



Alexandria Taxpayers United

Suggestions for Improving and Expanding Alexandria City's Department of Real Estate Assessments Website

Provided by Alexandria Taxpayers United
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Many states have "Taxpayer Bill of Rights" pledges on how customers can expect to be treated:

Maryland: <http://www.dat.state.md.us/sdatweb/bor.html>

Florida: <http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/taxes/billofrights.html>

North Dakota: <http://www.nd.gov/tax/genpubs/bill-of-rights.pdf>

Texas: <http://www.window.state.tx.us/comptrol/compact/>

Could Alexandria adopt and post a similar policy?

The Department letter that went out with the 2007 assessment notice (http://alexandriava.gov/city/realestate/rea_assessment_sample.html) says the following: "*we have replaced the Department's Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal (CAMA) system that produces the real property assessments. A thorough analysis of the converted data has been completed, and we believe that all data is accurate and complete.*"

Could you provide a more in-depth explanation of the system and how your analysis works (perhaps the manufacturer of the system has a description you could adapt)? We're imagining a step-by-step explanation (in a manner laypersons can understand) on how the assessment process determines market value. A flow chart may be helpful, and each item in the flow chart could be a hyperlink to a term definition. We'd also be very interested in explanations on specific items that go into the software to determine the value of a property.

Could you post a copy of the last independent auditors report on the accuracy of the assessment system and report on how often the system is audited?

The following websites have "best practice" aspects that could be replicated on Alexandria's site:

The following website shows how, with determination, even a complex system can be boiled down sufficiently to the point that someone with a hand-held calculator can at least figure out how a tax was arrived at:

http://www.co.washington.mn.us/client_files/documents/ate/TAX//TAX_PTA_IMP_2007photo.pdf

See also the variety of information this same locality provides, including an online calculator for approximate taxes and links to taxpayer groups:

http://www.co.washington.mn.us/info_for_residents/atse/property_tax_and_assessment/

Here's another site that looks complex, but actually provides just enough detail to calculate your own bill. Note also how you can compare rates statewide, a nifty feature for taxpayers:

<http://www.gordoncounty.org/countyfacts.asp?topic=4>

Note how this website is organized, hierarchically. You can get an increased level of information on how assessments are conducted, based upon how much you want to download:

http://www.douglas.co.us/assessor/Property_Assessment_and_Taxes.html

Here's one of the more exotic local websites that explains the assessment process with an interactive bureaucrat: <http://64.176.237.147/propertytax.html>

This site provides a linear, click-on, drop-down organization of Maricopa's Assessor's site; you can navigate quickly to what you need, and here again there's an online appeal form:

<http://www.maricopa.gov/Assessor/>

Under the "Frequently Asked Questions" page on the Alexandria Department of Real Estate Assessments website, it says under #10: *Q. How much are my taxes going to be in 2007?*

A. City Council has not set the tax rate as yet. The City Manager will present his budget to the Council, including the proposed tax rate, on February 13, 2007. City Council will set the tax rate on May 7, 2007.

The 2007 rate has been set and the answer should be updated.

Under the "Frequently Asked Questions" page on the Alexandria Department of Real Estate Assessments website, it says under #5: *Q. How does Alexandria compare to other parts of the state or to other Northern Virginia jurisdictions?*

A. Assessment changes in Alexandria as of January 1, 2007, are comparable to assessment increases in the neighboring jurisdictions of Northern Virginia. Assessments in these jurisdictions reflect sales prices seen in the real estate market during calendar year 2006.

Would it be possible to have the percentage numbers from surrounding jurisdictions posted here? Users can then make their own judgment of "comparable" based on the data.

We noticed that the City Manager reports on the City's position on some legislation before the General Assembly (see here: <http://dockets.alexandriava.gov/fy07/012307rm/di16.pdf>).

Could you post or link to the City's position on General Assembly bills that would impact real estate tax assessments?

Nassau, NY allows a homeowner to review and appeal their assessment on the Internet, through the AROW system: <https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/wps51/portal/AROW>

Adopting something similar for Alexandria could serve both government and taxpayer interests well, provided the information is balanced. Appeals boards would have less work processing pointless claims, while taxpayers could avoid wasting time on fruitless pursuits.

Could you post the following appeals-related data points:

- Number and percentage of appeals that have resulted in a downward adjustment?
 - Number and percentage of appeals that have resulted in an upward adjustment?
 - Average time it takes to complete the appeals process?
 - Comparison of recently sold properties and their correlation to assessed values (e.g. X percentage of properties sell above the assessed value, X percentage below assessed value)?
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We found this great property assessment manual (<http://www.co.accomack.va.us/News%20Articles/Accomack%20Reassessment%20Manual.pdf>) on Accomack County's website.

Could you post something similar providing profiles of basic types of properties (free standing house, town house, high rise condo, etc.) in Alexandria?
