

Marya Crigler Interview Questions

Emailed questions 11:30am Friday October 25, 2019

Agreed response due by noon Tuesday, October 29, 2019

Introduction

When you applied for a job at TCAD in January 1990, you had worked as a receptionist, market researcher and dorm manager. You started work at TCAD part-time in 1990. Over the years you worked your way up to be named chief appraiser in November 2011. (I happened to be at the Board of Directors meeting in which you were selected and wrote an article about it.)

As you know I've been reporting about TCAD pretty frequently this year and it seems like a good time to go over some things. So here are my questions:

1. Standards published by the International Association of Assessing Officers for assessment appeals recommend that, "The appeal process should begin with an informal consultation between the assessor and the property owner... The informal consultation may, at the option of the property owner, be a face-to-face meeting, telephone conference, or correspondence by mail, fax, or electronic mail." [IAAO Standard on Assessment Appeal, p. 5 at 3.1 Informal Review by the Assessor.] I'm told that TCAD is the only major metro appraisal district in Texas not to allow face-to-face appeals. My question is: Is TCAD alone among major metro appraisal districts in not allowing informal meetings with appraisers?
2. TCAD ran a pilot program with online protests starting in 2018 but still allowed face-to-face appeals. Why in 2019 did you eliminate the informal, face-to-face meetings with appraisers, what did you hope would be gained by this, and did you consider what the additional costs to taxpayers would be for expanding the ARB?
3. Before you became chief appraiser, did any of the previous TCAD chief appraisers you worked for ever eliminate face-to-face informal appeals? (If so, which ones, what were the results, and why was the practice discontinued?)

4. Doing away with face-to-face informal protest hearings increased the number of formal protest hearings from 26,905 in 2018 to 90,000 in 2019. That's more than three times as many formal hearings and at a greatly increased cost to operate the ARB. It appears that customer satisfaction has been reduced as well. What's been gained this year by eliminating informal face-to-face appeals?

5. Does holding so many more formal ARB hearings tie up appraisers for a longer period and diminish the amount of time they have to be in the field doing appraisals and discovering new properties that should be added to the tax rolls?

6. Your latest financial disclosure indicates that you chair the Metropolitan Council of Appraisal Districts. Have any of the other Metro CADs eliminated face-to-face informal protest hearings with staff appraisers? (If so, which ones?)

7. I noticed that your employment agreement is running on an annual renewal basis and expires December 31, 2019. Given how long you have been the chief appraiser, that strikes me as odd. Are chief appraisers at other Metro CADs kept on yearly contracts?

8. You've been working for TCAD 30 years now. Are you eligible for retirement? (Do you have any plans to retire?)

9. Now that the 2019 protest season is over, you have a better idea of how things worked without having informal face-to-face protest meetings. In terms of results, what were the pluses and minuses?

10. What discussions, if any, did you have with the TCAD board of directors before you eliminated the informal face-to-face protest meetings? (When?)

11. The board of directors is supposed to discuss the elimination of the face-to-face informal protest meetings at its November meeting. Are you planning to defend limiting appeals to electronic filing and recommend it be continued into the 2020 protest season?

12. If you had not eliminated face-to-face informal protest meetings would it have been necessary to expand the Appraisal Review Board?

13. If you had not eliminated face-to-face informal protest meetings would it have been necessary to purchase the building at 850 E. Anderson Lane and incur the cost of remodeling and building a parking garage?

14. As I have reported the number of people actually on TCAD staff has not grown. So is the extra space in the bigger building needed for day-to-day functioning of the staff?

15. You lost your deputy chief appraiser more than three months ago. Why did he resign and why haven't you sought applications for a new deputy?

16. Who is performing the duties of the deputy chief appraiser while this position is vacant?

17. Does the lack of a deputy place a bigger burden on you to manage the organization?

18. You've also had a vacancy for director of information technology and haven't sought to fill it either. Why not?

19. Who is performing the duties of the IT director while this position is vacant?

20. How did not having an IT director affect your ability to recover from the recent ransomware attack?

21. You have just one outside law firm, Evertson & Sanchez, handling the defense of almost all lawsuits filed against TCAD. Last time I checked there were more than a thousand lawsuits pending. Are you satisfied that firm, which has just two attorneys, can keep up with all those cases and get them resolved in a timely way?

22. You have had many budgeted staff positions that remain unfilled. Why haven't these budgeted positions been eliminated to help reduce the size of the TCAD budget?

23. As a journalist I'm interested in transparency and opening up opportunities for public involvement. But the way TCAD board meetings are set up sends a message — intended or not — that public involvement is not a priority. The way the tables are arranged means people have to look

at people's backs. Until I complained under the Americans with Disabilities Act, there was no sound system to amplify the board and staff's discussion. The board meetings are not recorded, not even for audio. What are your thoughts about transparency in your administrative role? Do you think the public has a right to see and hear how you and the board make decisions that affect how TCAD operates and what it costs?