

ROUND ROCK | PFLUGERVILLE | HUTTO

by JP Eichmiller

County to consider allowing local vote on a tax increase

The Travis County Emergency Services District No. 2, also known as the Pflugerville Fire Department, is being squeezed by declining tax revenue and an increase in service calls.

Pflugerville Fire Chief Ron Moellenberg said the department faced a \$750,000 shortfall in its 2012 budget.

“We are not making ends meet,” Moellenberg said. “We are using rollover money and reserves. ... If you did your home budget the same way, you would be in trouble.”

Moellenberg said response teams are being left shorthanded as a result of the lack of funds. Fire engines normally staffed by four people are now forced to operate with three. The department’s response times to emergency calls are also rising as responders struggle to keep up with more calls from the area’s increasingly urban population, he said.

The Pflugerville Fire Department is made up of 85 employees who collectively serve a 100-square-mile area with a population of more than 100,000 people, Moellenberg said.

“We are understaffed by state and national service standards,” Moellenberg said. “We’ve tightened our belt to a certain point where there are no more holes to punch in it. We have put off maintenance, and we have held off purchasing equipment for our trucks.”

One solution being presented is the creation of an overlay district for emergency medical services. The overlay district would create separate funding sources for Pflugerville’s EMS and fire department.

In order to create the overlay district—which could increase property taxes in areas served by the department by up to 10 cents per \$100 of property valuation—the Travis County Commissioner’s

Court must give its approval for a public vote. The court will decide whether to approve an election at its Feb. 12 regularly scheduled meeting.

“Nobody likes to talk about additional taxes, including me,” Moellenberg said. “But it is a potential for us to get adequate funding to close our existing funding gap and provide some additional funding right now. ... We are at critical mass and hope the voters approve that.”