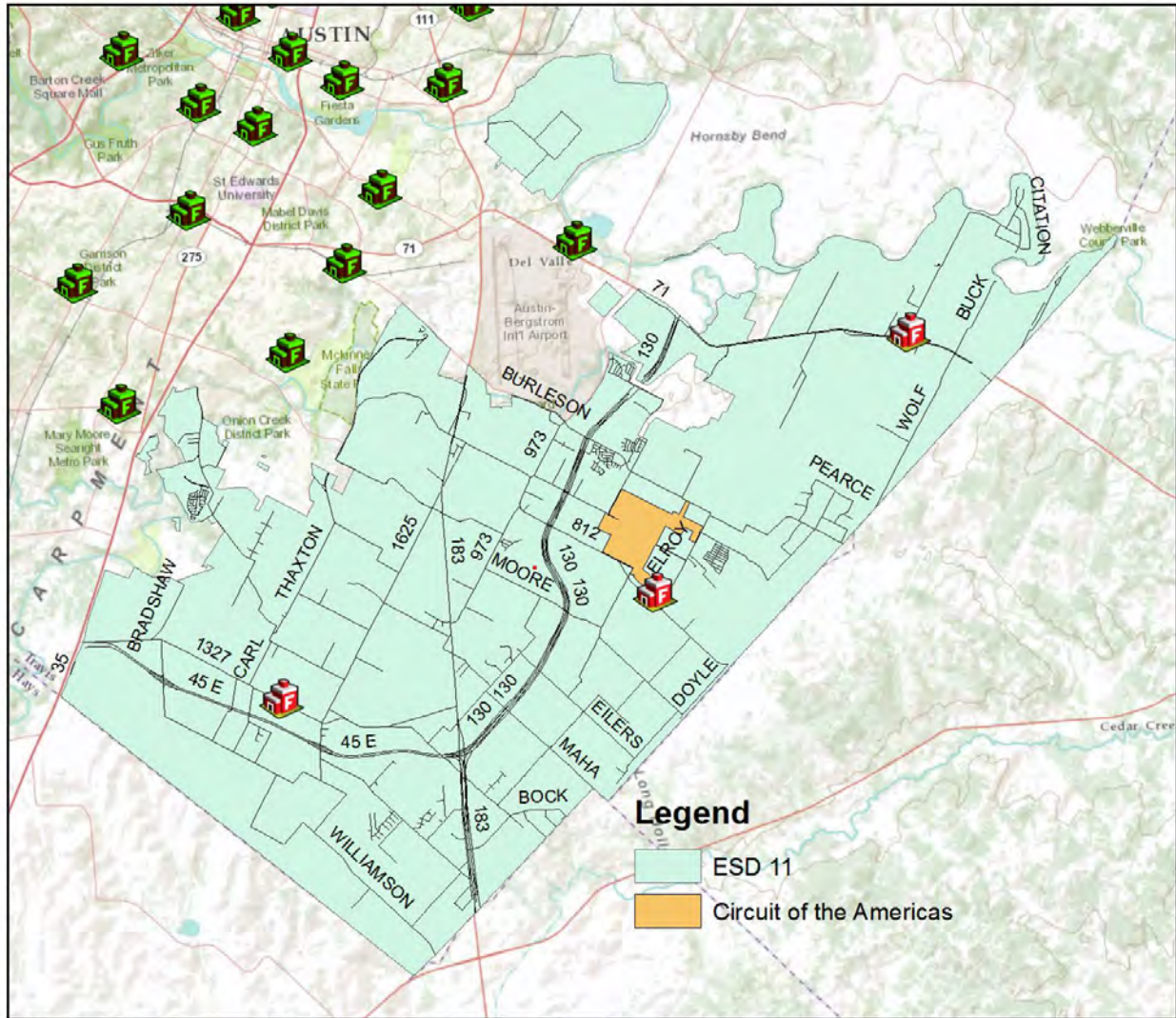


Figure 1. Map of ESD 11

Shown here are the three fire stations (red) located in ESD 11. The orange shape is the COTA facility and the green fire stations are Austin Fire Department stations.