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March 3, 2009 Voters should say yes to better safety

Can you reach deeper into your pocket? Will you?

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It's a bad time to be asking, but the St. Charles and Countryside Fire Protection District is getting ready to put those very questions to the people it serves.

The district's proposed west-side fire station could cost taxpayers anywhere between \$1.25 million and \$1.75 million, district President Ed Malek said recently.

The price tag could have been gaudier -- Central Development Corp. is expected to donate the land for the project, worth an estimated \$1 million all by itself.

Two referendum questions on the April 7 ballot will give voters a chance to say "yea" or "nay" to floating bonds and hiking property taxes by 14 cents per \$100 of assessed value -- an increase of about \$13 a month on a \$350,000 home -- to fund the new station.

While the idea of tax hikes and municipal bonds probably is laughable to some and infuriating to others, I hope residents find reasons to vote "yes" on both these measures.

Sure, it's easy for me to say; I don't live in the district. As a renter, I don't even pay property taxes -- not directly, anyway.

But if I were going to buy a home and settle down here, safety would be one of the main reasons I would do so. Good emergency service is one of the things that makes St. Charles and surrounding towns desirable places to live -- one of the things that draw people to live in the "Pride of the Fox."

According to a study released last year, residents living in the northwest reaches of the district can expect response times upward of 15 minutes. As any firefighter will tell you, a lot of stuff can burn in 15 minutes. Your house can become a barbecue pit in 15 minutes. I exaggerate, but you get the point.

If those essential services stagnate or deteriorate, it's a sign that every aspect of quality of life in your burg is turning in the wrong direction, going down the tubes, heading south (choose your cliché).

Malek remains optimistic, but he knows what the district is asking.

For those with that knee-jerk reaction of "no way," you've got a little more than a month to change your mind.

I would suggest that you do so. We aren't talking potted plants and holiday decorations here.