



Bruce Elfant, Travis County Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registrar

# News Release

Communications Division

2433 Ridgepoint Dr ▪ 4705 Heflin Ln ▪ 15822 Foothill Farms Loop ▪ 4011 McKinney Falls Pkwy ▪ 8656 Hwy 71

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**May 28, 2022**

## Travis County debuts new Tax Office HQ

AUSTIN – Today, Travis County offered a sneak peek and tour of the new Tax Office HQ, 2433 Ridgepoint Drive.

The tax office plans to complete its move in June. Tax office divisions will move in phases from its current location on Airport Boulevard. The move is expected to cause some disruption in customer service, but the drive-thru at 5501 Airport Blvd. will remain open until the move is complete. To find out what divisions move when, go to [www.traviscountytax.org/newhq](http://www.traviscountytax.org/newhq).

The tax office's four branch locations, three of which feature drive-thru service, will remain open throughout the move.

"The Travis County Commissioners Court is pleased to present this new Tax Office headquarters that offers plenty of parking and building space to accommodate the tremendous growth of our county population," said Commissioner Margaret Gomez. "We are proud that this building is named after Nelda Wells Spears, the state's first Black tax assessor-collector and voter registrar, who served for five consecutive terms."

Customers coming through the new tax office's main entrance will be greeted by a large mural of Well Spears painted by Peruvian born Austin artist Niz.

Commissioner Brigid Shea said the new Tax Office HQ is designed to give Travis County residents a better customer-service experience and should provide plenty of room for expansion to keep pace with the county's growth.

"It's no secret for anyone who's used the tax office that it was hard to find parking and they needed more space," Shea said. "This new facility will be a welcome addition to Travis County customer services."

Bruce Elfant, the tax assessor-collector and voter registrar, said the new Tax Office HQ features the latest technology. “This office provides many upgrades we believe will be welcome additions by our customers.”

He added the dampening of COVID-19 should also help to give customers a more “normal” service experience at the tax office.

The pandemic created many issues, from closures to employees being out with the virus, Elfant said. “To top it off, our appointment and queuing system wasn’t reliable, and like many businesses, we faced staff shortages and had difficulty hiring new employees,” he added.

The pandemic did give the tax office an opportunity to expand its McKinney Falls and Oak Hill branches so they can serve more customers and by the end of the year, a new branch office with a drive-thru is expected to open on RM 620.

“The new Tax Office HQ gives us a new beginning,” Elfant said. “But even with that, customers need to use our online services whenever they can to renew their vehicle registration and pay property taxes.”

The **Travis County Tax Office** annually collects more than \$5 billion in local property taxes for 141 local government entities and \$4 million in court fines on behalf of the County Courts, District Courts and Justices of the Peace. The office registers and titles almost 1 million vehicles, registers over 850,000 voters, and supports elections for 201 local government entities. The Tax Office operates five locations in Travis County and many services are available online.



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## Nelda Wells Spears

We are proud the Tax Office HQ is being housed in the new Nelda Wells Spears Building, 2433 Ridgepoint Drive.

Wells Spears was the first Black tax assessor-collector in Texas and thanks to Travis County voters, she served in that role for five consecutive terms. She was a beloved community leader and activist who was dedicated to her family. She retired in December 2011 to become the full-time caregiver to her elderly mother and aunt and an advocate for seniors.

She died in March 2018 after a brief illness. She was 71 years old.



Nelda Wells Spears lobby mural by artist Niz

When visitors enter the main entrance of new building, they are greeted by a large mural of Wells Spears painted by nationally recognized, Peruvian born Austin artist, Niz. The artist is known for using elements of graffiti, hip-hop culture, existentialism and spirituality in her work.

“Nelda is an historical figure in the state, county and city not only as the tax assessor-collector but as a community activist dedicated to social justice and mentoring Black youth and women,” said Cecelia Burke, who preceded Wells

Spears as Travis County tax assessor-collector and served on a committee to honor Well Spears in the new Tax Office HQ. “She and I both loved the tax office and believed that taking care of your employees and taking care of your constituents was the cornerstone of a good office.”

Tina Morton, who worked for Wells Spears and was appointed tax assessor-collector after Wells Spears’ retirement, said there are so many people moving into Travis County from other states that it is important local icons be celebrated. “This mural will help educate newcomers to Nelda’s importance and should serve as an inspiration to tax office visitors and employees,” said Morton, who chose not to run for the tax office assessor-collector position after her appointment.

“Nelda was loved by tax office employees throughout her 20 years of service to Travis County,” said Tax Assessor-Collector Bruce Elfant, who succeeded Spears as the next elected official to take over the office. “She was dedicated to her staff, committed to hiring quality people and was passionate about giving county residents exceptional customer service.”

Before he became tax assessor-collector in 2012, Wells Spears tapped Elfant, then a county constable, to assist the tax office with its voter registration efforts. “She believed everyone should have a voice in their government and was committed to making sure eligible voters were registered,” Elfant said.

When Wells Spears was appointed tax assessor-collector on Aug. 1, 1991, she proudly became the first Black tax assessor-collector among the state’s 254 counties.

Previously, she was the chief deputy tax assessor-collector under Burke. When Tax Assessor-Collector Burke retired, it paved the way for Wells Spears’ appointment to the office that county voters would elect her to fill for five consecutive terms. She retired in 2012.

Before serving as tax assessor-collector, Wells Spears filled many leadership roles in federal, state and county government. She worked for Sen. Al Gore Sr. and Sen. Ralph Yarborough in Washington, D.C. In Texas, she held positions in the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts under Bob Bullock; the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs under the man who would go on to become governor, Mark White; and the Texas General Land Office under Gary Mauro. She first came to work at Travis County as the director of the Human Resources Division.

Wells Spears had a distinguished background in community service, including leadership roles with the Austin Women’s Center, NAACP, and the Texas County and District Retirement System. She was a founding member of Executive Women in Texas Government, where she fostered women’s growth in state leadership roles.

Wells Spears was a woman of strong faith and a lifelong member of Greater Mount Zion Baptist Church.

A native Austinite, Wells Spears attended Austin public schools and graduated from L.C. Anderson High School. She went on to Fisk University in Nashville, TN, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in English and became a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Spears completed her graduate studies at Memphis State University, where she earned a master’s degree in communications.

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# NELDA WELLS SPEARS BUILDING

## REMARKS

**Travis County Commissioner Margaret Gomez**  
**Travis County Commissioner Brigid Shea**  
**Tax Assessor-Collector & Voter Registrar Bruce Elfant**  
**Former Tax Assessor-Collector Cecelia Burke**

## NEW TAX OFFICE HQ

### FEATURES:

- ◆ **Parking.** A large parking lot, plus street parking.
- ◆ **Appointments.** A new appointment & queuing system.
- ◆ **Kiosk.** An easy kiosk check-in system.
- ◆ **Space.** Larger lobbies & better building flow for customers.
- ◆ **Dealers.** Separate entrance for auto dealers & runners.



2433 RIDGEPOINT DRIVE

**WE'RE MOVING**

## **NEW TAX OFFICE HQ FAQs**

### **When is the tax office moving?**

The office will begin moving in early June. Divisions will move over several weeks.

### **How long will you be closed? Will I still be able to transfer a title or register my vehicle while you are moving?**

As you can imagine, moving a large office is a daunting task that will not happen overnight. We are not planning to fully close, but several divisions may have interrupted services that may last 1 - 2 days. We've put together a plan to minimize the disruption to our services that includes:

- Moving equipment and furniture over the weekend for our largest divisions.
- Staggering division move dates in order to provide as many services as possible during the move.
- Temporarily relocating staff from the main office to our branch offices so we can add more appointments at our other locations.
- Keeping the Airport Boulevard drive-thru open for registration services during the move.

### **When will I be able to schedule an appointment at the new location?**

We are in the process of installing and testing a new appointment system and hope to have it available for scheduling by early June. Once the system is available, we will begin scheduling appointments for the Ridgepoint location.

## **Does the Ridgepoint location have a drive-thru?**

The Ridgepoint location does not have a drive-thru. During our move, the drive-thru on Airport Boulevard will remain open. We will continue to offer drive-thru services at our North, East and Southeast offices. Later this year, we will be opening a new office in Northwest Austin that will provide drive-thru services.

## **How will the move impact dealers and runners?**

Dealers and runners are required to complete transactions at our main office. We will be temporarily unable to process dealer transactions from Friday, June 3 through Tuesday, June 7.

Starting Wednesday, June 8, dealer and runner processing will be available from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Friday, in the Motor Vehicle Lobby at the new Tax Office HQ, 2433 Ridgepoint Drive. There is a limit of three transactions per visit.

Dealer and runner pickup and drop-off will be available 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, in the Tax Office HQ Dealer Lobby. Dealer supplies will be available from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday.

Dealer and runner badges will be available by appointment only.