

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **WHAT IS REVALUATION?**

A revaluation is the process of determining market values for real property (real estate) in Town. These values are derived by performing all of the necessary market analysis and valuation steps to determine accurate and equitable estimates for all properties within a municipality. The equalization of the values within the Town of West Hartford creates a fair distribution of the tax burden.

### **THE PURPOSE OF A REVALUATION**

The main purpose of a revaluation is to correct inequalities in the tax burden that have developed since the last revaluation in 2011. Revaluation is a revenue neutral process. This means that a municipality's tax levy is not changed by the revaluation. The total sum of taxes the Town needs to collect is dependent upon the Town's budget needs, regardless of whether or not a revaluation takes place. What does change in a revaluation is the portion of taxes an individual taxpayer is responsible to pay. The first tax payments under this revaluation will be due in July, 2017.

### **HOW DOES REVALUATION EQUALIZE THE TAX BURDEN?**

Since property taxes are based upon value, it is important to have all property valued periodically on a uniform basis, using a modern system of valuation. Property values change with time. Some values go up, some go down and others remain static. Appraisals must be updated or inequities in tax distribution will result. For instance, property valued at 250,000 in 2011 might now be worth 270,000 or it could have declined in value to 240,000. In either case, the 2011 appraised value of the property is obsolete and will result in the property owners either paying too much or too little of their share of the tax for the operation of local government.

### **WHY IS A REVALUATION REQUIRED?**

Connecticut State Statute §12-62(b) requires that a revaluation be done at least once every five years in all municipalities. The last revaluation in West Hartford was completed October 1, 2011. The upcoming revaluation will be completed for October 1, 2016.

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE REVALUATION?**

The Town of West Hartford is responsible for the revaluation.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE REVALUATION?**

There are six major phases to a municipal revaluation: Data Collection, Market Analysis, Valuation, Field Review, Notices of New Assessments, and Informal and Formal Appeal Hearings. To successfully complete the revaluation, many tasks will be implemented during these phases.

## **Phase 1 – Data Collection**

West Hartford's 2016 revaluation will be a "limited data verification" (LDV) type revaluation. Our last revaluation in 2011 was a "full data verification" (FDV) type revaluation. The 2016 revaluation involves a Revaluation Company and Assessment Department staff visiting properties within the Town to verify exterior property data and conduct interior inspections. For 2016, historical data will be updated based upon building permits, physical inspections of all property exteriors, and interior inspections of 5,000 properties.

Beginning August 11, 2015, Tyler Technologies personnel will begin property inspections in the Southern sections of Town working between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. This first phase will last for approximately one year. Data collectors will carry badges identifying them as Tyler Technology employees, and their vehicles will be signed with "West Hartford Assessment Department" and registered with the West Hartford Police Department.

During the first phase data collectors will go to each property scheduled for inspection to measure the exterior and note the various characteristics of the exterior and interior of the property. The homeowner will then be asked to sign the data collection form verifying the inspection took place. For most properties, the entire process will take approximately 15 minutes.

The Town of West Hartford and Tyler Technologies realize the sensitivities of the interior inspection process. We understand that there will be many cases when a homeowner is not at home during the day due to their work schedule and other reasons. Thus, data collectors will make more than one attempt to visit each property, and will be available to set up appointments to visit each property if their first "cold call" attempts are unsuccessful. Tyler will send a "call back letter" to property owners whose properties they were unable to inspect asking them to call and set up an appointment for inspection.

With an understanding of security and privacy matters in today's world, both the Town of West Hartford and Tyler Technologies wish to make the inspection process as unobtrusive as possible. The data collectors will visit properties for informational purposes only. All property owners benefit if the information regarding their property's measurements, quality condition, room counts, etc. is correct and the Town's real estate database is accurate.

Digital imaging of each property is an ongoing task in the Assessment Department; this process will continue during the revaluation. Older images will be updated in the database and can be printed on the property record card.

Homeowners are reminded that specific questions regarding current assessments should be directed to the Town of West Hartford Assessment Department. Tyler Technology data collectors are not prepared to answer questions concerning current values or Town laws. The Tyler data collector's sole purpose at the initial property inspection is to gather information. Actual assessed values from this revaluation will be determined later, during the market analysis and valuation phases of this project.

## **Phase 2 – Market Analysis**

While the physical data is being collected by the data collectors, appraisal personnel will be analyzing property sales taking place over a two and a half year period. A variety of resources are used to analyze the real estate market and determine which market factors influence property values. Once all the data is collected and reviewed for accuracy, appraisers will determine land values and set neighborhoods. These neighborhoods help rate the valuation levels of locations throughout the Town as determined by actual market activity.

## **Phase 3 – Valuation**

Valuation is done by employing three recognized appraisal methods: The Cost Approach, Market Approach, and Sales Comparison Approach. During this phase individual characteristics of buildings are analyzed using information gathered in both phases 1 and 2. Each property is compared to other comparable properties with similar characteristics. Then the contributory market value of the improvements is added to the previously determined land values. This value is the final estimate for each parcel, land and building.

## **Phase 4 – Field Review**

Field Review is the method of checking and re-checking both the values that have been determined and the data that has been collected. During this review, properties are viewed by experienced appraisers who double-check uniformity and accuracy of information.

## **Phase 5 – Notices Mailed**

During the month of November of 2016, after the Field Review phase, initial notices of new property assessments will be mailed. Final assessment notices will be mailed after informal hearings, during the month of December, 2016.

## **Phase 6 – Informal and Formal Appeal Hearings**

After the initial notices of new assessments are mailed, property owners will have the opportunity to schedule an informal hearing with Assessment Department staff appraisers if they wish to review the new assessment. The informal hearing is the first step in the review process if the property owner feels their assessment is inaccurate. The informal hearings will take place mid-November through Late December, 2016. A final notice will be mailed to those property owners who participate in an informal hearing, showing the results of said hearing.

If owners are dissatisfied with the results of the informal hearing, they will also have an opportunity for a Formal Appeal with the Board of Assessment Appeals during the month of March 2017. This is a formal appeals process undertaken annually by State Statute.

## **WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF MARKET VALUE?**

Market value is the most probable price in terms of money which a property would sell for in a competitive and open market under all conditions requisite to a fair sale.

Conditions of a fair sale:

1. Buyer and seller are typically motivated
2. Both parties are well informed and are acting in their best interest(s)
3. Reasonable time is allowed for exposure in the open market
4. Payment is made in cash or its equivalent
5. The price is unaffected by financing amounts or sales concessions

## **HOW WILL THE HOMEOWNER BE NOTIFIED OF THE NEW ASSESSMENT?**

Each homeowner will receive an individual notice of their new assessment late October 2016.

## **WILL ALL PROPERTY VALUES CHANGE?**

In all probability your property value will change. However, not all property values will change at the same rate. Market value may have increased/decreased more for some neighborhoods and property types than for others. Some neighborhoods and property types may have changed in value and others may have remained the same. One purpose of a revaluation is to make sure that the assessed values reflect the changes that have occurred in the real estate market since the previous revaluation.

## **DO ALL ASSESSMENTS CHANGE AT THE SAME RATE?**

There are differences between individual properties and between neighborhoods. In one area, the sales may indicate a substantial change in value in a given year. In another neighborhood, there may be a lesser change in property values.

Different types of properties within the same neighborhood may also show different value changes. For example, one-story houses may be more in demand than two-story houses or vice versa. Older homes in the same area may be changing in value more slowly than newer homes.

A few examples of factors that will cause values to differ are: location, condition, living area, dwelling quality, number of baths, basement finish and garages.

## **WHAT SALES DID YOU COMPARE TO MY HOME TO ARRIVE AT ITS VALUE?**

The value of your property is based on an analysis of the entire real estate market for a specified period of time, usually one or two years before the completion of the revaluation project. This study of recent property sales allows the assessor to establish valuation parameters (construction rates, land rates, market adjustments, etc.). These valuation parameters are then applied to all properties in order to approximate the market value of each property.

Assessors are required by the State to test the parameters being used to insure that they are consistently producing values that closely approximate the sale prices across all types of properties throughout the Town. When this is accomplished, the assessors can then apply these same valuation parameters to all of the “non-sale” properties in the Town. In doing so, they are approximating the market value of each property using the information derived from all of the sales.

## **WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY ASSESSMENT IF I IMPROVE MY PROPERTY?**

While property improvements generally increase the value to your property, they may or may not change the assessment to your property. For example, while replacing a roof covering, a furnace, a water heater or updating your electrical main should have a positive effect on your market value they are not likely to increase your assessment. Landscaping your property should increase its curb appeal and could also increase its value, but would not increase your assessment. There are also improvements that would increase your market value and correspondingly your assessment. Some of these changes include adding central air conditioning, finishing off a basement, building an addition, and possibly remodeling a kitchen or bath(s).

## **WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP ME DETERMINE THE VALUE OF MY HOME?**

There will be listings of all valid sales in the Assessor’s Office for the 2 years prior to the Revaluation. The listings will be organized by neighborhood. These listings will include sales information as well as detailed information about the property that was sold.

Computers are also available in the Assessment Office to review property information and maps. You may also reference this information online: for maps visit <http://host.appgeo.com/westhartfordct/> and for up-to-date property information visit <http://gis.vgsi.com/westhartfordct/>

## **HOW CAN A HOMEOWNER COMPARE HOW OTHER PROPERTIES HAVE BEEN VALUED?**

A listing of all West Hartford property assessments will be posted in the Town Hall Assessment Office by October 2016. This listing will provide the new market value and both the old and new assessed value for each property in Town.

## **IF PROPERTY OWNERS DISAGREE WITH OR HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR ASSESSMENT, WHAT ARE THEIR OPTIONS?**

If any property owner disagrees with or has questions regarding their assessment, they should schedule an informal hearing. Instructions on how to schedule an informal hearing will be included in your assessment notice.

## **WHAT IS AN INFORMAL HEARING?**

An informal hearing is a forum meant to answer questions on the new property valuation. This is not a forum to discuss taxes. If you feel you are being unfairly assessed, please come prepared with documentation regarding specific issues with your new assessment.

Appraisers will take notes as to the property owners' concerns and specifics regarding their property. Each property that had an informal hearing will then be reviewed on an individual basis to determine if there is a change of value warranted. Homeowners will be notified of the results of their informal hearing no later than February 1, 2017.

## **IF AFTER AN INFORMAL HEARING, THE PROPERTY OWNER STILL DISAGREES WITH THE ASSESSMENT, WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?**

If, after an informal hearing, the property owner still disagrees with the property assessment, the property owner may then petition before the Board of Assessment Appeals. Applications will be available starting January 2, 2017 in the Assessment Office or online at [www.westhartfordct.gov](http://www.westhartfordct.gov). All applications are due to the Assessment Office no later than February 20, 2017 (postmarks by the 20<sup>th</sup> are accepted).

## **WHO IS THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS?**

The Board of Assessment Appeals is an official municipal agency. It is designed to serve as an appeal body for taxpayers who believe that town or city assessors erred in the valuation of their property, or erroneously denied them exemptions. It is a review body and as such serves independently of the assessor. Member of the Board of Assessment Appeals are volunteer town citizens appointed by the Town Council.

## **WHAT ARE THE POWERS OF THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS?**

The Board has eight distinctive powers, which they may exercise at their own discretion. They may:

1. Administer oaths in cases coming before them (§I-24 and §I-25)
2. Correct clerical omissions or mistakes in the assessment of taxes (§12-60)
3. Add to the assessment lists the names of people who own taxable property in the town, but have been omitted from the lists (§12-111)
4. Increase the number, quantity or amount of property in any person's list (§12-111).
5. Reduce the list of any person appearing before the Board by decreasing the valuation, quantity or amount of any item (§12-113).
6. Make a supplemental list of any taxable property omitted by the assessors (§12-115).
7. Shall add 25 percent to the value of any additions (§12-111) or supplemental lists or personal property (§S12-115) as a penalty.
8. Elect not to conduct appeal hearing for any commercial, industrial, utility or apartment properties with assessment greater than \$1,000,000 (§12-111).

## **HOW WILL I BE NOTIFIED OF MY BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS APPOINTMENT?**

Each aggrieved property owner who timely files a petition with the Board of Assessment Appeals will be notified in writing of the date, time and location of their hearing by the March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 deadline.

## **WHAT SHOULD PROPERTY OWNERS BRING TO THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS?**

Your appeal must be based on the market value of the property as of October 1, 2016, the date of the Town's revaluation.

Please come prepared to explain why you believe the market value of your property, as determined by the assessor, is incorrect. Please provide any evidence that you believe shows that a lower or higher market value is more appropriate. For example, you may wish to provide the Board with comparable sales in your neighborhood.

The hearing is not a forum to discuss the Town budget or taxes.

## **HOW WILL I KNOW THE RESULTS OF MY HEARING WITH THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS?**

The Board shall determine all such appeals and send written notification of the final determination of such appeals to each property owner within one week after such determination has been made.

## **WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP AFTER A BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEAL IF A PROPERTY OWNER STILL DISAGREES WITH THE PROPERTY VALUE?**

If a property owner disagrees with the decision of the Board of Assessment Appeals, he/she must make an application to the clerk of the New Britain Superior Court within two months of the Board of Assessment Appeals' decision letter.

## **WHAT IS A MILL RATE?**

A mill rate is an expression of taxes in dollars per every thousand dollars of assessed value. For example, a mill rate of 38.31 would mean that taxes would be \$38.31 for every thousand dollars of assessed value.

## **HOW ARE MILL RATES ESTABLISHED?**

Mill rates are established annually after adoption of the Town's budget. The basic formula for determining the mill rate is the Town Levy divided by the Net Taxable Grand List. The Town Levy being the amount of money the Town needs to generate through property taxes in order to provide Town services. The Net Taxable Grand List is the total of all non-exempt assessments for all real property, personal property and motor vehicles located within the Town's boundaries as of October 1<sup>st</sup> each year.

## **WHEN WILL THE REASSESSMENT FIRST APPEAR IN MY TAX BILL?**

New assessments will be reflected in tax bills due July 1, 2017. West Hartford's Town Council will establish the mill rate for these bills in April of 2017. *Please do not multiply your new assessment by the previous year mill rate.*