



Nassau & Suffolk Assessment Errors Can Be Corrected

By Richard G. Fromewick, Meyer, Suozzi, English & Klein, P.C.

On Sunday March 21, 2010, Newsday featured a lengthy article about Nassau County's substandard real estate tax assessment system. It was an extremely unflattering story and, regrettably for Nassau County real estate taxpayers, it was all true. Nassau's assessment system is broken and has been in disarray for many years. There are over 420,000 individual parcels in Nassau County, yet the County does not have the infrastructure to value them correctly. There are several different computer systems used in the assessor's office, unfortunately the programs frequently contain different information due to human errors made while inputting data from one system to another.

Examples of assessor's office mistakes over the years include the assessment of a half-acre parcel as a two-acre parcel, the assessment of a three bedroom split-level house as a five bedroom colonial house. Some mistakes will have no affect on the real estate taxpayer because the assessment, despite erroneous descriptions, can still be based on the correct market value. However, some mistakes can result in unrealistic market values and inflated real estate tax bills. For example, a converted residence containing a small medical office being assessed as a commercial property with commercial tax rates was reversed back to a residential property tax rate, resulting in a 75% reduction of the taxes.

Assessments have to be protested every year, with a very small window of time in which to do so. The tentative Nassau assessment roll is released on January 2nd and protests must be filed by March 1st. The good news is that assessor mistakes are in a category of their own and can be corrected, even if a protest was not filed prior to the years March 1st deadline.

Everyone paying real estate taxes for property in Nassau County should go to www.mynassauproperty.com to verify the County's description of your property and compare your assessments to similar properties. You can also do this by logging on to www.mlsli.com. It only takes a few minutes, and in the end could generate substantial savings.

If you thought living or owning property in Suffolk County could solve all your assessor woes, think again. Not only is the Suffolk County protest filing deadline shorter than Nassau County (the tentative roll is released May 1st with a May 18th protest filing deadline), the Suffolk County town assessors makes their share of mistakes as well. Recently, it was discovered that someone was paying taxes on a parcel of land that was completely submerged under water. The County refused to believe that the land was underwater but pictures proved otherwise and a reduction was obtained. In another case, an old 40-foot tall industrial building previously used as an aircraft hanger was still being assessed as though the owner was using all 40 feet of space. After the assessor was made aware of the fact that it was being used for assembly work at tables, with no planes in site, a large reduction was obtained, as the unused height of the building was obsolete.

Unfortunately for Suffolk County residents there is not a single website to log into and verify assessment records. Give your local Town and Village assessors a call and find out how you can obtain your property information. You might be amazed at what you have been paying taxes on.

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