



<https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/opinion/article/know-way-around-process-attorney-says-18494101.php>

Opinion: Property tax revaluation is here

Adam J. Blank

Nov. 18, 2023



Connecticut's Capitol in Hartford.; Contributed photo

In Connecticut, municipalities revalue real estate once every five years for tax purposes. Norwalk (using revaluation company Vision Government Solutions and Tyler Technologies), Darien (using Tyler Technologies), New Canaan (using Munival) and Weston (using eQuality) just completed their revaluations as of Oct. 1. The new valuations are expected to be shared with property owners mid-November through the first week of December.

These values are the basis for setting your property taxes. So, now is the time to independently consider your property's value to ensure your taxes are correct — and based on the true value of your property.

The revaluation company will use a method called “mass appraisal.” This approach is not as accurate as a typical appraisal but is cost efficient for the

municipality. If your property valuation appears high, you need to act right away, as Connecticut provides a very narrow window to challenge your assessment.

Additionally, a new state law now requires property owners to obtain and share with the city independent appraisals within four months of filing a tax appeal. This is a challenging deadline as appraisers are already facing significant backlogs. If you intend to challenge your assessment, begin the process right away.

The towns conducting revaluations this year will provide property owners with notice of their new proposed valuation sometime between now and the start of December. If the valuation appears inflated, property owners will have an opportunity to meet informally with the revaluation company in December to review the valuation and present documents or information demonstrating the true value of the property. These “informals” are very important and can often result in significant reductions in value with limited expenditure on appraisers and legal fees.

If a taxpayer is dissatisfied with the results from the informal meeting, beginning in January, the taxpayer can file a formal appeal to the municipality’s Board of Assessment Appeals. The deadline such a filing typically is Feb. 20, but can be extended to March 20 at the municipality's request. For higher-valued residential and most commercial properties, the municipality can (and usually does) simply refuse a hearing with the BAA and summarily deny the appeal. When a hearing is granted, it is uncommon for a BAA to make a significant change to the valuation, no matter how compelling a taxpayer's arguments may be.

If a property owner remains dissatisfied with the outcome from the BAA, the owner may take an appeal to the Superior Court. This tax appeal must be filed within two months of the BAA decision. Most of these cases resolve without a trial in mediation or settlement conferences in the Superior Court's Tax Session in New Britain or locally in front of a Superior Court judge in Stamford.

When evaluating an assessment, property owners often like to look at the assessment of a neighboring property and argue that their assessment should mirror the neighbor's. While this anecdotal information can complement an appraiser's testimony, at the end of the day, the ultimate question will be “did the municipality accurately value your property?” Looking at assessments of

neighboring or similar properties often is not a successful tactic. On the other hand, some other information that can be very useful in analyzing the merits of an appeal:

- Was your property recently sold or listed for sale? If the property is listed for sale well above the value you seek from the municipality, this is problematic.
- Was your property recently financed or refinanced? If so, an appraisal will exist concerning the refinance. If that appraisal is much higher than your view of your property's current value, there should be a good explanation as to why.
- Is the municipality's information accurate (square footage, acreage, etc.)?
- Have you done any recent renovations or construction on the property so building permits with estimated construction costs are filed with the municipality?
- If the property is income producing:
 - Have you timely submitted income and expense statements with the municipality?
 - Does the property have cell tower income? Parking fee income? Tenant reimbursements? Early lease termination payments? Amenity fees?
 - Any recent leasing activity? Is space listed for lease currently? The recent leasing activity may be used as evidence as to what all similar space in the property should lease for.
 - Are your rents and expenses in line with the market? If not, why?

If, after reviewing this information, you believe a tax appeal may be warranted. For most taxpayers the municipality will get your valuation about right, but for those whose valuations are off, the tight deadlines and infrequency of revaluations make it extremely important to quickly analyze whether an appeal should be brought and to begin preparations for an informal hearing in December.

Adam J. Blank heads the tax appeal practice at Stamford-based Wofsey, Rosen, Kweskin & Kuriansky. His practice focuses on tax appeals throughout the state for

municipalities, commercial property owners, and residential properties. He can be reached at ablank@wrkk.com or 203-327-2300.