**Property Tax Statements (Bills) for 2016 Tax Year**

The fall season is upon us. For those of us in the property tax profession, the arrival of fall ushers in the collections phase of the tax calendar for 2016. What does this mean to the property owners of our county? By now you should have received your Property Tax Statement (Bill) from the appraisal district. Things you should know regarding your tax statement. Bills are due upon receipt and will become delinquent on February 1st, 2017. Delinquent taxes accumulate penalties and interest and may result in a lawsuit to collect. It is important to timely pay your property tax bill and avoid these additional costs.

**NOTE:** If you own property in Fannin County and have not received your bill by mid-October, please contact the Fannin Central Appraisal District’s collections department at 903-583-8701 to verify your account information and avoid possible delinquency. Property owners are responsible to update the appraisal district of any address change in writing. The appraisal district uses the address indicated on the deed to send notices, bills and other mailings. If the current owner’s actual mailing address is different from what is indicated on the deed, the owner has the responsibility to inform the appraisal district of the change in writing. All of our mailings are send with return service and will not be forwarded by the postal authorities. Please do not let the simple process of updating your address keep you from being informed of important property tax matters that can affect your wallet. If you own property in Fannin County and have not seen your tax bill, call or stop by so we can get this in your hands.

There are several property owners that own more than one piece of property. Paying property taxes on multiple accounts can be confusing. Owners of multiple accounts are responsible for ensuring they have reconciled all of their properties with all of their bills prior to making payment. Owners of multiple properties often have different names on the accounts. Some accounts may be in a company name, a trust or in various forms of a name (such as J. Smith, John Smith, and Jonathan Smith etc.). Some owners have differing mailing addresses as well. In short, the collectors do not own the property, are not responsible for the tax or to determine how much a person decides to pay. During this phase the collectors receive and post payments and issue receipts upon request. If a person requires assistance in this area they should come to the Appraisal District office early (October-November) in this phase.

**FAQ’s:**

**If I did not receive my bill, am I still liable for the taxes?** Yes, each year on January 1, a tax lien attaches to all property subject to taxes to secure payment of the tax. The lien exists in favor of the taxing unit(s) having authority to tax the property until the taxes are paid. The property tax code places the personal liability for the property tax on the owner of the property on January 1. Further, non-receipt does not affect the validity of the tax. Essentially, if you own property in Texas that is subject to taxation, make sure you are aware of the tax bill amount and the deadline to pay on time.

**How can I pay my bill?**  The District accepts cash, personal check, money orders and most major credit cards. A person can also pay their property taxes online at our website [www.fannincad.org](http://www.fannincad.org). If paying by check, simply detach the stub and mail it with your payment to the address indicated on the stub. If you would like a receipt, please provide a postage paid self-addressed envelope with your payment.

**Is there a fee for paying by credit card?** Yes, the vendor charges a 2.3% convenience fee for the service. The fee does not go to the District or the Taxing Units.

**Are there any payment options available?** Yes, some options have eligibility and qualification criteria that must be met and other options do not. The legislature made some significant changes in this area. They added disabled veterans and their unmarried surviving spouses to the quarter pay option (previously reserved for persons at least 65 years of age or disabled) for their residence homestead. The legislature also permitted property owners to request (and requires the District) to enter into an installment agreement for delinquent tax, penalties and interest on their residence homestead. This provision is beneficial in that it limits the accrual of penalties on delinquent taxes and protects the property owner from having their property seized and sold so long as they abide by the terms of the installment agreement.

**Special Payment Options:** Persons at least 65 years of age, disabled persons, disabled veterans or an unmarried surviving spouse of a disabled veteran who qualify for a residence homestead may elect to pay the tax in four equal installments (commonly called quarter pay) without penalty, provided the taxpayer notifies the District prior to the delinquency date. Notifying the District of your intention is simple. Just refer to the back of the payment stub and sign in the boxed area. Send the signed payment stub with your first installment. The payment due dates are as follows: First installment (with the notice indicating you are electing to use this option) is due before February 1; second installment is due before April 1; third installment is due before June 1 and the fourth installment is due before August 1.

**Deferral:** Persons over 65 years of age or disabled persons (does not include disabled veterans) are entitled to defer their tax on the property they own and occupy as their residence homestead. The person must file a deferral affidavit (available at the District’s office) with the chief appraiser. This protects the property owner from a tax suit or foreclosure of the tax lien for as long as they own and occupy the property as their residence homestead. Interest accrues on the unpaid balance at an annual rate of eight percent until the owner ceases to own and occupy the property as their residence homestead. At that time, all taxes, any penalty and accrued interest become due and must be paid in full within 180 days. If not paid by the 181st day, full penalties are imposed and the property is subject to tax suit and foreclosure of the tax lien.

**Mandatory Installment Agreement:** Recent changes to the property tax code now allow the person delinquent in the payment of property tax on their residence homestead to request (and the district shall enter into) an installment agreement for the payment of the tax, penalties and interest in installments. The requestor cannot have entered into an installment agreement with the District in the preceding 24 months; the agreement must be in writing, provide for equal monthly installments and must extend for a period of at least 12 months but cannot exceed 36 months. If any provision of the agreement is breached a suit to collect is filed, full penalties are imposed and the person is ineligible for this mandatory installment agreement for the next 24 months.

**Optional Installment Agreement:** This option permits the District to enter into an installment agreement for the payment of delinquent taxes, penalties and interest on any property. This agreement is an option to the District and not mandatory. The agreement must be in writing, provide for equal monthly installments and must extend for a period of at least 12 months but cannot exceed 36 months. If any provision of the agreement is breached a suit to collect is filed, full penalties are imposed and the person is ineligible for the mandatory installment agreement mentioned above for the next 24 months.

**Is there any other payment option available that does not have qualification criteria or formal agreements?**  Yes, a person can simply make partial payments for the taxes due. There is no contract or formal agreement. Additionally, there is no reason to wait until taxes become delinquent to accomplish this. When taxes become delinquent the unpaid balance accrues penalties (up to 12%) and interest (1% per month) for each month or portion of a month they remain delinquent. If the tax remains delinquent in July, attorney fees of up to 20% are added to the unpaid balance. Partial payments are a great way to pay down a tax bill if a person cannot make the full payment at one time. The taxpayer simply breaks their tax into payments before the delinquency date. Even if a person cannot pay their full tax before the delinquency date, they have paid down on the amount that penalty and interest will accrue and established a good pay history—which works to their favor regarding an optional installment agreement.

In summary, property tax bills for 2016 have been mailed to all property owners’ most recent address we have on file. Please make sure you have received yours and contact the District if you have not. These tax bills are due upon receipt and become delinquent after February 1st, 2017. Property owners are encouraged to open these statements sooner than later and be proactive in communicating any payment arrangements with the District’s collections staff. Property owners are further encouraged to utilize the postal system when paying their tax. The postal cancellation mark is used to establish timely delivery. If a person chooses to wait until the last day of the year or the last day in January to pay their property tax in person at the District, they can expect long wait times. If the same person places their payment in the mail before the end of the year or the end of January, the postage cancellation mark will indicate when it was processed and the payment will be posted to the account as if the person came to the District to pay on that day. Every year we encounter taxpayers that waited until the last minute to pay their tax bill and did not get their payment to us in time. These taxpayers immediately faced penalties and interest fees which, when added to the base tax, increased their bill. There is really nothing I or my staff can do to prevent the effects of delinquency once it occurs. Feel free to stop by or call should you have questions on these provisions. The staff at the Appraisal District may be reached at 903-583-8701. Michael R. Jones, Chief Appraiser