

Alice Echo-News Journal

Duval County gets Groundwater District

Voters approve new tax, rate will be set at later date

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Duval County residents overwhelmingly supported the creation of the Duval County Groundwater Conservation District by a margin of three to one during the election on Saturday.

More than 60 percent of voters also approved levying a maintenance tax at a rate not to exceed \$.10 for each \$100 of assessed value, to go toward the operation of the district.

For Proposition 1, voters came out early in support of the measure, with 91 early votes in favor of the district, and 19 opposed. On Election Day, 268 residents came out and voted in favor of the district, while 108 voted in opposition to it, for an overall total of 359 for and 127 against.

With taxes always being a hot button issue for Duval County residents, according to local officials, the final margin on Proposition 2 was much narrower than Proposition 1, with 291 in favor of levying a maintenance tax to 189 opposed.

The creation of a Duval County Groundwater Conservation District was approved by the 79th Texas Legislature in 2005, but required local voter approval to be put into place.

The Duval County Commissioners Court previously appointed five members of the temporary board of directors for the groundwater district, in preparation for the organization's official duties. Four of those members represent each of the four commissioner precincts, while the Duval County judge appointed the fifth member himself. The five temporary directors are Elda Flores, J.M. Rodriguez, Atlee Parr, Leonel Garza and Robert Garcia.

The creation of a local groundwater district will allow Duval County residents to have representation in the South Texas area when groundwater issues are formally discussed, according to board member Garza.

Garza is the board member representing the Freer area, and said from what he saw prior to the election, very few in the community were against it.

"We didn't have the funds to have an election back then," Garza said of when the legislature first approved the district in 2005. "This is for the future of Duval County, to preserve our groundwater resources. I didn't talk to too many people before the election, but from what I saw, there were very few people against the proposition."

Garza said the maintenance tax issue was a concern for some residents prior to voting, but that the amount could be lowered.

"I know that some of them were upset about that because of how bad the economy is, and the severity of the drought. I'm just talking for myself now, but we can always try to get it (the tax) lowered," Garza said.

"We just have to move forward and see how it develops."

Garza said that there are many water issues currently facing Duval County. Aside from the difficulties caused by the ongoing drought, Garza also pointed to the quality of water in Freer, and his hopes that but working through the groundwater conservation district, he and his fellow board members will be able to resolve some of these issues.

The Board of Directors is scheduled to meet on Thursday, July 30 at 6 p.m. to canvass the election at the Duval County Courtroom. Garza said several of the current board members will be up for election in 2010.

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