

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE 2024 GALAX CITY REASSESSMENT



WHAT IS A REASSESSMENT AND WHY IS IT BEING DONE?

By State Law, all real property (land, building, and improvements) must be assessed at "fair market value" (the price that a seller is willing to accept and a buyer is willing to pay on the open market and in an arms-length transaction) at least every four (4) years. While some localities reassess every year or every two years, the City of Galax chooses to do its reassessment every four (4) years. This means that property owners get to retain the same valuation throughout the four-year period instead of seeing the tax value rise or fall every year or two. While this can help keep taxes lower through the period, even when the fair market value of the property increases in real time, it does mean that many times the reassessment valuation is higher than property owners expect because it is taking into consideration the gains for four years not just year-over-year. The 2024 reassessment reflects the current fair market value of your property. Every effort has been made to reassess your property accurately and equitably.

WHEN WAS THE LAST REASSESSMENT?

The last general reassessment in the City of Galax was completed in 2019 and became effective January 1, 2020.

WHO DETERMINES THE VALUE OF MY PROPERTY?

A popular misconception is that the City staff or City Council determines the value of each property. This is not true. Every four years, the City Council hires an expert third party to reassess all real property in the City. This time the City hired Wampler-Eanes Appraisal Group. Wampler-Eanes is a Virginia-owned company that has completed 153 reassessments for 55 different localities across Virginia and North Carolina totaling 2,600,000 + properties. Wampler-Eanes has done the last six reassessments for the City of Galax going back to 2004.

HOW IS THE VALUE OF MY PROPERTY DETERMINED?

The reassessment process starts with a comprehensive sales study. Each property is visited by a field inspector who verifies data and collects additional data. The field review is done with the homeowner if they are at home. The city is divided into smaller areas called neighborhoods for the purpose of market comparison. Throughout the process, neighborhood sales, land values, yearly appreciation trends and other data are analyzed. This information is entered into the mass appraisal system and its accuracy is validated. GIS is also utilized by the appraisers and field technicians to view property lines, topo, open land vs. woodland, waterfront, etc. This helps the appraiser to determine acreage, road frontage, water frontage, and to locate other structures on the property. The goal of mass appraisal is to produce accurate appraisals and equitable assessments.

Per Wampler-Eanes:

The recent general reassessment which was completed in your jurisdiction was carried out under the guidelines of the Virginia Department of Taxation and the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO). The main objectives of general reassessments in Virginia are to assess property at fair market value and assess like classes of properties uniformly. This does not mean that all properties that have recently sold will be assessed exactly at what they sold for. Because uniformity is required, a standard formula must be derived using valid market data collectively and then applied to all properties in the jurisdiction with respect to property class and location. Valid market data excludes foreclosures, sales between family members, property exchanges, properties that have been altered since their purchase, assemblage and generally any transaction involving duress. Properties may sell above or below market value, but the reassessment strives to value all properties to reflect the general tendency. As per Virginia Department of Taxation guidelines, when the market value cannot be easily agreed upon, uniformity is preferred. When valuing vacant land in the mass appraisal process it is not possible to always walk or access each vacant parcel of land due to time restrictions or limited or no access to the parcel. The industry standard is to view the property from the road if it has frontage or in the case of a back tract aerial photography such as Eagle View, LandGlide or the county's GIS system are utilized. During the reassessment, a list of recent sales deemed to be valid is maintained and compared to the assessed values applied to those parcels (Comparable Parcels). By comparing the sale price of the parcel to the assessed price, it illustrates how assessments relate to sales prices within the jurisdiction. This data will be used to calibrate land and building values to arrive at market value. Each parcel within the jurisdiction will have a record file listing the characteristics of the property. These characteristics will include legal data such as who owns the property, the location address, acreage, property class, etc. The record will also include information displaying values that were applied to land and structures on the property. It will also show depreciation and market adjustments that were made to reflect the condition, location, design or any other factors that may negatively or positively affect the property. This record is commonly known as the Property Record Card.

WHEN WAS THE VALUE OF MY PROPERTY DETERMINED?

The third-party appraisers began work in September 2023 and completed their work in early January 2024. They utilized actual sales data from the timeframe of November/December 2022 until December 2023.

WHY DID MY PROPERTY VALUE GO UP IF I HAVE NOT IMPROVED IT SINCE THE LAST REASSESSMENT?

The Virginia State Code requires that all properties be assessed at fair market value. Since the last reassessment in 2020, land, buildings, and homes all over the country have increased in value and sold on the open market for ever greater prices. It is no different in Galax. As for-sale properties have become scarcer, as inflation has persisted, and as more people want to live in our City, the sales price of properties has increased. This means that the fair market value of the same property in 2020 is now higher in 2024, even if no improvements have been made.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I DO NOT AGREE WITH MY NEW VALUATION?

If you feel the reassessed value does not represent the current fair market value of your property, or that the reassessed value is not uniform or consistent with similar properties in your area, you may appeal the reassessment. The first step as outlined in the reassessment letter you received is to make a written appeal (through email or regular mail) to the Galax Reassessment Office to be reviewed by the appraisers. This request to appeal the reassessment must be received by no later than Monday, February 5, 2024. Submit your appeal to: City of Galax Reassessment Office, 111 East Grayson Street, Galax, VA 24333 OR to reassessment@galaxva.com. Please make sure to include your "Map Number" as shown on the reassessment letter on all written appeals. In case the assessor needs to contact you, also please include a daytime phone number where you can be reached on all appeals. In your appeal, you may include a letter, an appraisal, pictures, or any other information that you would like the assessor to review. We strongly encourage you to file an appeal through email to ensure it is received prior to the deadline. You will be notified by mail within 4-6 weeks of the conclusion of the outcome of any appeal. Values may be raised, lowered, or remain unchanged as a result of appeals. The goal is to maintain accuracy and consistency and to reflect current real estate market conditions.

If you do not agree with the result of your appeal, or decide not to appeal through the Reassessment Office, the City of Galax is establishing a Board of Equalization (BOE) to review any appeals that are not adequately resolved by appealing to the Reassessment Office. Dates for these hearings will be advertised in the local newspaper and on the City website. The BOE will be scheduling hearings sometime in the Spring of 2024. In any appeal to the BOE of an assessment of residential property, Section 58.1-3331 of the Code of Virginia requires that owners with less than four residential units be given a 45-day notice prior to their hearing date. These owners will have the option to request a hearing date earlier than 45 days from the date the appeal is made by signing a waiver agreeing to waive the required 45-day notice in advance of their hearing date.

Finally, the result of the appeal at the Reassessment Office and/or BOE can be submitted to the Circuit Court for adjudication.

For more information, call the City of Galax Reassessment Office at 276-236-2528 or email: reassessment@galaxva.com