Transcript of a recorded interview of Mark Evert, a commissioner of Travis County Emergency Services District No. 1, by Jack Britton, editor of Lago Vista Watchdog, at the Lago Vista Brewery, Oct. 17, 2026 (16 minutes). Evert agreed to publication of the interview. Transcribed with Microsoft MAI-Transcribe-2, checked word by word against two other speech-to-text transcripts, and reviewed by the editor by ear. Verbatim, with fillers and false starts. Times are minutes:seconds into the recording.

Jack Britton [00:00]: Okay guys, uh, um, this is Jack Britton with Lago Vista Watchdog. Uh, I'm sitting here with Mark. Mark, your last name?

Mark Evert [00:07]: Evert.

Jack Britton [00:07]: Evert. Uh, we are at the Lago, uh, Vista Brewery, so if you hear kids in the background and wind, and we're just outside, we're having a conversation. So regards ESD 1, ESD 7, and, um, the tax stories. Maybe we don't have, uh, every- every- everything we- we need to kind of make, uh, you know, a good decision as far as like, hey, why are we getting these taxes? So Mark's here to kind of set the record straight. Mark, can you tell us a little about yourself? What's your background and what have you done for the city? Like, what do you do for the city? And then let's go right into it.

Mark Evert [00:38]: I'm, I'm currently, currently serve as the board of president of the board of commissioners for Travis County ESD 1. I'm one of five commissioners that are on the board. We are all appointed by the Travis County Commissioners Court, um, for two-year terms, which they can renew as often as they want. Uh, however, we are not a Travis County entity. We are a completely separate entity, uh, from the county. We don't take direction from the county. Uh, yeah, the only, only power they really have is to choose not to, not to, uh, uh, renew our two-year, uh, terms. The, uh, we, we operate under, under state law and, uh, uh, they're governed pretty much by state law. And I'll be down actually at the Capitol building come, you know, next term doing lobbying, you know, on behalf of, uh, behalf of the district, behalf of SAFE-D, which is our, uh, professional organization, similar to the Municipal League, uh, from the city standpoint. Uh, I've been doing this, I'm the longest serving commissioner right now. I've been doing this for about 12 years. I was orig- originally appointed, appointed, uh, um, now I've got a memory block here. Uh, but anyway, I've been, so I've been reappointed 6 times. And, uh, yeah, there were some concerns, concerns raised the other day, uh, about having duplicative services from, uh, from Travis County and ESD 7 for ambulances.

Jack Britton [02:29]: Yeah, they were, there were people thinking, you know, hey, I'm looking at my tax bill and I can see ESD 1, ESD 7, they're two separate line items, and the, and the number's now 10 cents. What's that about?

Mark Evert [02:40]: Well, the, the, well, ESD1 and ESD7, uh, ESD1 was created by the voters back, I think, sometime in the early, early 90s. Uh, to, uh,

Jack Britton [02:57]: Helicopter.

Mark Evert [02:58]: Got helicopter noise here too. Uh, and ESD- ESD1 basically replaced, uh, what was that time the Lago Vista Volunteer Fire Department and, uh, incorporated it into, uh, into the district. ESD7 was, and ESD1's primary responsibility up until, uh, 2016 was, uh, fire, uh, fire related, you know, firefighting services and stuff like that. We did not do EMS service. Travis County had two ambulances out here that they provide. Uh, however, in 26- 2016, after doing a review of the Travis County services, we decided to, uh, ask the voters to approve ESD 7, which basically funds the EMS services. Now, ESD 7 basically contracts out through what's called an interlocal agreement with ESD 1 to provide those services. So ESD 7 basically just, just pays the bill, and ESD 1 operates as, you know, a single cohesive unit for both firefighting and EMS. Uh, there's been some concern about the fact that we have Travis County ambulances and ESD 7 ambulances. uh, it's not really a duplicative service. We're, we work together. uh, they have ambulance- ambulances at or near two of our stations, and we have three additional ones at other stations. So they're spread throughout the, throughout the county strategically, um, allowing us to, you know, minimize response time. Our, our goal is basically, uh, to be able to respond, I think, within 16 minutes, you know, to anywhere, anywhere in the district. So we worked, we worked together with them. They're dispatched. Uh, we use the same dispatching. Um, they're dispatch- we're all dispatched based on who was closest, uh, to the actual call, and uh, uh, so it's not, it's not like you're paying twice for the same thing, but uh, uh.

Jack Britton [05:14]: So they have basically two different services.

Mark Evert [05:16]: Two di- two different services. Uh, they just have, they just have different employers. Their trucks are yellow, ours are red, basically, uh, easy way to distinguish. The, uh, the county right now, the, the Travis County Commissioner's Court has expressed, uh, concern about the cost of these ambulances. They currently pay the city of Austin 19 million dollars a year to provide, uh, service to, to the counties. It's not, it's not for individual ambulances. Uh, these

ambulances serve the entire county, so they're just paying, paying a flat cost for, uh, for the service. But the fact is, yeah, there are ambulances such as ours that are, uh, stationed out in the county away from the, away from the city. So they have, they have determined, made a determination that the cost of that service is not sustainable, and they have begun an audit, uh, they call it an efficiency audit, uh, it's really a cost of delivery audit. Um, I'm in this area, I'm being very speculative, but I think they are looking for, you know, an opportunity to, uh, divulge themselves of providing that service and, uh, eventually, uh, transition it over to, you know, ESDs and other, other local entities. So that, that's pure speculation on my part, but I can kind of read between the lines, uh, you know, what they're trying to do. So that's, that's something that's on the horizon. Uh, we, we would be happy to assume that responsibility. Uh, there may be, uh, some sort of an agreement with the county to provide some funding, at least on a transitional basis, but, uh, we feel, we've always felt that we can do, do it more cost effectively than what the county does. We have some idea of what their expenses are, and, uh, uh, I said we believe we can do a, do it, uh, uh.

Jack Britton [07:30]: You guys are cash, you're cash flow positive.

Mark Evert [07:32]: What?

Jack Britton [07:32]: From the budget, right, that I've seen, you guys are doing pretty good with cash.

Mark Evert [07:35]: Yeah, I mean, we're, we're, we're doing, we're doing well, uh, partly because of the, the TIFMAS revenue that we've been getting. Uh, we collected about 4 and a half million dollars in that last year. Some, a lot of that, high percentage of that goes to paying for salaries for people that we deploy, uh, on TIFMAS, but there is a certain percentage that, uh, we we receive for the use of our equipment, and, uh, you know, it it probably goes above and beyond what the actual cost to us is for that equipment. That's intentional on TIFMAS' part. They want us to invest and, uh, you know, increase our capabilities to support them when they need because of the, uh, ongoing threat of wildfires. We have people deployed right now, uh, they're just on standby in various strategic locations that may be, uh, susceptible to, you know, more susceptible to wildfires. Uh, yes, what other questions do you have?

Jack Britton [08:41]: Yeah, I think, I think you mentioned wildfires. That's actually a big topic of conversation amongst residents. Like, there's only one way in or one

way out, uh, and, you know, if you're, if you're over by, um, oh man, what's that POA, uh, beach, uh, the, the beachfront, uh, the boat ramp, it's the, not the first park, the second park I visited. Oh, I can't remember the name of the park, but it's one of the POA parks. If you're over by Lake Travis and a wildfire.

Mark Evert [09:05]: Cody Park or?

Jack Britton [09:06]: What's, what's Cody Park? That's the one. Yeah, yeah, Cody. Yeah, if you're at Cody Park, um, uh, you know, and there's a wildfire and it, and it hits one of the intersections of the main roads, there's, there's really no way out. Uh, is that something that the city is planning, uh, planning around as far as like how do we manage that?

Mark Evert [09:23]: Probably, probably, to be honest with you, if you're at Cody Park by the lake, you're probably, probably in a good spot.

Jack Britton [09:29]: Okay. Yeah. There's a lot of other

Mark Evert [09:32]: Yeah.

Jack Britton [09:32]: areas here, yeah.

Mark Evert [09:33]: Yeah. Uh, I mean, the problem with wildfires is, and for to have, you know, predetermined evacuation routes is that they're situational in nature, and, you know, it depends on which way the wind's blowing, where the fire's at, uh, you know, everything as to, you know, what, what the evacuation route would be. Getting close to the lake in most cases would be a good thing.

Jack Britton [09:57]: That's a good thing. So are you guys coordinating with like POAs as far as like, hey, if you're in this area and this gets cut off, the, the move is to get to Cody Park.

Mark Evert [10:05]: Yeah.

Jack Britton [10:06]: That coordination is happening?

Mark Evert [10:07]: We would coordinate with the city.

Jack Britton [10:09]: Okay.

Mark Evert [10:09]: And, uh, uh...

Jack Britton [10:11]: Because they're all gated, you know,

Mark Evert [10:12]: Yes.

Jack Britton [10:13]: they've got the only-

Mark Evert [10:14]: Right.

Jack Britton [10:14]: the only like open, uh, open piece of land.

Mark Evert [10:17]: Yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure that, you know, law enforcement and stuff like that has access to that.

Jack Britton [10:22]: Hopefully they're planning it. That's good. I think people want to know that, you know, and, um, I, 2007, I was in the, I was on Camp Pendleton, and we had fires, and, um, the fires moved at about 70 miles an hour, so

Mark Evert [10:33]: Yeah.

Jack Britton [10:33]: hopefully that never happens here, you know, and

Mark Evert [10:36]: Yeah. It's a little less likely to happen here because we don't get the, the, the winds that they get, but we are in a urban wildland interface, uh, that, you know, as we saw in Bastrop back in 2011, uh, you know, there there's always the potential for for that. So hopefully it never happens here.

Jack Britton [11:00]: Yep.

Mark Evert [11:01]: Uh, but, you know, we feel that we're prepared for it. We do operate, uh, a lot of people don't realize this, we do operate the Emergency Operations Center. It's actually right almost next door here in the Casey building. Uh, it's uh, we also have our administrative offices, uh, in that building, and uh, so we, we would activate that emergency operations center. Uh, we activated it. Last time we activated it was during the flooding back in uh, uh, 2025, the July 4th floods, and uh, uh, we coordinate with other, other organizations. In that case, we had representatives from the, the sheriff's office, we had representatives from a couple other fire departments, uh, in the area, uh, law enforcement, sheriff, um, the, uh, county emergency services, uh, all were, all were in the emergency operations center during that time, and, uh, get- getting updates, you know, from the field on what, what the status was and what actions were needed, uh, you know, to handle situations.

Jack Britton [12:15]: That's awesome. Um, I guess last thing is, uh, you know, for Lago Vista residents, how can they help the fire department? Like, what are- what are some upcoming things you wanna- you wanna mention to them? Hey, pay attention

to these things and get involved. This would help, uh, our fire department. Um, what do you got?

Mark Evert [12:32]: Well, there's- there's, uh, there are Firewise programs, which is, uh, uh, not really coordinated entirely with the depart- I mean, it is coordinated with the department, but it's not sponsored by the department. And those, those basically advise residents on what they can do in terms of, you know, trimming trees and brush, you know, keeping, keeping a safe area around, around their homes and, uh, neighborhoods. Uh, that that's always, that's always important. Uh, the other, other thing that's important is, uh, you know, when we do have an incident, uh, communication goes out right now through, uh, Warren, Texas, and, uh, they should learn about that and make sure that they're, uh, uh, receiving information from them during a, during an event. Uh, interestingly, uh, Chuck Brotherton, who's county executive for emergency services, he was at our meeting here this week, and uh, he also talked about the fact that they're going to install a pi- pilot, uh, siren, flood siren, uh, up Sandy Creek. Uh, it's actually going to be installed at the, at our station 104, which is located up there. And it's basically just a, just a test program pending a more extensive, uh, program. They want to, uh, you know, see how it works, uh, you know, see what the distance is people can hear it and stuff like that. And so they're, they're going to be installing that actually very quickly, probably within the, the next month or two. So we, uh, we authorized them to erect a tower and do the necessary work to, to install that system, and we'll, we'll have basically an interlocal agreement with them, uh, regarding the, the use of that siren. So that's... So that's, uh... You know, we're trying to, trying to figure out ways to communicate better with the community. We've, we've got, uh, uh, some people who are working specifically with social media. We've started, uh, started just a little feature on social media of, uh, introducing people to some of our firefighters, uh, you know, giving them a little bit more personal standpoint. But yeah, the the the amazing thing about this community is how supportive it it has been of us. Uh, I mean, not only did they vote, uh, strongly to, uh, to create ESD 7, but we've actually had, uh, actually had 5 other elections, all involving sales tax increases, uh, and one involved, uh, an expansion of ESD 7, kind of a complicated story. Uh, when we had the initial election, there was a section of our our district that looked like it was going to be annexed imminently by, um, Leander. That fell through. They're no longer interested in doing that.

Jack Britton [15:34]: That's good news.

Mark Evert [15:35]: We went back and had them, had them vote separately, uh, to join ESD. Uh, but, uh, we've had the other elections have involved, uh, getting the percentage of sales tax. We don't get a lot of revenue from sales tax. We get about 650,000 a year on it. Uh, that's minuscule compared to what other ESDs get. Uh, ESD, uh, 6 over in Lakeway, they get, uh, almost 10 million a year from, from just their sales tax. They have a budget of 35 million a year overall.

Jack Britton [16:11]: We just don't have a lot of retail here.

Mark Evert [16:13]: We just don't have a lot, don't have a lot of retail. We don't have the tax base

Jack Britton [16:16]: Right.

Mark Evert [16:16]: to do that. We cover a bigger area, but, you know, they obviously have, have a more densely populated area over there as well, but...

Jack Britton [16:26]: Okay. Mark, thank you.

Mark Evert [16:28]: Okay.