Introduction

In the spring of 2010, the Hill Country Education Foundation (“Foundation”) Board of Directors selected as its flagship project the establishment of a community library within the Four Points area of Austin, Texas. The Board believed that this undertaking not only supports the mission of the Foundation, but a library would provide the community with untold benefits. Currently, the six thousand (6,000) school-aged children and estimated two-thousand (2,000) pre-school aged children must drive over twenty (20) minutes to the nearest library. The Foundation believes the demographics support and merit a community library within its boundaries.

Hill Country Education Foundation

The Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2009. It is a community based education foundation with a primary goal to ensure that students graduating from Vandegrift High School are the best prepared for their advanced education, future careers and to make a positive impact on their communities. The Foundation will achieve this goal by helping to make Vandegrift High School a “Top 100” high school in the nation. Through community support, fundraising and corporate sponsorships, the Foundation will focus its efforts on K-12 initiatives that promote Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) in conjunction with the Four Points public schools. These initiatives will come from teacher, parent and administrative proposals and grant requests as well as proven supplemental activities.

Benefits of a Library

Modern libraries are more than just a repository of literature. While promoting reading and literacy remains an important aspect of a public library, they also:

- Allow for educational activities for pre-school aged children.
- Provide an advanced computer lab with updated technology and free Internet access.
- Become an invaluable resource for small businesses.
- Furnish free meeting rooms for civic and other area groups, such as the Boy/Girl Scouts, Toastmasters, Rotary and much more.
- Foster a sense of community.
Economic Impact

Often times, taxpayers want to determine the economic impact or ROI of a community library. Studies on the economic benefits of public libraries show that:

- Overall, public libraries return $6.54 for every $1.00 invested from all sources.
- For every $6,448 spent on public libraries, one job is created.
- For every $1.00 of public support spent on public libraries, gross regional product increases by $9.08.

Research

The Foundation reached out to two Austin experts that have either created and/or overseen the operation of a library within the greater Austin metropolitan area. They are Dianne Koehler and Beth Fox. Ms. Koehler was instrumental in the creation of the Wells Branch Library District, which operates the Wells Branch Library (www.WBLibrary.com). Until recently, she sat on the Library District’s Board and had been Board President for many years. Ms. Fox is not only the Library Director of the Westbank Library (www.WestBank.Lib.TX.US) located in Westlake, but also the driving force to change Texas legislation. Her work allowed for the formation of a Texas Library District, which is a legally defined area funded by a percentage of collected sales taxes. In fact, the Westbank Library was the very first Library District in Texas.

During many conversations, library tours and additional correspondence with these two individuals, the Foundation learned:

- Library districts operate in two different formats:
  - 1) Sales tax funded Library Districts, or
  - 2) Non-profit Library Districts.
- Non-profit libraries are cumbersome and difficult to operate. Ms. Fox mentioned that before Westbank became a sales tax funded library district, it was a non-profit library that held ten (10) fundraisers a year just to stay open.
- When Westbank switched from the non-profit model to the sales tax funded model, their annual circulation went from 150,000 to more than 375,000 and allowed for building expansions.
• A Library District is able to collect a maximum of 0.50% sales tax, approved by the voters.

• Furthermore, when a relatively steady revenue stream, such as sales tax collections, funds a Library District it allows the Library District to borrow funds for the construction of a stand-alone building. A well-apportioned library can cost upwards of $3M, not including land.

The Foundation also learned the Four Points community falls within various municipal jurisdictions. The area north of 2222 falls within the full-purpose jurisdiction of the City of Austin. Areas around River Place and Westminster Glenn are either limited-purpose jurisdiction or extraterritorial jurisdiction. Steiner Ranch and the land bordering Lake Travis, north of Mansfield Dam, is mostly extraterritorial jurisdiction, with small pockets of limited-purpose jurisdiction by the City of Austin.

Furthermore, territory that is marked full-purpose jurisdiction and falls within a municipality that already has a library district cannot vote for another library district. Therefore, any community north of 2222 would not be able to participate in the formation of the Hill Country Library District, but still enjoy the benefits of having a nearby library.

The State of Texas mandates the maximum allowable sales tax rate is 8.25%. Of this, 6.25% is allocated to the State of Texas, which leaves 2.0% to be “fought over” by area municipal entities – i.e. fire/emergency districts, transportation authorities and library districts. Typically, it’s allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis. Since the community falls within various jurisdictions, the sales tax allocations are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area north of 2222</th>
<th>State of Texas</th>
<th>6.25%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City of Austin</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Austin MTA</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8.25%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>River Place / Westminster Glen</th>
<th>State of Texas</th>
<th>6.25%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travis Co ESD #4 or #6</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Austin MTA</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8.25%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steiner Ranch / Lake Travis Area</th>
<th>State of Texas</th>
<th>6.25%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travis Co ESD # 6</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Austin MTA</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8.25%</td>
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The Travis Co ESD # 4 and # 6 are the two fire departments in the area. In addition to being funded by a property tax collection, the emergency service districts receive a portion of the area sales tax collection.

The Austin MTA is also known as Capital Area Metro or CapMetro. By Foundation estimates, CapMetro currently collects approximately $1,000,000 in sales tax revenue from the Four Points community (based on 2008 data provided by the Texas Comptroller’s Office). In the 78732 zip code alone, CapMetro collects in excess of $300,000. The CapMetro web site shows that the transportation authority operates two bus stops in the Four Points community. One is between Taco Cabana and Starbucks, on Four Points Drive and the other bus stop is located on the 3M Campus. These two bus stops serve a total of three (3) individuals, as reported by CapMetro.

During the summer months, the Foundation met with Texas State Representative for District 48, Donna Howard, and Travis County Commissioner Karen Huber. While the majority of the tasks of forming a library district are more on the local or county level, Representative Howard’s staff was very helpful with gathering the necessary information in forming the library district, which requires placement on an election ballot and a majority of winning votes.

The Foundation also learned that Travis County handles any and all elections held in the boundaries of the county. For the county to call an election to create a library district and impose sales tax, the commissioner’s court must receive a petition signed by at least 5 percent of the number of voters in the proposed district who voted in the most recent gubernatorial election. The court then orders an election if the petition is in proper form and the petitioners have deposited the cost of the election with the county clerk. Additionally, the county must order the election no later than the 70th day before election day.

In early August, the Foundation engaged the law firm of Armbrust and Brown, a local law firm that specializes in municipal law, the same firm that advised and provided legal guidance to both the Westbank and Wells Branch Community Library Districts.

Original Intent

Up until a few weeks ago, the Foundation intended on having two ballot questions placed on the November 2nd ballot:

**Question # 1** – The withdrawal of the 78732 (zip code) from Austin MTA and removing the 1.0% sales tax from the area.

**Question # 2** – The formation of the Hill Country Community Library District and the implementation on a 0.50% sales tax in the 78732 area.
If these questions were on the ballot and approved by the voters in the 78732 zip code, this would have not only created the Library District, but also provided an estimated minimum annual revenue of $150,000. While this amount would not afford to have the most technologically advanced library with all the bells and whistles the Foundation envisions, it would give the Library District a good start and solid foundation. Additionally, as the area continues to grow (i.e. with expansion of the Oasis restaurant or the construction of the Randall’s shopping center), this amount would similarly grow.

However, just prior to the petition deadline to the county, the Foundation learned, through a conversation between the Foundation’s attorney and the Travis County attorney, that Texas Transportation Code 451 (Subchapter M. Withdrawal of Territory from Authority) does not accommodate the withdrawal of unincorporated areas (such as the 78732) from transportation authorities. The Board determined that even though Ballot Question # 2 could have been placed on the November 2nd ballot, it simply did not make sense to create a library district if it did not have a feasible funding source. Therefore, both ballot questions were pulled for the November 2nd ballot.

Revised Intent

During the next few months, it is the Foundation’s intent to pursue revising the Texas Transportation Code to allow unincorporated areas the ability to withdraw from Cap Metro. This is an ideal time as the Texas State Legislature goes into session in January 2011. If are successful, the Foundation will place both questions outlined above on the ballot for the May 2011 election.

Furthermore, the Foundation has reached out to the developers of the Randall’s Development, at the entrance of Steiner Ranch, and have asked them to provide a building for the Library. With the overwhelmingly negative response from the community regarding this development, it is the Foundation’s belief that if the developer provides the Library building, similar to how Hill Country Galleria developer provided a library for area residents, the Steiner Ranch community would be more in favor of this development. Similarly, a library located in this development would be a good draw for businesses within the development.

In addition, the Foundation is pursuing opportunities as a non-profit organization, exploring cooperative partnerships and fundraising campaigns. We are encouraging community members who have a passion for libraries to join our cause and help to play an instrumental role in creating a library for the Four Points community.

Involvement
To join the library committee of the Hill Country Education Foundation, please contact Kai Lamb at kalamb@hillcountryedfoundation.org.
- References -

Texas Statutes:

Texas Transportation Code – Chapter 451
Withdrawal of Territory from Authority

Texas Local Government Code – Chapter 326
Creation of a District

http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/

CapMetro Four Points Route (#122)

http://www.capmetro.org/riding/current_schedules/MAPS/RT122_SB.PDF