

New land values startle owners

Property taxes still won't go up more than 3 percent

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Nervous Washoe County homeowners are calling the assessor's office by the hundreds to make sure the large increases in land values shown on recent county mailings won't be reflected in their property taxes next year.

After reappraising the south end of Truckee Meadows, Washoe Valley and Incline Village, Assessor Josh Wilson said the average land value is up 80 percent for the tax year starting July 1 over the current tax year.

But with the ceiling imposed by the Nevada Legislature, property taxes cannot go up more than 3 percent next year, the same as for the past three years.

Thomas Gregory, a retiree who lives in the Galena Country Estates on the Mount Rose Highway, said he was "floored" when he saw the land value for his home on less than a half-acre is rising from \$66,256 to \$159,600.

"I have a pile of rocks worth \$100,000 more, and there ain't a bit of gold in it," Gregory joked. "I called the assessor on it. I just wanted to make sure my taxes are going to increase only the 3 percent."

"We can afford that," Gregory said. "But if they ever stop the tax cap and property assessments hit the cosmos, it's a way government can take everybody's property away from them. I don't think that's the plan."

The assessor's office received more than 1,400 such calls Monday and a slightly lower number Tuesday after most property assessment notices were mailed to people over the long Thanksgiving holiday.

The south county had not been reappraised for five years, and home sales studied in a required three-year period included the peak of the housing boom. Even though home prices now are dropping, that lag time is why property assessments went up so much in the south.

Wilson said the median county housing price for 2007 is \$326,165. That's down from a peak of \$365,581 in 2006 and from \$343,403 for 2005, the years covered in the study.

In two years, Wilson said, the south area, North Valleys and Spanish Springs will be reviewed for the latest changes in the market. South and west Reno will be reappraised, meaning three of the five appraisal areas will be studied in one year.

Wilson plans eventually to appraise the entire county every year.

North Valleys and Spanish Springs properties were mass-reappraised this year and will be again next year. New land values have been lowered by 8 percent to reflect lower sales prices.

But because of the state tax-cap law, property taxes still will increase 3 percent from this year.

As for home values, Wilson said they went up an average of 4 percent in October 2006 from a year earlier due to higher construction costs for concrete, labor and wood. Buildings are appraised at their replacement costs after depreciation.

Wilson said the Legislature will talk about changing the state's tax structure in 2009, especially since the governor has called for sweeping budget cuts due to declining sales and gaming tax revenue. While there might be some tinkering, he doesn't expect the Legislature to touch tax caps for people who now live in their own homes.

"They wouldn't have the stomach for that," said Ron Sauer, a senior appraiser in the assessor's office.

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Median housing prices

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2005: \$343,403.

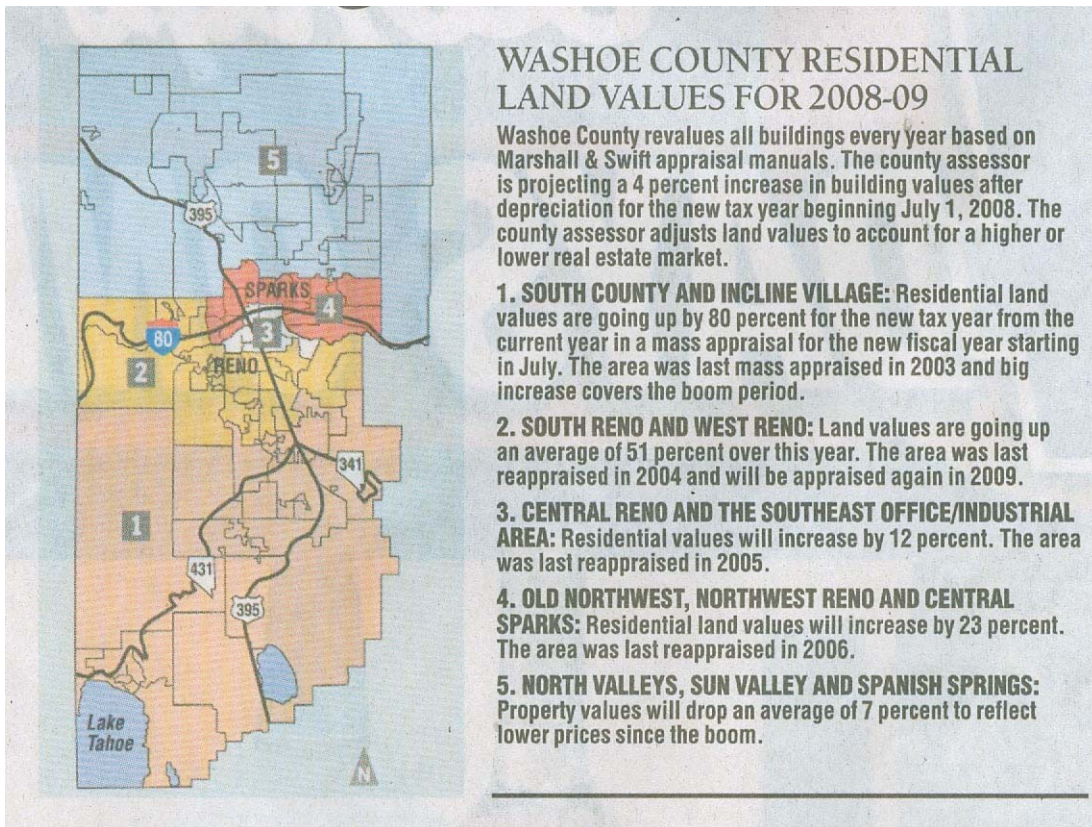
Source: Washoe County assessor

Learn more

1. When people review their property valuation notices from the Washoe County Assessor's office, they can look up their parcels on the county Web site to make sure facts, such as the age or square footage of their homes, are correct. If you live in your own home, you should also check to make sure the tax cap status box lists you as a "3 PCT qualified primary occupancy."

2. If you want to check home sales in your area to contest the assessor's findings, check sales data information listed on the assessor's home page. If you get to the spread sheet, the last column includes a code for home sales in your area that can be used to limit your search.

3. If you intend to appeal your property values, you can call the assessor's office at 328-2233 to ask questions or request an appeal form. The deadline for filing appeals is Jan. 15.



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