

Local Municipalities: Elections, Taxes and Garbage Services

Elections

Sunday, 7 February 2016, were the local elections for alcaldes (mayors) and municipal council members representing each of the cantons. Municipal elections are now held once every four years in between national elections. Alcaldes are elected at-large for four year terms from within the entire canton. One council member is elected from within each of the canton's official "districtos." Polling places are at designated local schools. A little note: unless you are a Costa Rican citizen, it is illegal to campaign for any candidate. (This includes even wearing a button or placing a campaign sticker or placard on your car or property.)

Municipal Taxes and Garbage

If you are an owner of property in Costa Rica, property taxes are by the end of the first quarter. These taxes are not to be confused with corporation tax, which was declared unconstitutional after the 2015 tax year. In Sarchi, garbage collection fees are also due for the first quarter. In Sarchi, your property tax for the year 2016 and your garbage collection fees for the entire year can be paid in advance. In Sarchi, and probably everywhere, you will get a discount on your annual property tax if you pay it in full by the end of the first quarter. (You get the discount here even if you use a credit card to make payment.) I am set up with online payment for these fees and was surprised to see a very large single line item amount due in January. This was made clear after a visit to the municipality where it was explained that the amount included first quarter property taxes, Q1 garbage collection fees, and my most recent water bill. In order to get your property tax discount, you must pay at the municipality and not online. Another note: property taxes for each property in the canton are reassessed (and revalued) every five years.

I was asked a question about where does the garbage go once it is collected. Every canton is responsible for setting up its own refuse collection scheme and once again, I was only able to find out about Sarchi. A little less than a year ago Sarchi got rid of its own municipal collection crews and contracted with a private company. After collection, Sarchi's garbage heads to an area in San Jose called Carpio.