

## **Frequently Asked Questions** **Regarding the Assessment Process**

### **It seems the Assessor is at my house every year. Why is that?**

The Town of Effingham has contracted with Avitar Associates to complete an update of values for tax year 2020. Avitar was hired to complete cycled inspections over the previous five year period and to update values for 2020 to market value. In the last cycled process (2016-2019) you should only see an assessor representative once as the Town is divided into sections and certain sections are visited each year, however, if you have recently pulled a permit or your home is flagged for ongoing construction, you will see the Assessor annually around the April 1<sup>st</sup> date. We are working diligently to minimize the visits to properties as we don't want to unnecessarily bother you any more than you want to see the Assessor. We apologize if our visits are obtrusive. We merely want to ensure the data is accurate so that ALL taxpayers are assessed fairly and equitably.

### **The Assessor came to my house this year for data verification (cycled inspections) and my value changed why is that?**

The only reason for an assessment change in a non-update year is the data listed on your record card was inaccurate. You may have made no changes to your property over the years, but the data could still be in error. While this is unfortunate, errors do happen as we are all human. A human collects the data then a human has to enter it into a computer. Mistakes can happen. We work diligently by checking field work and entry to ensure this is minimal, but it can still happen. The Town sends a copy of the old record and the new record after the changes so you can review. If you disagree with a change noted on your record or you notice a discrepancy in the data you are urged to call the Assessor's office to discuss.

### **Why is my assessment different than the refinance appraisal I just received?**

Since the recent lending crisis, banks occasionally have stated it is acceptable for appraisers to rely upon distressed sales such as foreclosures, bank sales, short sales etc. as a basis of comparison when valuing property. Also, as the appraiser works for the bank and not the lender, they are more inclined to arrive at a conservative opinion of value. However, we as Assessors must rely on only arm's length, non-distressed sales when arriving at assessments for a community. As such, it is likely you will see a difference between the two value opinions. Also, time is a big factor. Property is assessed in NH as of April 1<sup>st</sup> and Towns are only obligated to bring assessments to market value once every five years. The State of NH Department of Revenue annually compares assessments to recent sales to determine at what percentage of market value assessments in each Town are at. The indicated median ratio can be applied to current assessments to determine what the indicated market value of a property is. For example, if a home is assessed at \$250,000 and the median ratio in the Town is 85% then the indicated market value of that property is \$294,100 rounded ( $\$250,000 \div .85$ ). That is the number you would want to compare to a recent appraisal or comparable sales to determine if your assessment is a reasonable value conclusion. Industry standards dictate that 2 market value opinions that are within 10% of one another would be deemed complementary. Using the above-

example if your appraisal offered a value opinion of \$285,000 it would complement the equalized assessment (\$294,100) as it is within the 10% reasonable range. It would appear the assessment as arrived at is fair.

**Last time the Town updated values the Assessors just did a drive by assessment. Don't they need to look inside my home to properly assess it?**

Remember, your home has been viewed as part of the cycled measure and list process. If the assessor was unable to view the interior on the first visit to your property they would have left a door tag notifying you of their visit and then later sent a letter asking you to call and arrange an appointment for an interior inspection. If they did not gain access at that time to the interior it would be estimated. As such, it is crucial to the process to ensure the data on your record is accurate as incorrect data could lead to an inaccurate assessment for your property. The final phase of the update involves the Assessing Supervisor (with another Assessor) driving the entire Town and reviewing the data that was previously collected. They may sit in front of your home and/or drive up your driveway to get a better look. This is not a drive by assessment, but rather a double check to ensure the data entered accurately depicts what is on each lot.

**What is market value and who determines my assessment?**

Market value is determined by people (buyers and sellers) and their emotional likes and dislikes. It is not an exact science and certain factors that appeal to one buyer may not appeal to another buyer. The state of the economy has an overall affect real estate values. Arm's length (non-distressed) sales are analyzed by the Assessing Supervisor for the job and an assessment model is created based on those sales. The model is essentially a market-modified cost approach. Cost tables are calibrated based on the indications from local sales so that the model should accurately estimate values (assessments) as of April 1<sup>st</sup> in any given year the update is completed.

**I received my preliminary notice of value. How do I know, as an average taxpayer, whether the assessment the Assessor arrived at is representative of market value.**

As an average lay person, you likely wouldn't, however the letter you receive provides you with information for access to the online database. Within that database are all of the sales that have occurred in the Town and there is a function (sales search) within that database that allows you to search for sales and to enter criteria (such as size, bedroom count etc.) to find sales that are similar to your property. No two homes are exactly alike, so you have to give consideration to the differences that exist between your home and the sale properties. If after reviewing this information you feel your assessment is too high (or too low) the letter provides a phone number to call on certain days/times to arrange for an appointment to discuss with the Assessor. The appointments are scheduled for a later date at a specific time. This is a meaningful process and helps the average lay person understand the assessing process a bit better and oftentimes potential disputes over value can be rectified.

**I went to the informal hearing with the Assessor. I still think my property is over-valued. What can I do?**

The informal hearing is merely that, informal. The next step would be to wait until you receive your final notice of tax (usually your December tax bill) and then file an abatement with the Town (before March 1<sup>st</sup>). However, the obligation is the taxpayers to indicate in detail why they feel they are over-assessed. If you have an appraisal or sales comparisons this would be the time to present them. All of the information submitted will be reviewed and you will receive a written letter explaining why your abatement was granted or denied. If your abatement is denied and you still do not agree you have the right to file an appeal with the Board of Tax and Land Appeals in Concord or Superior Court, but not both. You have until September 1<sup>st</sup> to do so following July 1<sup>st</sup> or the date you were denied (if earlier than July 1<sup>st</sup>). The burden of proof lies with the taxpayer, so you must be prepared and have evidence to support your claim if you are to be successful in either venue. Claims that your taxes are too high or my value is too high without corroborating evidence are often unsuccessful.