

How Did We Get Through it?

A Case Study in Flexibility!

Scott Griscom, Assistant Chief Appraiser, Bexar AD

TAAD



The Problem – The Pandemic Upended Everything at the Worst Time of Year!

- The world shut down right as we were about to send notices.
 - Rolling values was not an option.
 - Notices must be sent.
 - Protests must be processed.
 - Hearings must be conducted.

Safety of the public, ARB, and our staff was of utmost importance!



How Can We Preserve the Property Owner's Right to Protest as Safely as Possible?

- Keep contact with the public to a minimum
 - Close the building until it is deemed safe to open by local health experts.
- Use technology like we never have before.
 - Online Portal, Appointy, Zoom, WebEx, email, telephone
- Adapt to changes daily!
 - That didn't work? Try something else!
 - That worked pretty well? Then KEEP DOING IT!
 - One thing was certain – we would not be able to conduct business like we always had.



How Can We Preserve the Property Owner's Right to Protest as Safely as Possible?

- We sent a notification with our notices telling property owners and agents that this year will be different! We will not be open to the public, protest by mail, email, or online. (We did install a drop box outside.)
 - Notification was one page – in English on one side, Spanish on the other to reach as many as possible.
 - Expectation that this year, protests will be resolved slower than normal.
 - Opened up nearly all properties to be eligible for online protest filing, not just non-agent represented homestead properties.
 - Agent notices sent first, property owner notices much later.



How Can We Preserve the Property Owner's Right to Protest as Safely as Possible?

- We received a record number of protests. (Of course we did!)
 - Agent protest load was similar to years past.
 - Owner protest load was higher, but those that used the online portal was exponentially higher!



Fit a Camel Through the Eye of a Needle.

- Now that we have them, how best to process them?
 - Remote Informals to the rescue!
 - For Agents – Meet via WebEx or Zoom, Phone, and Email.
 - We found that this was MUCH more efficient because the agents did not have to travel to the office.
 - “Top-line” / Agreed Order resolutions lessened the number of ARB hearings needed!
 - For Owners – Worked through online protests first. Deployed ‘Appointy’ app to allow them to select a time for staff to call them for an informal over the phone (we control timeslots and number available). Several wanted to use Zoom for informals, so we agreed.
 - Higher ‘show rate’, a bit of phone tag but lessened after they chose their timeslot, a bit more drawn out than years past, settlement rate similar to years past (over 92%).



Fit a Camel Through the Eye of a Needle.

- Now that we have them, how best to process them?
 - Remote Formal Hearings
 - ARB Hearings conducted by telephone or Zoom
 - ARB members were socially distant
 - Protesting Party called in or joined via Zoom
 - CAD Appraiser called in or joined via Zoom also!
 - Safety was of utmost importance.
 - Promoted fundamental fairness, too – If the protesting party was not going to be physically present, our staff shouldn't either.
 - We did have a few glitches along the way, but there were fewer than we had expected.



Fit a Camel Through the Eye of a Needle.

- Wait a Minute. What About Those Who Demanded In Person Hearings?
 - They demand it; we must have it (so sayeth the AG)
 - ARB Hearings conducted in Person
 - We saved these for last!
 - Largest rooms used to promote social distance.
 - Schedule was staggered to allow for no / short wait times.
 - Protesting Party and ARB were in the same room.
 - CAD Appraiser still called in or joined via Zoom and appeared remotely.
 - We conducted very few of these.



Fit a Camel Through the Eye of a Needle.

- We were able to certify at 90% on July 25!

- ARB Approved Records per Tax Code Section 41.12 (c-2)

A monumental accomplishment considering our doors remained closed the entire time and the fact that we sent the bulk of our notices to property owners on May 28 (which meant a protest deadline of June 28).



What Are We Going to Keep Moving Forward?

- We are going to continue to push online protest portal
 - We had a record number of resolutions using the portal. All departments used it for the first time, not just Residential.
- We are going to allow for appearance by Zoom upon request.
 - Was more efficient than expected.
 - Fewer glitches than expected.
 - More widely accepted in the community now.
 - People were appreciative not to have to appear in person.
 - Alleviates traffic and parking problems at our building
- We will process protests electronically first.
 - Processing these first will reduce traffic and alleviate parking issues when we are fully open.
 - Results in a more efficient resolution
 - Staff can resolve these while working remotely or present in the office.



Have Further Questions?

Contact information:

Scott Griscom

Assistant Chief Appraiser

Bexar Appraisal District

(210) 242-2408

sgriscom@bcad.org

