



TOWNSHIP OF WYCKOFF
 MEMORIAL TOWN HALL
 WYCKOFF, NEW JERSEY 07481-1907
 TEL: 201-891-7000

October 2013

Dear Property Owner:

The Township of Wyckoff will be completing a town-wide evaluation of all properties for the Tax Year 2015. This revaluation has been ordered by the Bergen County Board of Taxation and approved by the Director of the Division of Taxation for the State of New Jersey. The purpose of the revaluation is to determine the current Market Value of your property in order to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of the tax burden among all Wyckoff property owners.

After a competitive process, the Township has selected Realty Appraisal Company to perform the revaluation. Realty Appraisal Company has been approved by the State of New Jersey and has more than 50 years of experience in revaluations.

In order to properly assess your property, a complete inspection of both the interior and exterior of each building is necessary. The inspection process includes all types of properties; residential, commercial, industrial and exempt properties. During the inspection, the inspector will measure and photograph each property and list the various amenities. Income producing properties will also be required to submit income and expense information as part of the process. If your property is currently rented, please advise the tenants that access must be provided to the revaluation inspector.

For your protection, each inspector for the revaluation will be provided with a photo identification card from the Wyckoff Police Department. **Do not let anyone enter your property without the proper identification.** If you have any question as to whether or not the person is an employee of the revaluation firm, ask the inspector to wait and contact either the Wyckoff Police Department (201-891-2121) or the Tax Assessor's office immediately to confirm their identity.

Prior to the finalization of the revaluation and submission to the Bergen County Board of Taxation, you will receive a letter from the revaluation company reflecting the preliminary value that has been determined for the property. At that point, you may request an appointment for an informal review of your assessment with a representative of the revaluation firm. If you have any factual documentation of conditions (wetland delineations, structural defects, land contamination, etc.) that you feel may affect the value of your property, please submit a copy of those materials at the time of the review.

If you have any questions regarding the revaluation process please visit Realty Appraisal's website at www.realtyappraisal.net or contact the Tax Assessor's office at 201-891-7000, ext. 114 between 9:00 am and 4:30 pm Monday through Friday.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Pamela Steele, CTA
 Tax Assessor

Revaluation Fact No. 1

Your tax assessment will not be greater because the interior of your home is elaborately furnished. Assessments are based only on the real property and not on your personal belongings.

The Big Questions

Why is Wyckoff having a revaluation?

The revaluation program has been ordered by the Bergen County Board of Taxation, so it's not optional. The methods used in the equalization of property values are supervised by the Bergen County Board of Taxation. The last time a revaluation was conducted in Wyckoff was in 2005 for 2006. Regardless of whether a property is residential or commercial, or whether it's occupied or vacant, it must be assessed at the same standard of value in order to ensure that every property owner is paying his or her fair share of the tax burden.

Two properties with essentially the same market value should be taxed at approximately the same amount. However, there can be differences based on a variety of factors. For example, a four bedroom Colonial on a cul-de-sac may be valued differently than the same type of dwelling on a busy county road. The value could differ due to the age and condition of the properties, the value of surrounding properties, or if one home has been improved more than the other. Another example would be a property that was improved without construction permits and, therefore, the improvements have escaped taxation and the property would be under assessed.

An equalization of taxes is also required when there have been:

- Changes in characteristics in neighborhoods or within individual properties
- Fluctuations in the economy due either to inflation or recession
- Zoning changes that have either enhanced or diminished the value of the property

How Does Revaluation Affect My Taxes?

If property values have increased since the last revaluation, causing the aggregate assessment to increase, then the tax rate will go down. Prior to the most recent revaluation, which was conducted in 2005 for 2006, the overall tax rate was \$2.58 per \$100 of assessed valuation. In 2006, when the revaluation was completed, the overall tax rate fell to \$1.260 per \$100 of assessed valuation. The tax rate drops because the total tax ratables for the entire township increase. However, just because the tax rate drops does not necessarily mean that the tax on any given property will decrease. As a result of the equalization process, the tax on some properties will increase, while the tax on others will decrease and still others will remain the same.

Experienced Firm to Conduct the Revaluation

After a competitive process, the Township Committee selected Realty Appraisal Company to conduct the revaluation. Realty Appraisal Company is the oldest revaluation firm in New Jersey, and has conducted more than 400 revaluation and reassessment programs. They may be reached at 201-867-3870 or on the web at www.realtyappraisal.net.

Township of Wyckoff
 Memorial Town Hall
 Scott Plaza
 Wyckoff, NJ 07481

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How a Revaluation Impacts Property Taxes

Many people are of the mistaken belief that a revaluation program is a way to raise more tax money for the municipality, schools and county. This is not true. A revaluation is revenue-neutral. The purpose of a revaluation is to fairly distribute the necessary tax burden among all property owners based upon the true value of their property. In other words, all property should be assessed at its full fair market value. This is the law.

Calculation of the Tax Rate

The Wyckoff municipal government collects taxes on behalf of all four units of local government and the amount collected is determined by the elected officials of those four units. The four units are the municipal government, the local school system, the regional high school system and the county government. Your overall tax rate is determined by dividing the amount to be raised by taxation for these four entities by the total assessed value of all property in Wyckoff.

The formula is:

$$\frac{\text{Total Amount to be Raised in Taxation}}{\text{Total Assessed Value of All Real Property in the Township}} = \text{Tax Rate}$$

The formula operates as follows:

- If the total assessed value of all real property in Wyckoff increases, then the Tax Rate decreases.
- If the total assessed value of all real property in Wyckoff decreases, then the Tax Rate increases.

Why Some Property Owners Pay More Taxes After a Revaluation

■ Some increases will result for correcting inequities. For example, improvements made to a property performed without building permits and, therefore, not reflected in the assessment before the revaluation. If a property assessment was lowered in the last 2-3 years due to a tax appeal lawsuit, then that property is now likely under assessed relative to other properties in Wyckoff.

■ The assessed value is only one component in determining the tax rate. The other is the total amount to be raised through taxation. Each year, the individual local government units determine the amount they need to raise in taxes to support their individual operating needs (budgets). When this amount increases, regardless of a revaluation program, the tax paid increases.

Visit www.wyckoff-nj.com



Revaluation Underway



As you may have read in the local press, the Township has been ordered by the Bergen County Board of Taxation to conduct a revaluation of all real property in Wyckoff. Revaluation is a periodic program undertaken in order to appraise all real estate in terms of its full and fair market value (bringing all properties to 100% of their true market value). Also known as tax equalization, revaluation ensures that all property owners pay their fair share of taxes based on the actual market value of the property they own.

This newsletter continues the Township's commitment to a thorough public information effort and to provide clear and complete information on this revaluation and its implications.

How is the Revaluation Conducted?

STEP 1 **The Gathering of Information**

Trained inspectors, working for Realty Appraisal Company, under the supervision of the Wyckoff Tax Assessor, gather necessary data by visiting each property in the Township. The interior and exterior of each property are inspected and the building dimensions are determined. It's important to point out that the valuation of your home will be based on the total living area in terms of square footage rather than by room count, although the appraiser will list the number of rooms for descriptive purposes only. Aside from the living area, other features which will affect the valuation of your property include: location, lot size and topography, architectural style, high quality finishes, additional bathrooms and kitchens, finished basements, central air conditioning, decks and patios, fireplaces, pools, cabanas, out-buildings, saunas, garages, and the overall condition of the home. Pictures will be taken of the exterior of all houses and structures. These pictures will be taken by authorized photographers who will visit properties separately from inspectors.

STEP 2 **Property Appraisal**

All the information believed to have some bearing on the value of a home will be collected, reviewed and analyzed in order to make a proper determination of the full and fair value of each property. This information, along with the findings of the field inspector, is used to estimate true market value. Additionally, real estate market value trends are analyzed by conducting a sales study. This includes an examination of all real estate sales that took place within three years of the date of the revaluation, a delineation of neighborhoods, and an analysis of any land sales that have taken place during that period. It is important to note that only arms-length transactions are considered, and sales that occur closest to the assessing date of 10/1/2014 are given the most weight. Commercial property or residential properties of five or more units that were purchased for investment purposes are examined in terms of their income-producing potential. As a result of this extensive research, the value of a given piece of property and the improvements to it can be estimated, establishing the assessment of a property as of October 1, 2014.

STEP 3 **Notification**

Realty Appraisal Company will notify each property owner regarding the preliminary assessment of his or her property through the mail. If you have any questions or if you disagree with the preliminary valuation, you may schedule an appointment to meet with a representative of the firm in order to discuss your concerns.

STEP 4 **The Preliminary Assessment Review**

A preliminary assessment review will be available to property owners who have questions or concerns about the preliminary assessment of their property. This review can be scheduled by appointment and will take place in Town Hall. You will be provided a number to call to schedule a brief meeting, should one be necessary.

The preliminary review process will be informal and will focus on a discussion of your property. This process is anticipated to occur during the fall of 2014. It's important that all information presented about your property is accurate. If you feel that there are conditions that diminish the market value of your property, the meeting is your opportunity to bring those factors to bear. All appropriate comments will be reviewed and considered to determine if an adjustment is in order. An appointment for review of your preliminary assessment will only be provided after a field inspector has inspected the interior of your house.

During the period for the review of preliminary values, information regarding your neighbors' property values will not be available. The comparison of assessments is not an appropriate method of determining value and is not permitted in the appeal process at any level. The formal tax list will be available for review at the Tax Assessor's office during normal business hours after January 10, 2015.

STEP 5 **Adjustment and Appeal**

The results from the meeting will be mailed to you about three weeks after the conclusion of all preliminary assessment reviews. If you are dissatisfied with the results of your meeting, you may file a formal appeal with the Bergen County Board of Taxation after you receive your notice of assessment in February 2015. This must be done prior to May 1, 2015. This step is similar to the preliminary assessment review, however, your comments will be heard by a Commissioner of the Board of Taxation. You will be given an opportunity to state the reasons you believe your assessment is inaccurate. After reviewing the facts presented, the Board will render a decision as to whether an adjustment is in order.

In the event that you are not satisfied with the decision of the Board of Taxation, you have the right to file an appeal with the Tax Court of the State of New Jersey. This must be done within 45 days of the date that the County Board judgment was mailed. This step in the process is formal, taking place in a courtroom setting, before a Tax Court Judge.

STEP 6 **Approval of the Revaluation**

The revaluation figures cannot be adopted until they are approved by the Wyckoff Tax Assessor and the Bergen County Board of Taxation. The revaluation figures will serve as the basis for the 2015 tax billing, which will be mailed to property owners in the summer of 2015. The tax bill will be retroactive to January 1, 2015, using the new tax rate and new assessments, as provided by State law.

Revaluation Fact No. 2

Property assessments do not change every time a property is sold. According to state law, assessments only change under certain circumstances, including, but not limited to, improvements that are made, zoning and market changes, substantial damage or deterioration or when the Township is ordered to perform a revaluation.

REVALUATION FAQs

Q. What can be expected during a visit by the field inspector?

A. First, when the field inspector arrives at your door be sure to ask to see their Wyckoff Police Department issued proper identification before admitting anyone into your home. If you have any doubts about the person's identity, ask the inspector to wait and immediately call the Police Department at 201-891-2121 for verification.

Realty Appraisal employees will not enter your property unless the owner or an adult representative of the owner is present. The inspection of the interior of your home takes between five and ten minutes, depending on the size of your home. Field inspectors are looking for: the number of rooms, number and type of baths, heating and cooling systems, basement size and whether it is finished, condition of interior and exterior, as well as, amenities such as fireplaces, whirlpool tubs, decks, patios, garages and sheds. Because of the large number of properties being appraised, Realty Appraisal representatives will not be making inspection appointments in advance. If you are not present when your property is visited, a card will be left at your door instructing you to call for an appointment. When you call the number on the card, you will be asked to provide your name and address. A representative will then contact you for an appointment.

Q. Are field inspectors responsible for assigning value to my property?

A. No, field inspectors gather data and list the amenities. This information is then submitted to the Realty Appraisal certified appraisers to determine value.

Q. Can a property owner refuse entry to the field inspector?

A. Yes, you may refuse entry to your home. It is, however, in your best interest to see that as much information as possible is gathered to help ensure an accurate assessment. If the field inspector cannot inspect the inside of a building, it's possible an excessive assessment may result. The law provides that a property shall be assessed at the highest possible value if the assessor or field inspector is denied entry.

The revaluation program should not be seen as an adversarial situation. Property owners have a vested interest in the outcome of the project and cooperation is vital to achieve an equitable revaluation. If one person's property is under assessed, all other property owners in the township will pay higher taxes to make up for the discrepancy. Conversely, if the property owners deny access to the field inspector, their property could be over assessed and they would pay more than their fair share of taxes.

Q. If a property owner refuses entry to the field inspector, will the property owner be able to review their preliminary assessment after scheduling an appointment?

A. No. A review of the preliminary assessment will only be provided after a field inspector has completed an inspection of the interior of the home. Cooperation and inspection are important to achieve an equitable revaluation.

Q. What typically happens when the property owner denies the field inspector access to the property/home or does not call to schedule an interior inspection with a field inspector?

A. The appraiser determining value must assume that the basement is fully finished as living area, the interior has been completely remodeled, all available possible amenities have been added and all areas (attics, basements and lofts) have been improved.

Q. What if my property has a unique condition or feature that influences the value?

A. Please send supporting documentation as soon as possible to the Wyckoff Tax Assessor with a copy to the revaluation company: Realty Appraisal Company, 4912 Bergenline Ave., Suite 4, West New York, NJ 07903. Be sure you clearly mark any correspondence, photos or other materials with your block and lot number and "Township of Wyckoff."

Q. What should I know about the preliminary assessment review?

A. Once a meeting with Realty Appraisal Co. is scheduled, you should assemble whatever materials and information you believe impacts the market value of your property. If there are any legal situations such as easements, deed restrictions, etc. bring copies of the documentation. If there are functional or physical problems with the dwelling, bring photographs or other documents that show the problem. If your property is currently listed for sale, bring the listing agreement. Remember that this is an informal meeting that is offered to provide you with the opportunity to present information that you feel may affect your valuation.

Q. If after receiving my final assessment, I am still not satisfied my assessment is not the full and fair value to whom should I direct my complaints or comments?

A. You may appeal your assessment to the Bergen County Board of Taxation or to the Tax Court of New Jersey (if your new assessment exceeds \$1,000,000).

Q. Can I ask the Mayor or Township Committee about my assessment?

A. No, the Mayor and Township Committee are prohibited by law from becoming involved in the assessment process.

Revaluation Fact No. 3

The purpose of revaluation is not to increase the total amount of revenue to be raised by taxation. The sole purpose of a revaluation is to redistribute the tax burden fairly by estimating all properties at 100% of their market value.

The municipality only collects the amount of tax dollars that each of the four units of local government (local school, regional school, county government and municipal government) determine is necessary to operate.

Revaluation Fact No. 4

The tax rate is the same for all types of properties, whether residential or commercial, vacant or occupied.

Revaluation Fact No. 5

Under state law, the actual tax on a property cannot be appealed. A property owner can file a tax appeal with regard to the assessment of value (as detailed in this publication). The tax rate and a tax assessment are two distinctly different things which are often confused. The tax rate is determined by the total amount to be raised in taxation to operate the four separate governmental entities. The tax assessment provides the value upon which to apportion the taxes. One may appeal a tax assessment not a tax rate.