Appealing Your Property Assessment to the County Board of Equalization

OCTOBER 2010

If you disagree with the county assessor's valuation of your property, you have the right to appeal. This publication provides an overview of the Board of Equalization's property assessment appeal process.

Property Valuation Methods

State law requires assessors to value all taxable property at **100 percent of its true and fair market value in money** according to the highest and best use of the property. Market value is the amount of money that a willing and unobligated buyer is willing to pay a willing and unobligated seller.

The county assessor values real property using one or more acceptable appraisal methods:

- Market or sales comparison
- Cost approach
- Income capitalization approach for income producing property
- Combination of the three approaches above

Settling Disagreements on Property Value

You can contact your county assessor's office to review your valuation whenever you have questions about your property value. Property owners can often settle disagreements at this level without continuing the appeal process. However, you still need to preserve your appeal rights by timely filing your appeal form with the *Board of Equalization*.

Assessor Determines Assessed Value

The county assessor determines the assessed value of your property. A *Change of Value Notice* is sent to you when the assessed value of your property changes. The notice indicates the assessed value of your land and improvements. Real property must be reassessed at least once every four years.

Appraised vs. Assessed Value

Appraised value is the true and fair market value or the amount of money a buyer is willing to pay a seller for a property.
Assessed value is the value on which your property taxes are based. This amount may be less than the appraised value if you are receiving any type of exemption or reduction.

This material is intended for general information purposes and does not alter or supersede any administrative regulations or rulings issued by the Department of Revenue.

Filing an Appeal

To file an appeal against an assessor's property valuation, you must complete a Taxpayer Petition for Review of *Property Valuation Determination* form in the county where the property is located. A letter or phone call will not be accepted as a substitute for the appeal form.

Only the taxpayer or entity whose name and address shows on the assessment roll, or their duly authorized agent, or the property owner may file an appeal.

Appeal Forms

Appeal forms are available at:

- Department of Revenue's website dor.wa.gov.
- Local county Board of Equalization where property is located.
- Local county assessor's office.

Filing Deadline

The deadline for filing an appeal is the latter of:

- July 1 of the assessment year; or
- Within 30 days* of when the *Change of Value Notice* was mailed by the assessor's office.

For example: The *Change of Value Notice* you received was postmarked July 20. The deadline for filing an appeal would be August 19.

If you mail your appeal form, it must be postmarked by midnight of the deadline. You may hand deliver the appeal form to your county Board of Equalization and have it date stamped.

* Certain counties extend the filing deadline to 60 days. Please check with your county Board of Equalization for your filing deadline.

Exception to Filing Deadline

Following are reasons why the filing deadline may be waived:

- Death or serious illness of the taxpayer or member of the taxpayer's immediate family.
- The taxpayer was absent from his or her home where the change of value notice is mailed.
- The taxpayer relied on incorrect written advise from a board member, board staff, assessor, assessor staff or property tax advisor.
- The loss or delay of the petition by the postal service.
- The taxpayer is a business, and the employee responsible for dealing with property taxes was unavailable due to an illness or unavoidable absence.

The request to waive the filing deadline must be made within a reasonable amount of time of the deadline. The Board's decision to waive the filing deadline is not appealable.

The following are reasons why the board may be reconvened:

- If you did not receive a change of value notice at least 15 days prior to the filing deadline, and you can show proof that the value was changed for the current assessment year.*
- The assessor submits an affidavit to the board stating that he or she was unaware of facts that were discoverable at the time of appraisal and the lack of that information impacted the assessment.*
- The property was purchased after July 1, but on or before December 31 of the assessment year and the sale price was less than 90% of the assessed value, and the sale was between a willing and unobligated buyer and seller (an arm's-length transaction).*
- You received a change of value notice for property that existed but was not included in your previous assessment (omitted property).**
- You may request the board to reconvene if all of the following conditions apply:
  - Real property within the county is revalued on an annual basis;
  - A timely appeal was pending before the board of equalization when the property was revalued for an intervening year and the assessed value did not change;
  - No appeal was filed for the intervening year; and
  - The reconvening request is filed within 30 days of the board of equalizations decision.
- The property was overvalued by at least 100 percent.***

*Appeal must be submitted by April 30 following the year being appealed.

**Appeal must be submitted within 3 years of the discovery of the omission.

***Appeal must be submitted within 3 years of the Board's regular convened session.

Note: The county assessor is required to send the *Change of Value Notice* to the taxpayer whose name and address appears on the assessment roll. The taxpayer is responsible for:

- Notifying the county assessor of any address change.
- Requesting copies of the notices from the assessor, mortgage or lending company.

Information Required in Appeal

An appeal form must include specific market reasons why you believe the assessor's valuation is incorrect. Statements that the assessor's valuation is too high or property taxes are excessive are not sufficient. You must be specific as to why the assessed value does not reflect market value.

Examples might include:

- Recent appraisal of your property.
- Excessive deterioration of your property.
- Sales of similar properties reflecting a lower value for your property.

Comparing the assessment, percentage of increase or other uniformity issue alone is not sufficient to win your case. You must provide market evidence demonstrating the comparison properties are valued at 100% true & fair market value, while your parcel is not valued at 100% true and fair market value.

Any adjustments to the value of your property or other properties will be based on market value evidence, including:

- Parcel number of the property you are appealing.
- County assessor's determination of value.
- Your estimate of value.
- Comparable sales or other supporting evidence you wish to include.
- Indication if you intend to submit additional evidence prior to the hearing.

Additional information must be provided at least seven business days prior to your hearing date with the Board of Equalization.

Listing Comparable Sales

You can get comparable sales information from records at the county assessor's office, realtors or title companies. You should use property sales that are most comparable to your property, and which sold closest to the assessment or appraisal of your property. The best sales comparisons are sales of your property or similar properties in your area or neighborhood. For each comparable sale you use, make sure to include the parcel or account number, property address, date of sale, sale price and comparable property characteristics.

Comparable characteristics to consider are:

Land

- Location (sales in the same subdivision or neighborhood)
- Unit of comparison (lot size, acreage, square feet and front feet)
- Desirable features such as a view or waterfront
- Sewer/septic systems
- Undesirable features such as an access problem
- Wetlands
- Water systems
- Zoning

Improvements

- Type of construction (wood frame, brick or other)
- Square footage of total finished living area
- Year built
- Number of stories
- Improvement type and grade
- Building condition
- Number of bedrooms and bathrooms
- Fireplace
- Garage/carport

Other Supporting Evidence

- A map showing the location of your property and comparable sales properties
- Appraisals prepared by others
- Documentation by others concerning problems
- Written estimates of the cost to repair problems
- Photographs

True and Fair Value

The county Board of Equalization determines if all properties are assessed at their true and fair value. Equalization issues brought before the county Board of Equalization may result in changes in value of all properties involved.

Hearing Process

The clerk of the Board of Equalization will notify you about the date, location and time of your scheduled hearing.

The hearing is an informal review that allows property owners to represent themselves without an attorney. Both you and the county assessor will give oral testimony and written evidence to support the value. You may cross examine each other and rebut evidence.

Keep in mind the county assessor, by law, is presumed to be correct. The burden of proof is on you, the taxpayer, to show that the assessed value is not correct. You must present clear and convincing evidence to support your estimate of market value.

Board of Equalization Decision

Usually, the Board of Equalization issues a written decision within 30 to 60 days of the hearing. The board can either raise, lower or sustain the county assessor's value.

Appealing the County Board's Decision

You may appeal the county Board's decision to the state Board of Tax Appeals. Your appeal must be filed with the state Board within 30 calendar days of the postmarked date of the county Board's decision. You may also pay your taxes under protest and petition the Superior Court for a refund by filing a lawsuit (Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 84.68).

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. If I don't file my appeal by the deadline,will the county Board of Equalization consider my appeal?

A. There are limited reasons the board would reconvene to consider an appeal if the appeal was not filed by the deadline.

For example: A new purchaser bought property after July 1 and before December 31 of the assessment year, and the sale price was less than 90 percent of the assessed value. The deadline for requesting the board to reconvene is April 30 following the assessment year. Or, in the event of 100 percent over valuation, a board may reconvene up to three years after their regular session. Contact your county Board of Equalization for more information.

Q. When should I pay my property taxes, before or after the hearing?

A. You should pay your property taxes when they are due. After your hearing, when the Board of Equalization has made their decision, the county treasurer will notify you of any adjustment to your taxes.

Laws and Rules

Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 84.08 — General Powers and Duties of Department of Revenue

RCW Chapter 84.48 — Equalization of Assessments

WAC Chapter 458-14 — County Boards of Equalization

Need More Information?

If you have questions about the appeal process or need help in completing the appeal form, contact your:

- Local Board of Equalization, your county assessor's office.
- The Washington State Department of Revenue, Property Tax Division at (360) 534-1427.

For general information contact:

- **Department of Revenue, Telephone Information Center 1-800-647-7706**
- To inquire about the availability of this document in an alternate format for the visually impaired, please call (360) 705-6715.
- Teletype (TTY) users please call (360) 705-6718.

Department of Revenue
http://dor.wa.gov

PTFS0034 03/10