

MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN

Two weeks ago, I wrote about the Trustees' decision to adopt a policy for periodic property valuation update. Since the column was dense due to the nature of the topic, I thought I would distill it down to the most frequently asked questions we have received from residents and real estate agents since I wrote the column.

Didn't we just do a revaluation, why do we need to do this now?

To achieve continuing equity, it is vital that property values are kept current and it is important from time to time to reset the values to current market value because the valuation of property is a snapshot in time that must be updated to remain reliable. This is especially important in times of market volatility.

Will the procedure be similar to the 2007 home inspections?

No, in 2007, the Village had not done a valuation since 1967 so we had to start from scratch and do interior inspections and record inventory, capture improvements and set up an entirely new system.

Now that we have a very complete database, a curbside review of the property will suffice in almost all situations.

Has the Village started the updating process?

Yes, our staff has been in the field with their laptop computers, staying approximately ten minutes in front of each house. In order to do a whole block, their car may be parked for an hour or so in one location on a street.

Each staffer has a Village ID and the police department is made aware of their location each day.

If you have any concerns, call the police desk and they will verify whether Village staffers are in your neighborhood.

Should I expect a major swing in my valuation resulting in a substantial tax increase such as what happened to some properties in the last revaluation?

No, this is an updating or perfecting of the property valuation, essentially a correcting at the edges to achieve the greatest possible equity.

Since the market is down and with it my house value, should I expect a lower valuation resulting in lower taxes?

Not necessarily. Since the market depressed the value of all homes, in order to see a reduction for a particular property, data must substantiate the home value decreased disproportionately vis-à-vis other Village homes. In concert with our statistician, we will also be analyzing the valuation fluctuations by neighborhood and classification of houses. For example, we will learn the different rates of decrease perhaps between townhouses

and homes priced over \$3 million and whether the same type of home decreased differently due to neighborhood location. The statistician will also be analyzing all the homes that have recently sold and as well as those currently on the market.

Will homeowners be notified of the new valuation?

Yes, an impact statement using the new assessment and last year's tax rate will be sent to every homeowner in early December. Even if your assessment has not changed, every resident will be notified. This would be the time to then ask questions about your particular property.

When will the new valuation be reflected on the tax roll?

Any change in valuation will appear on the June 2011 tax bill. The tax bill you receive in the next few weeks reflects the current/older assessment.

Will future Boards of Trustees have to revalue every three years or if the COD climbs above 12% as promulgated in the recent policy adopted by the current Board of Trustees?

Our hope is that future Boards will follow this policy, but should they decide not to, they will be required to raise the issue and explain to the public why they choose not to do the revaluation and overturn our resolution.

Currently, Pelham and the Town of Rye are the only other communities in Westchester doing the periodic reassessments as recommended by the State Office of Real Property Services. They both decided to reassess annually.

What are the benefits of reassessment?

Property values kept as current as possible, result in greater equity and fairness in taxes and certioraris and grievances tend to decrease saving both time and money.

Unfortunately, because New York State has no set uniform standards for reassessing property values, the onus falls on the individual communities to set in motion a process to achieve equity.

In fact, in a recent speech, John Wolham, Regional Director of the New York State Office of Real Property Services, said "New York's system for assessment is arguably one of the worst in the country." We are only one of three states including Pennsylvania and New Jersey that does not set statewide standards for how properties are valued.

As Mr. Wolham stated succinctly, "If you do not have periodic reassessment, some parcels are going to pay too much and some are going to pay too little." This is especially important in our Village where property values and the resulting taxes are at very high numbers so any inequity has a large dollar value.