

**Williamson County Appraisal Review Board
Hearing Procedures**

I. ARB Membership

[Tax Code Section 5.103(b) (16), (15), and (12)]

1. Administration of ARB (Appraisal Review Board) Appointments

ARB members are not provided any statutory role in the process for the administration of applications or requests for appointment for membership on the ARB. If an ARB member is contacted by an individual regarding requesting an appointment to the ARB, the member shall direct the individual to the person designated to receive applications or requests for appointment for the ARB.

2. Conflicts of Interest

Each ARB member is responsible for ensuring that he or she does not have any conflict of interest that results in ineligibility to serve on the ARB or restricts or prohibits the ARB member's participation in ARB activities, such as participation in the determination of a taxpayer protest. An ARB member must promptly report any conflict of interest to the ARB Chair in addition to any other individual or entity as may be provided by law. The Chair shall ensure prompt notification of reported conflicts of interest to the appropriate individuals.

If an ARB member discovers before or during a protest hearing that a conflict of interest exists, the member may not participate in that protest hearing. If the conflict exists due to the provisions of the Local Government Code Chapter 171, an affidavit must be filed with the Secretary of the ARB. The affidavit must be filed as soon as the conflict is identified, even if it requires a delay in the conduct of the hearing. If the conflict arises from Tax Code Section 41.69, no affidavit must be filed; however, the ARB member must recuse himself or herself immediately from the hearing and report the conflict to the Chair or Secretary of the ARB.

ARB members must remember that while Local Government Code Chapter 171 addresses matters of "substantial interest", Tax Code Section 41.69 applies to any protest in which an ARB member is interested (i.e. there is no requirement under Tax Code 41.69 that the interest be substantial). Therefore, while a conflict of interest under Local Government Code Chapter 171 may not prohibit an ARB member from participation in a protest, Tax Code Section 41.69 may still prohibit participation. If an ARB member has a question as to whether or not he or she has a conflict of interest that might prohibit his or her involvement, the member shall immediately contact the ARB Chair to address the matter.

In the recusal process, the ARB member not only may not vote on the matter that is the subject of the protest, but also may not hear or deliberate on the protest.

3. Ex Parte and Other Prohibited Communications

- a. ARB members shall not engage in prohibited ex parte or other communications related to a protest. If an ARB member is approached by one or more individuals that appear to be engaging or attempting to engage in a prohibited communication, the ARB member shall immediately remove himself or herself from the conversation.
- b. Property owners and their agents and the chief appraiser and his staff may not communicate with members of the ARB regarding the evidence, argument, facts, merits or property related to a property owner's protest except during the hearing on the protest.
- c. Communications between the ARB and its legal counsel are not prohibited.

II. ARB Duties

[Tax Code Section 5.103(b) (1), (5), and (6)]

1. Statutory Duties of an ARB

Each ARB member is responsible for ensuring that he or she understands the statutory duties of the ARB and shall comply with all statutory requirements in performing statutory duties as a member of the ARB.

2. Notices Required under the Property Tax Code

Each ARB member is responsible for obtaining and maintaining familiarity with notices required under the Property Tax Code. If an ARB member has reason to believe that any notice that is required by law to be provided by the ARB is not being provided or does not meet the requirements of applicable law, the ARB member shall promptly notify the ARB Chair. The ARB Chair shall investigate each such report and take appropriate action to correct all verified problems.

3. Determination of Good Cause under Tax Code Section 41.44(b)

- a. "Good cause" for filing late protests is not defined in Tax Code Section 41.44(b). Claims of good cause for late filed protests should be carefully considered and standards in making determinations for good cause under Tax Code Section 41.44(b) should be uniformly applied. The ARB should give due consideration to good cause claims in such a manner that properly respects the rights of property owners while not undermining or contravening laws related to filing deadlines or the orderly and expeditious fulfillment of ARB duties.
- b. "Good Cause" for failure to timely file a notice of protest exists when the property owner or the owner's agent shows necessity due to unforeseeable events or extraordinary circumstances. Some examples of good cause include, but are not limited to, accidents, illness and emergencies. Untimely protests that are filed without a showing of good cause or after approval of the appraisal records cannot be accepted due to statutory deadlines for the ARB's completion of hearing.
- c. When a property owner files a notice after the legal deadline or before the date the ARB approves the appraisal records the property owner shall provide the ARB with a written explanation for the failure to file the notice on time. The ARB will accept the protest and schedule a hearing if it appears that there was good cause for the property owner's failure to file the protest on time.

III. ARB Hearings (Informal Meetings)

Pre-hearing Conference

The ARB recommends that the protesting party first review the matter being protested with the Chief Appraiser or his authorized designees and verify that such an informal conference was held and that the parties were not able to agree. All evidence that will be presented at the formal hearing by either party should be submitted for review at the pre-hearing conference.

IV. ARB Hearings (formal hearings, not informal meetings between property owners and appraisal district staff)

[Tax Code Section 5.103(b) (3), (4), (7), and (14)]

1. Scheduling Hearings Generally

The ARB shall schedule a hearing when a timely notice of protest is filed and, in doing so, may be provided with clerical assistance by the appraisal district.

2. Scheduling Hearings for Property Owners not Represented by Agents

Pursuant to Tax Code Section 41.66(i), hearings filed by property owners not represented by agents designated under Tax Code Section 1.111 shall be scheduled for a specific time and date. More than one protest may be scheduled for hearings at the same time and date; however, if a hearing for a property owner is not started by an ARB panel or the full ARB within two hours of the scheduled hearing time, the ARB is required to postpone the hearing, if a postponement is requested by the property owner. The request for postponement must contain the mailing address and/or email address of the person requesting the postponement. The ARB shall respond in writing or by email to the request for postponement not later than the seventh day after the date of receipt of the request.

3. Scheduling Hearings for Multiple Accounts

If requested by a property owner or a designated agent, hearings on protests concerning up to 20 designated properties shall be scheduled on the same day by the ARB. The request must meet all requirements of Tax Code Section 41.66(j), including the required statement in boldfaced type: "request for same day protest hearings". No more than one such request may be filed in the same tax year by a property owner or a designated agent. Also pursuant to Tax Code Section 41.66(j), the ARB may schedule hearings on protests concerning more than 20 properties filed by the same property owner or designated agent and may use different panels to conduct the hearings based on the ARB's customary scheduling. The ARB may follow the practices customarily used in the scheduling of hearings under Section 41.66(j).

4. ARB Panel Assignments

If an ARB sits in panels as authorized by Tax Code Section 41.45(d), protests shall be assigned randomly, except that the ARB, with or without clerical assistance from the staff of the appraisal district, may consider the type of property or the protest grounds in order to assign the protest to a panel with members who have particular expertise.

Once a protest is scheduled to be heard by a specific panel, it shall not be reassigned to another panel without the consent of the property owner or a designated agent. If the ARB has cause to reassign a protest to another panel, the owner or designated agent may agree to the reassignment or request a postponement of the hearing. The ARB is required to postpone the hearing if requested in this situation. Pursuant to Tax Code Section 41.66(k), “[a] change of members of a panel because of a conflict of interest, illness, or inability to continue participating in hearings for the remainder of the day does not constitute reassignment of a protest to another panel.”

5. Postponements Under Tax Code Section 41.45(e)

A property owner who is not represented by an agent under Tax Code Section 1.111 is entitled to one postponement of a hearing without showing cause, if the request is made before the date of the hearing. The request may be made in writing, by electronic mail, by telephone, or in person to the ARB, an ARB panel, or the ARB Chair. If the hearing for which the postponement is requested is scheduled to occur before the next regular meeting of the ARB, the Chair or the Chair’s representative may take action on the request for postponement without the necessity of action by the full ARB. Unless the date and time of the hearing as postponed are agreed to by the ARB Chair or the Chair’s representative, the property owner, and the chief appraiser, the hearing may not be postponed to a date less than five or more than 30 days after the date scheduled for the hearing when the postponement is sought.

In addition, and without limit as to the number of postponements, the ARB shall postpone a hearing if the property owner or his/her designated agent at any time shows good cause, as defined in Tax Code Section 41.45 (e-2). The request may be made in writing, by electronic mail, by telephone, or in person to the ARB, an ARB panel, or the ARB Chair. If the hearing for which the postponement is requested is scheduled to occur before the next regular meeting of the ARB, the Chair or the Chair’s representative may take action on the request for postponement without the necessity of action by the full ARB. Unless the date and time of the hearing as postponed are agreed to by the ARB Chair or the Chair’s representative, the property owner, and the chief appraiser, the hearing may not be postponed to a date less than five or more than 30 days after the date scheduled for the hearing when the postponement is sought.

In addition, and without limit, the ARB shall postpone a hearing if the chief appraiser consents to the postponement. The request may be made in writing, by electronic mail, by telephone, or in person to the ARB, an ARB panel, or the ARB Chair. If the hearing for which the postponement is requested is scheduled to occur before the next regular meeting of the ARB, the Chair or the Chair’s representative may take action on the request for postponement without the necessity of action by the full ARB. Unless the date and time of the hearing as postponed are agreed to by the ARB Chair or the Chair’s representative, the property owner, and the chief appraiser, the hearing may not be postponed to a date less than five or more than 30 days after the date scheduled for the hearing when the postponement is sought.

6. Postponements Under Tax Code Section 41.45(e-1)

A property owner or a person designated by the property owner as the owner’s agent to represent the owner at the hearing who fails to appear at the hearing is entitled to a new hearing if the property owner or the owner’s agent files, not later than the fourth day after the date the hearing occurred, a written statement with the ARB showing good cause, as defined in Tax Code Section 41.45(e-2), for the failure to appear and requesting a new hearing.

“Good Cause” means a reason that includes an error or mistake that was not intentional or the result of conscious indifference and will not cause undue delay or other injury to the ARB or person authorized to extend the deadline or grant a rescheduling.

7. Postponements Under Tax Code Section 41.45(g)

The ARB must postpone a hearing to a later date if:

1. The owner of the property or the owner’s agent is also scheduled to appear at a hearing on a protest filed with the ARB of another appraisal district.
2. The hearing before the other ARB is scheduled to occur on the same date as the hearing set by this ARB.
3. The notice of hearing delivered to the property owner or the owner’s agent by the other ARB bears an earlier postmark than the notice of hearing delivered by this ARB or, if the date of the postmark is identical, the property owner or agent has not requested a postponement of the other hearing; and
4. The property owner or the owner’s agent includes with the request for a postponement a copy of the notice of hearing delivered to the property owner or the owner’s agent by the other ARB.

8. Postponements Under Tax Code Section 41.66(h)

The ARB shall postpone a hearing (one time only) if the property owner requests additional time to prepare for the hearing and establishes that the chief appraiser failed to comply with Tax Code Section 41.461. Only the property owner may request a postponement for this reason. The request for postponement must contain the mailing address and/or email address of the person requesting the postponement. The ARB shall respond in writing or by email to the request for postponement not later than the seventh day after the date of receipt of the request.

9. Postponements Under Tax Code Section 41.66(i)

Hearings on protests filed by property owners not represented by agents designated under Tax Code Section 1.111 shall be scheduled for a specific time and date. More than one protest may be scheduled for hearings at the same time and date; however, if a hearing for a property owner is not started by an ARB panel or the full ARB within two hours of the scheduled hearing time, the ARB is required to postpone the hearing, if a postponement is requested by the property owner. The request for postponement must contain the mailing address and/or email address of the person requesting the postponement. The ARB shall respond in writing or by email to the request for postponement not later than the seventh day after the date of receipt of the request.

10. Postponements Under Tax Code Section 41.66(k)

If a protest is scheduled to be heard by a particular panel, the protest may not be reassigned to another panel without the consent of the property owner or designated agent. If the ARB has cause to reassign a protest to another panel, a property owner or designated agent may agree to reassignment of the protest or may request that the hearing on the protest be postponed. The ARB shall postpone the hearing on that request. A change of members of a panel because of a conflict of interest, illness, or inability to continue participating in hearings for the remainder of the day does not constitute reassignment of a protest to another panel. The request for postponement must contain the mailing address and/or email address of the person requesting the postponement. The ARB shall respond in writing or by email to the request for postponement not later than the seventh day after the date of receipt of the request.

V. Conduct of ARB Hearings (formal hearings, not informal meetings between property owners and appraisal district staff)

[Tax Code Section 5.103(b) (2), (9), and (10)]

1. Conducting Hearings Open to the Public

In accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act, anyone wishing to record, photograph or videotape all or part of an ARB hearing may do so. The protesting party must announce to the ARB the intent to record the hearing. In order to limit disruption of the proceedings, recording devices must be placed immediately in front of the protesting party and are not moved during the proceedings. Video recording devices should be placed on a tripod and in a location, agreed to by the panel Chair, which does not interfere with anyone’s view of the proceedings. Cameras without a tripod may be placed on a bookcase, chair or the corner of the hearing table but may not be moved during the hearing.

For most protest hearings, the hearing should be conducted in the following order:

- a. Commence the hearing and announce the assigned protest number, property location and owner, and other identifying information.
- b. Announce that, in accordance with Tax Code Section 41.45(h), all written and electronic material that has not been provided must be provided.
- c. State that the ARB members who are considering the protest have not communicated with anyone about the protest and have signed affidavits to that effect.
- d. Welcome the parties and remind them of the content of the hearing procedures, time limits for the hearing (approximately 15 minutes) and other relevant matters. The ARB or panel may waive the time limits at its discretion.
- e. Ask if any testifying witness holds a license or certificate from the Texas Appraiser Licensing and Certification Board and if the witness is appearing in that capacity.
- f. Inform witnesses that all testimony must be given under oath or affirmation and swear-in all witnesses who plan to testify. If any person testifying or giving evidence refuses to take an oath, the record shall reflect the refusal.

- g. Ask the property owner to decide if he/she wishes to present his/her evidence and argument before or after the appraisal district.
- h. If the property owner or agent presents his/her case first, he/she shall present evidence (documents and/or testimony). The ARB shall only consider evidence on those issues addressed on a timely written notice of protest. If witnesses are present, the property owner or agent may examine the witnesses as part of the presentation of evidence. At the end of the presentation, an opinion of value (if applicable) for the property must be stated.
- i. Next the appraisal district representative may cross examine the property owner, the agent, or the representative and/or witnesses. The ARB/panel will limit cross examination to matters that are relevant to the subject of the hearing and will not permit questions that are abusive or personal.
- j. If the property owner or agent presented his/her case first, the appraisal district representative shall present evidence (documents and/or testimony) next. If witnesses are present, the appraisal district representative may examine the witnesses as part of the presentation of evidence. At the end of the presentation, an opinion of value (if applicable) for the property must be stated.
- k. Then, the property owner or agent may cross examine the appraisal district representative and/or witnesses.
- l. Members of the ARB shall not be examined or cross examined by parties. ARB members may ask clarifying questions.
- m. The party presenting its case first may offer rebuttal evidence (additional evidence to refute evidence presented by the other party).
- n. The other party may then offer rebuttal evidence.
- o. The party presenting its case first shall make its closing argument and state the ARB determination being sought.
- p. The party presenting its case second shall make its closing argument and state the ARB determination being sought.
- q. The ARB or panel Chair shall state that the testimony is closed.
- r. The ARB or panel shall deliberate orally. No notes, text messages, or other form of communication are permitted.
- s. The ARB or panel Chair shall ask for a separate motion for each matter that was the subject of the protest hearing. The motion should include the exact value or issue to be determined. A vote shall be taken and recorded by a designated appraisal district staff person or member of the ARB assigned for this purpose. Separate motions and determinations must be made for each protested issue. (i.e., excessive appraisal and unequal appraisal must have separate ARB motions and determinations).
- t. Thank the parties for their participation and announce the determination(s) of the ARB and that an order determining protest will be sent by certified mail.

If computer screens are used by ARB members during ARB hearings for reviewing evidence and other information, computer screens also must be available to property owners and agents at the hearings to view the same information that is presented to the ARB members by the appraisal district staff. This requirement is met if the property owner or agent can see all information displayed on at least one computer screen in the hearing location (there is no requirement that the property owner or agent be provided a separate screen).

If a chief appraiser uses audiovisual equipment at a protest hearing, the appraisal office must provide equipment of the same general type, kind and character for the use of the property owner or agent during the hearing. See Section VI, Other Issues, for more information regarding audiovisual equipment requirements.

The property owner or agent and the appraisal district representative are prohibited from debating each other. All communications must be directed to the ARB members, except for examination or cross examination during testimony of witnesses or parties testifying at the hearing.

For taxing unit challenges, motions to correct appraisal records, protests regarding exemption, or other matters that may be the subject of ARB hearings, the ARB should follow the order of conducting hearings above but may make exceptions for the type of hearing.

Records for each ARB proceeding must be kept according to Tax Code Section 41.68 and Comptroller Rule 9.803. This includes the ARB retaining evidence offered or submitted by the parties as required by Tax Code Section 41.45 and Comptroller Rules 9.803 and 9.805. The Secretary of the ARB is responsible for ensuring proper record keeping, maintenance, and retention.

2. Conducting Hearings by Telephone Conference Call

A property owner initiating a protest is entitled to offer evidence or argument by affidavit without personally appearing. To appear at a hearing by telephone conference call, a property owner must notify the ARB by written request not later than the 10th day before the date of the hearing. To offer evidence or argument at a hearing conducted by telephone conference call, a property owner must submit a written affidavit of any evidence before the hearing begins. A property owner is responsible for providing access to a hearing conducted by telephone conference call to another person the owner invites to participate in the hearing.

3. Conducting Hearings Closed to the Public

A joint motion by the chief appraiser and the property owner is required to request that the hearing be closed due to intent to disclose proprietary or confidential information that will assist the ARB in determining the protest.

The ARB or panel Chair shall convene the hearing as an open meeting and then announce that the meeting will be closed to the public as permitted by Tax Code Sections 41.66(d) and (d-1). Only the parties to the protest, their witnesses, and the ARB members are permitted to stay in the hearing room. The same order of proceedings as for hearings open to the public should be followed.

The Secretary of the ARB is responsible for ensuring that a separate tape recording or written summary of testimony is kept for the closed meeting in accordance with the provisions of Comptroller Rule 9.803 generally. The proprietary or confidential evidence presented at the hearing giving rise to the closed hearing is confidential according to Tax Code Section 22.27 and shall be marked as "confidential" and maintained as confidential in the ARB records for proper handling. At the conclusion of the hearing the ARB panel shall confirm with the parties that all proprietary and confidential information has been appropriately identified by the ARB. The confidentiality of the information must be maintained by the ARB members and disclosed only as provided by law.

After deliberation, the ARB shall reconvene in open meeting and vote or take final action on the protest deliberated in the closed meeting. There must be no mention of the proprietary or confidential information during the open meeting.

4. Right to Examine and Cross Examine Witnesses or Other Parties

Tax Code Section 41.66(b) states that "each party to a hearing is entitled to offer evidence, examine or cross examine witnesses or other parties, and present argument on the matters subject to the hearing." The ARB may not prohibit this entitlement in any way; however, it may enforce time limits and dictate the order of ARB hearings for witness examination and cross examination. To the extent possible, the parties should be advised in advance of any time limitations the ARB has determined to impose regarding the presentation of evidence.

5. Party's Right to Appear by an Agent

The ARB shall accept and consider a motion or protest filed by an agent if an agency authorization is filed at or before the hearing on the motion or protest. The ARB may not require that an agency authorization be filed at an earlier time. The ARB may not require a person to designate an agent to represent the person in a property tax matter other than as provided by Tax Code Section 1.111. The ARB shall confirm with the district that the agent authorization is valid and acceptable to the district.

6. Affidavit in Lieu of Personal Appearance

Taxpayers who are unable to attend a hearing are encouraged to submit an affidavit. If a property owner offers evidence or argument by affidavit (sworn statement) instead of personally attending the protest hearing, the statement must be sworn to as true and correct before an officer authorized to administer oath (notary public). The affidavit must include: 1.) the name of the property owner initiating the protest; 2.) a description of the property that is the subject of the protest; and 3.) the evidence and arguments supporting the protest.

The affidavit must be submitted to the ARB or its panel prior to the scheduled hearing and all physical evidence to support the property owner's position shall be attached to and identified by the affidavit for consideration by the ARB or its panel.

VI. Evidence Considerations

[Tax Code Section 5.103(8), (11), and (13)]

1. A Party's Right to Offer Evidence and Argument

The ARB may not prohibit a party's right to offer evidence and argument. However, the ARB may enforce time limits and dictate the order of ARB hearings. To the extent possible, the parties should be advised in advance of any time limitations the ARB has determined to impose regarding the presentation of evidence and argument. The ARB should, schedule permitting, provide as much time as possible to each party to a hearing to fully present evidence and offer argument.

Before the hearing on a protest or immediately after the hearing begins, the chief appraiser and the property owner or the owner's agent shall each provide the other with a copy of any written material or material preserved on any portable device designed to maintain an electronic, magnetic, or digital reproduction of a document or image that the person(s) intend to offer or submit to the ARB at the hearing.

The ARB will accept the following electronic file types on CD and USB flash drives only: Pictures: .jpg, .jpeg, .bmp, .tif; PDF: .pdf; Excel: .xls, .xlsx; Documents (Word, Text): .doc, .docx, .rtf, .txt. The ARB will not accept evidence on a smart phone or electronic tablet.

2. Prohibition of Consideration of Information Not Provided at the ARB Hearing

In a protest hearing, the ARB will not consider any appraisal district information on a protest that was not presented to the ARB during the protest hearing. In order for any appraisal district record (i.e., appraisal roll history, appraisal cards) to be considered by the ARB, it must be presented as evidence by or on behalf of a party (e.g. chief appraiser, appraisal district representative, property owner, agent, or witness) at the protest hearing.

3. Exclusion of Evidence Required by Tax Code Section 41.67(d)

If it is established during a protest hearing that information was previously requested under Tax Code Section 41.461 by the protesting party and that the information was not made available to the protesting party at least 14 days before the scheduled or postponed hearing, the requested information not made available may not be used as evidence in the hearing. The ARB shall make a determination to exclude evidence under Tax Code Section 41.67(d) only if evidence presented at the hearing establishes that: (1) the information sought to be excluded as evidence was not made available at least 14 days before the hearing; and (2) the information sought to be excluded as evidence was previously requested by the protesting party.

VII. Other Issues

[Tax Code Section 5.103(17)]

1. Compliance with the Law, Integrity, and Impartiality

Members of the ARB shall comply with the law and should act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the ARB.

2. Patience and Courtesy

ARB members must be patient, dignified, and courteous to parties appearing before the ARB.

3. Bias or Prejudice

Members of the ARB shall perform their ARB duties without bias or prejudice.

4. Confidential Information

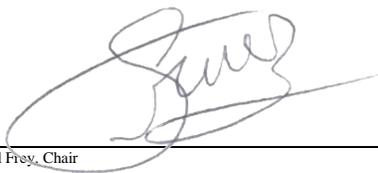
Members of the ARB shall not disclose or use for any purpose unrelated to ARB duties confidential information acquired in the performance of ARB duties.

5. Required Contents That Vary By ARB

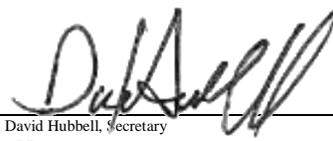
In compliance with Comptroller Rule 9.805, the ARB dictates that the manner and form, including security requirements, in which a person must provide the other party with evidentiary materials the person(s) intend to offer or submit to the ARB for consideration at the hearing on a small, portable, electronic device, must comply with the following:

- a. Any electronic device provided for the purpose of offering or submitting evidence to the ARB will be screened for viruses and malware;
- b. The ARB will only accept the following electronic file types on CD and USB flash drives: Pictures: .jpg, .jpeg, .bmp, .tif; PDF: .pdf; Excel: .xls, .xlsx; Documents (Word, Text): .doc, .docx, .rtf, .txt. The ARB will not accept evidence on a smart phone or electronic tablet;
- c. A copy of the evidence provided in this manner will be uploaded to the property on the district's computer, and the electronic device will be kept as part of the ARB's hearing record;
- d. ARB hearing rooms are equipped with a Windows-based PC capable of reading the formats listed above. The district representative will oversee the use of the computer and will make the hearing materials and images available on the individual monitors provided for the ARB, the district representative and the property owner or property owner's agent.

Adopted this 17th day of April 2019



Carol Frey, Chair
ARB



David Hubbell, Secretary
ARB