

## **Assessor - Frequently Asked Questions & Glossary**

### **Basic**

#### **How do I contact the Assessor's Office?**

City Assessor's Office

City of Janesville

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#### **What is the purpose of the City Assessor's Office?**

The City Assessor's Office has one main goal: Ensure a quality assessing program that the community has confidence in.

Specifically, the department will:

- Provide professional accurate collection and analysis of property data to insure a fair and equitable value setting outcome.
- Provide Janesville property owners with sufficient information so that they may understand the assessment process and also encourage their participation in the process.
- Ensure that Janesville property owners' participation in the process is handled with the highest level of professional courtesy and integrity.

#### **What does the City Assessor's Office do?**

The City Assessor's Office has three major duties; to collect data, verify the data, and use that data to value each residential and commercial property in the City. The Assessment Office checks to make sure measurements, ownership, and other property information is correct and current. The City currently contracts with a private appraisal firm to fulfill the role of Statutory Assessor and conduct independent review of the valuation process.

#### **Must the Assessor Have Special Training for the Job?**

Statutes require assessors be certified by the Department of Revenue. Certification involves an examination testing the individual's knowledge of appraisal and assessment law and administration. While there is no formal training required, an assessor must show, through successful completion of the certification examination, that they have acquired the knowledge essential to do a satisfactory job. In addition, many full-time assessors in Wisconsin are active in professional organizations with established professional standards for assessors and appraisers.

#### **Who is Cole-Layer-Trumble Co.?**

Cole-Layer-Trumble Co. (CLT) is the country's largest mass appraisal firm, retained by the City of Janesville, to assist with its assessments. The company was a pioneer in the

use of computers in its industry in the fifties. Today, they are considered a leader in the field of reappraisal and mass data collection. With over 80 years of experience and vast professional knowledge, they are available to assist local governments in the design, procurement and implementation of data processing systems and equipment. Programs are designed to meet each client's specific needs, for both the present and the future. The Wisconsin office is located in West Allis.

## **Process**

### **Why does the City value my property?**

Every year, each local government district (City, Village, Township) is required to establish a value for each taxable parcel within their jurisdiction. Those values are subsequently used in the process of distributing and collecting the property tax

### **How is property valued?**

Wisconsin Law requires property assessments to be based equitably on fair market value. Estimating the [market value](#) of your property is a matter of determining the price a typical buyer would pay for it in its present condition. Your assessment is based on two things: 1) detailed information about your property and 2) local real estate market conditions.

If you have taken out a building permit or recently purchased your home, you may remember being visited by a representative of the Assessor's Office some time in the last year or two. The representative, or "data collector", came to your property to gather information about its size, age, number of rooms, when it was last sold, etc. At the same time, Assessment Office appraisers were researching local market conditions that impact your property's value --- such as building materials and labor costs, depreciation factors, and local real estate sales.

The findings of the property inspections and market analysis are then entered into the City's Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal (CAMA) software. The result: An estimate of your property's fair market, or appraised value.

### **Who determines the assessed value of property?**

The assessor determines the assessed value of all taxable property, with the exception of manufacturing property. The Department of Revenue makes the annual assessment of all manufacturing property in the state.

### **What are special assessments?**

Your tax bill may contain a special assessment for some type of public work, such as sewer, water, street, alley, sidewalk, etc. The assessor does not make special assessments. They are based on the cost of the improvement or the repair and billed only to properties benefiting from the work. If you have a question about a special assessment, you should contact the City Clerk.

### **What is the process in Janesville used to value properties?**

Each year the Assessor must prepare an Assessment Roll. The major events in each annual assessment cycle are as follows:

- Data collection via home visits and sale information
- Data entry into the computer database
- Testing and verification of data entry
- Estimating property values and listing those in the Assessment Roll
- Open book sessions to allow citizen review of values and presentation of additional information to Assessor's Office if they believe estimates are inaccurate.
- Board of review sessions to allow citizens to present appeal to an impartial board if they still believe estimates are inaccurate.
- Adoption of values

### **What does the City Assessor's Office do?**

The City Assessor's Office has three major duties; to [discover](#), [list](#) and [estimate the value](#) of all taxable property within the jurisdiction of the city. City employees collect information on all taxable property in Janesville except for Manufacturing facilities. They check to make sure measurements, ownership, and other property information is correct and current. That data is used to estimate the value of each parcel. A contract Appraisal firm reviews the values estimated through City data collection and valuation methods for accuracy and consistence prior to placement of them in the Assessment Roll.

### **You didn't visit my property why did my value change?**

The law requires that property be valued from actual view or the best information available. The Assessor's office attempts to physically review all property at least once every 5 years. If for various reasons the Assessor cannot enter a property, the assessment must still be reviewed based on the existing records and other sources of property information. If physical data supporting a value change is discovered, the Assessor is required to change the value. The Assessor's preference is always to be able to physically inspect a property rather than be required to estimate its value based on old data or other sources of information.

### **How can my assessment change when I haven't done anything to my property?**

As property values change in the market place, those changes must be reflected on the assessment roll. Periodically the Assessor reviews real estate market factors to determine if economic conditions are causing property to appreciate, depreciate or if conditions are static. During revaluation years the findings of such analysis may result in a change in property assessments regardless of any physical changes to a property.

### **Why did my assessments change at a different rate than someone else I know who lives in Janesville?**

There are many factors used to arrive at a property's assessed value. Even subtle differences between individual properties and between neighborhoods can cause assessments to change at different rates resulting in varied dollar changes from property to property. Market factors (sale prices) also vary from neighborhood to

neighborhood and style of home. Thus it is possible that there may be value increases in one area of the city while values are stable or declining in another. For example, one-story houses near a new elementary school may be more in demand than two-story houses, or vice-versa. Older homes in the same area may be rising in value more slowly than newer homes. There are numerous factors to be considered in each property, which will cause the values to differ. Some of the factors, which can affect value are: location, condition, siding, basement finish, garages, bathrooms, deck or porch, and many others.

### **Why is the City's assessed value different from a private appraiser's estimate of fair market value I obtained recently?**

In general, both estimates of value are arrived at using the same general principals, but can result in different figures because the purpose of each is different. The Private (Fee) appraiser is completing a site specific single property appraisal usually for a mortgage lender as an estimate of the property's value on that specific date for use in determining the appropriateness of a proposed loan.. The City Assessor's office is completing a mass appraisal of approximately 22,000 properties at once in order to value all properties for tax equity purposes. The Fee appraiser typically arrives at a value by comparing your property to three similar properties that have recently sold and then adjusting those sales prices based on the way your's differs from those properties. The Assessor's office generates a value for your property by first calculating the cost to replace your home with an identical new home and then adjusting that Replacement Cost New value for age and condition depreciation and in revaluation years, appreciation associated with market conditions (comparing to potentially hundreds of sale properties).

In addition to variations in the process, another major factor resulting in different values is the date of the Fee appraisal versus the date of the City Assessment. By law the assessed value should represent the market value as of the 1 January of the most recent revaluation year. The private appraisal will specify the actual date of the value estimate. Thus in periods of an active real estate market, it is logical that a 1 January 2002 Assessment will vary from a private appraisal completed on 12 December 2002 or some other date after the assessment date.

### **What is the difference between assessed value and equalized value?**

State law recognizes that every municipality cannot be assessed exactly at market value each year. The law only requires that any given municipality assess all its major classes (residential and commercial) within 10 percent of market value once in any 5 year period, so long as there is equity in assessments within that municipality. Thus because assessment ratios to market value can vary between cities, towns and villages, it is necessary for the Department of Revenue to convert the assessed values for each jurisdiction within a county to a uniform level. These uniform values are called equalized values because all the various local levels of assessment have been equalized or converted to equal 100 percent of market value. The equalized values are used for apportioning county property taxes, public school taxes, vocational school taxes, and for distributing property tax relief.

**If a property sells, can the Assessor change the assessment to the sale price?**

The assessor must review the sale and make the decision in accordance with Wisconsin statutes and Wisconsin case law. Typically, the sale price is strongly considered if the sale is between to un-related parties and the property was customarily advertised for sale on the open market. The Assessor must also consider the sale date relative to the Assessment date and any modifications that may have occurred to the property before or after the sale. In general, however, a valid sale price is a good indicator of the properties value.

**Will I be notified if there is a change in my assessment?**

Yes. The notice must be in writing and mailed at least 15 days prior to the Board of Review meeting. The notice contains the amount of the changed assessment and the time, date, and place of the local Board of Review meeting. The notice must include information notifying the owner of the procedures to be used to object to the assessment.

**How can I find out about my assessment?**

The assessment for each property is listed in books called assessment rolls that are open for examination at the office of the clerk or the assessor during regular office hours. In many districts each property is identified by a parcel number that also appears on your tax bill. Your name should also appear on the assessment roll opposite the legal description of your property. Properties other than your own may be viewed as well.

**Is my property assessment fair, accurate and equitable?**

The City uses a CAMA (computer assisted mass appraisal) system to produce property values. The simplified description of that is “a giant calculator”. Physical property data and other value factors collected and monitored by Assessment staff are entered into the calculator and it completes the math. Thus in general, your property has been assessed equitably since the value has been arrived at using the same principals, practices and math used to estimate the values of all other properties within the city. Your assessment is accurate if the data that was used for your property is correct. That is why the Assessment staff periodically requests to inspect properties and update data. Uniformity of assessment within each class of property and between the classes is another indicator of equity. The Wisconsin Department of Revenue annually reviews the assessment levels by class for each jurisdiction. In summary, if your assessment is accurate, equitable and uniform, then it is a fair estimate of the value of your property.

So how can you tell if your assessment is accurate you still ask? The best indicator is that if your house is assessed at a value equal to or less than the range of values that similar homes in your area of the city are currently selling for, that is a pretty good indicator that your assessment is accurate. Remember that for every style of home in every area of the city there will be homes at the top of the sale price or assessment range and homes at the low end of the sale price or assessment range. If you believe that your assessment is outside of the range of what similar homes are selling for or that

they are assessed at, then you should visit with the Assessor staff during Open Book to confirm that their data is accurate.

### **Can property be assessed higher or lower than market value?**

Wisconsin law recognizes the difficulties in maintaining annual market value assessments and therefore requires each municipality to assess all property within 10 percent of market value once every five years. Requiring municipalities to assess at or near market value makes it easier for taxpayers to determine whether their assessments are equitable. Each year your property tax bill provides a comparison of the property's assessment to market value.

### **Why is my waterfront property assessed higher than non-waterfront property of similar style and condition?**

Waterfront property is frequently considered more desirable than property not on the water. The fixed supply and attractiveness of waterfront property generally increases the market value of your property and, hence, are reflected in your assessment. This situation may also occur with other factors such as when a property adjoins public open space like parks and greenbelts or school grounds.

### **What is a Revaluation?**

A revaluation is a city-wide complete and thorough review of all assessments. During a revaluation the Assessor attempts to physically inspect all properties and review all assessments. Value adjustments are made where necessary to guarantee that all property is assessed at market value. This is done to assure that taxes are distributed equitable and uniformly.

### **Why would a Revaluation be necessary?**

Beginning in 1986, The Department of Revenue (DOR) requires that all property be assessed at or near 100% of the fair market value. The DOR requires that the assessed value of a taxation district must be established within 10% of the full value at least once during the four year period consisting of the current year and the three preceding years.

The law states that if taxation districts have not met this requirement the DOR will notify the taxation district in writing that they are not in compliance and give the district one year to meet market value (+ or – 10%) requirement. A city-wide revaluation is usually then completed to meet that requirement.

## **Home Visits**

### **Why is my property being visited?**

Wisconsin Law requires property assessments based on actual view or, when that is not possible, by the best information available. Site visits result in the most accurate, fair and equitable assessment. Thus the Assessor's office systematically attempts to review properties.

### **What happens when someone visits my home?**

The Property Assessor visiting your home verifies that the information on file at City Hall is accurate. This may include checking measurements of your home's exterior. recent

building and decks, and also confirming quantity and quality data regarding home and features such as heating and cooling systems, the number of bathrooms and the area of garages and sheds..

### **How long will the visit take?**

The Inspector will only need 5-15 minutes to complete his review in a typical home. Reviewing a newly constructed home may take slightly longer.

### **What if I don't allow a city employee to view the inside of my property?**

The law requires that property be valued from actual view or the best information available. The Assessor keeps records on the physical characteristics of each property in the municipality. Even though the Assessor may have been unable to go through your property, the assessment will still be reviewed, based on the existing records and other available sources of information including comparison to similar properties. Obviously the estimating process is less desirable than valuing based on actual view. In addition, it is much more difficult for a property owner to contest an assessment if they have not allowed the Assessor to view their property.

### **Am I penalized for improving my property?**

Wisconsin Law requires a property to be assessed based on fair market value. Generally speaking, improvements that increase the market value of a property will increase the assessed value. Those improvements also increase the properties functional use and the occupant's quality of life. As such, although an improvement may increase your property assessment, it should also make the property a better place to live and thus you as the property owner must balance the cost to benefit of improvements. The following are typical items that will increase the assessed value of your property.

- Added rooms, garages, sheds, decks and in-ground pools
- Substantial modernization of kitchens or baths
- Central air conditioning
- Extensive remodeling

### **Am I penalized for repairing or maintaining my home?**

Although good maintenance will help retain the market value of your property. Generally, your assessment will not be increased for individual minor repairs such as these:

- Replacing gutters/downspouts
- Repairing/replacing roof
- Repairing porches/steps
- Exterior painting
- Interior redecorating such as paint, wallpaper, home furnishings and re-carpeting.

## **Open Book**

### **What is Open Book?**

Once the Assessor creates the preliminary tax roll, it is submitted to the City Clerk and "open for inspection." This Open Book period is the time between the submittal of the

preliminary tax roll and the formal Board of Review appeal hearing. It is used to allow property owners to review their assessment and meet with the Assessor and their staff if they have questions and want to exchange information about their property. Informal discussions with the assessor can often resolve a problem and frequently eliminates the need for a formal hearing before the Board of Review.

### **Why meet with the City Assessment staff and how long does it take?**

An informal discussion with the Assessor can often resolve a problem and frequently eliminates the need for a formal hearing before the Board of Review. **The informal meeting serves to answer questions about the assessment process and to verify that the factual information the City has about your property is accurate.** In general, it is not intended to be a negotiating session. The meeting will last between 15-30 minutes.

Before making an appointment, please take time to review information you have received from the Assessor's office and the information you have about your property. Familiarize yourself with the assessment process as much as possible. **In order to allow each property owner to participate in the informal process if they chose to, appointments are required and will be limited to 30 minutes.** Each property owner is allowed one meeting so make sure you are prepared for your meeting. If you own multiple properties that you wish to discuss, you should inform the Assessor's office of the number of properties you would like to cover when you call to arrange an appointment. Although you will still be limited to one meeting, the time allotted will be extended to accommodate the number of properties to be covered. Please be prepared to discuss each property.

When preparing, these are a few good places to start:

1. City Assessor's website  
<http://www.ci.janesville.wi.us/DeptHome.asp?Dept=Assessor>
2. State Department of Revenue <http://www.dor.state.wi.us/html/local.html#prop>
3. Various printed information is available by calling the City Assessor's Office (608) 755-3045 or the State Department of Revenue (608) 266-2772.

### **What happens during the meeting?**

During the meeting you and a property appraiser will make sure that the Assessor's office data for items such as the size, age, condition, number of bathrooms, and other physical characteristics of your property are correct. You can ask any question that will help you understand the assessment process. In addition, you will have the opportunity to present factual data to the appraiser regarding a different opinion of the value of your property. Examples of acceptable factual data include:

- Copies of your building plan *with dimensions*.
- A recent private appraisal for the property (2 years or less in age).
- Recent interior and exterior photos of the property that illustrate that the overall physical condition (not housekeeping) of the property is in less than average expected condition for the age of the house. Examples of items that might have a relationship to the assessed value include but are

not limited to structural damage or impacts from major mistreatment of the building, major water leak problems, pest damage with records of treatment or long term deferred maintenance (roof, siding, or window replacement, and needs of similar character).

- Information on the recent purchase of your property if that was completed within the past year or information on the recent sale prices of homes within your general area of the city that you believe are very similar to your home in physical characteristics.
- Other information: estimates for uncompleted repair or construction activities, receipts for completed repair or improvement projects, certified survey or plat maps delineating lot size and area, condemnation notice or orders to raze or repair, income and expense information and lease agreements (for income producing property), records of farm rents and crop production activities (for agricultural use valuation), or any other factual information that is relevant to the value of the property.

The primary purpose for the meeting is to allow you to exchange factual information with the Assessment staff, confirm their data and learn more about the assessment process. The appraiser involved in your meeting will not be reviewing the assessed value of your property, but instead they will be gathering data that will be used by a different appraiser to review your assessed value. That part of the process occurs following the conclusion of the meetings. You will be notified by mail in 4-5 weeks of the results of the completed property review.

Following the receipt of the findings from your meeting with the Assessment staff, if you still believe the assessment is not an accurate estimate of value, you may proceed to the Board of Review to present evidence as such. You may learn more about the Board of Review at the following website: <http://www.dor.state.wi.us/pubs/slf/02pb060.pdf> or by obtaining a brochure from the City Clerk's Office (1-608-755-3070).