

# **News for Broward Taxpayers** Summer - Fall

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### Update on the \$50,000 Senior's Additional Exemption

Florida voters passed a Constitutional Amendment last year which has the potential to double the current Senior's Additional Exemption from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for gualified seniors on fixed incomes. However, this amendment did not



automatically double the exemption to \$50,000. Instead, it gave the County and various cities the "local option" to increase the current \$25,000 exemption to any amount "up to \$50,000." To date, only eleven Broward cities adopted the increase to \$50,000. The eleven cities are Cooper City, Coral Springs, Dania Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, Lighthouse Point, Miramar, Oakland Park, Pembroke Pines, Sunrise and Weston. Many of the taxing authorities deferred action on the increase -- even though they are supportive of the concept -- because of the significant revenue cuts imposed on them by the Legislature's new tax reform law.

### "My Neighbor And I Have Identical Homes, So Why Are My Taxes So Much Higher?"

"My neighbor and I own identical homes. Both were built in the same year and sit on identical sized lots. My neighbor bought her house six years ago and I just purchased my home last year. My estimated tax bill for this year is \$10,530 – but my neighbor's bill is only \$6,220. There must be a mistake!"

Unfortunately, we hear this story several times a day. A provision in Florida's Constitution -- the "Save Our Homes"

Amendment -- causes this disparity and confusion. Overwhelmingly adopted by Florida voters, Save Our Homes was intended to prevent homeowners from being taxed out of their homes in the face of rapidly rising real estate values. The Save Our Homes cap limits increases in assessed value of homesteaded properties to no more than 3% per year -- regardless of how much more the properties increase in market value.



Because of this, current Florida law favors owners who stay in

their homesteaded property for many years. The longer you stay and the more your property rises in market value from original value, the more you save under the current law. Please see our educational brochure on the proposed Constitutional Amendment, as it provides more details on the 2008 ballot question to phase-out the Save Our Homes protection.

### Dear Broward Neighbors,

We're constantly working to improve this office ... but I need your help. If you have ideas to make our office even better, please drop me a note or email me at lori@bcpa.net

Lori Parrish, CFA Broward County Property Appraiser





**IMPORTANT: "Understanding Your TRIM Notice"** Inside ... See Pages 2-3

## **Protecting Your Rights as a Taxpayer** is as Easy as I-2-3

CAREFULLY READ YOUR PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX NOTICE. Many taxpayers ignore their Truth in Millage Notice ("TRIM Notice") of proposed property taxes until it is too late to challenge an assessment or question the proposed tax rates. But, if you act timely, you can protect your rights. The first thing to understand is how your taxes are calculated. It is based upon this math formula: TAXABLE VALUE x TAX MILLAGE RATES + SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS = TAX BILL. Our office determines the assessed value of your property. We do **NOT** set any tax rates. Your various governmental taxing authorities -- the School Board, County Commission, City Commission, hospital district board, etc. -- set your tax millage rates.

CHALLENGING YOUR PROPERTY'S ASSESSMENT.



Z Your TRIM Notice reflects our office's **ASSESSMENT** of your property's taxable value. For non-homesteaded property, the assessed value is always identical to the property's market value as of January 1,2007. For homesteaded property, your taxable assessment is the Save Our Homes value. In most instances, our market values are determined using a mass-appraisal process based upon multiple sales of comparable properties in the same or similar subdivisions. BOTTOM LINE: If our market value of your property (as printed on your TRIM Notice) is higher than you believe a buyer would reasonably pay for your property on the open market, either call or email our office or file a value petition by the September 18, 2007 deadline. Please see inside for the contact phone numbers, email addresses, and more details.

QUESTIONING PROPOSED TAX RATES, FEES & BUDGET CUTS. Your TRIM Notice also contains proposed **TAX RATES** for your property, as set by the various taxing authorities (i.e., School Board, County Commission, City Commission, hospital district board, water management district board, etc.). On average, properties in Broward County increased approximately 12% in taxable value this year over the previous year -- even though the real estate market has remained rather flat in terms of the number of properties sitting unsold on the market for lengthy periods. Due to the property tax "roll back" law adopted by the Legislature in June 2007 -- which cut local government spending for many taxing authorities -- this increase in value is unlikely to translate into tax hikes for many property owners. As many communities are cutting budgets this year, pay close attention to the budget process to see if you agree with the proposed cuts in spending and services. If you want to question your proposed tax rate, the non-ad valorem fees and special assessments, or the services being cut from local budgets, you should contact your elected officials who serve on those taxing authorities or attend the public hearings in September. Your TRIM Notice has all of the hearing dates and locations for each taxing authority.

Please see the enclosed educational brochure for more detailed information on the new property tax reform law and the proposed January 2008 Constitutional Amendment.

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# Understanding Your TRIM ("Truth In Millage") Notice

### The Important Parts of Your TRIM Notice

### Looking at your TRIM Notice, here are the parts you should read very carefully:

- A Name(s) of the current property owner(s), and the Parcel ID or account number for the property.
- **B** The governmental entities that tax your property.
- C Amount of taxes last year for your property.
- D What your taxes will be this year **IF** the taxing authorities adopt their proposed budgets after the public hearings in September.
- E Schedule of public hearings. If you believe the proposed millage (tax) rates are too high, these are the meetings you may attend to let the taxing authorities hear your objections.
- F The appraised "Market Value" of your property as of January 1, 2007. This is our opinion of the real value of your property on the open market.
- G The "Assessed Value" of your property as of January 1, 2007 -- sometimes referred to as the "Save Our Homes" value. This amount (minus exemptions) is applied against the millage rate to determine your property taxes.
- H The value of any exemptions (Homestead, Widow/Widower, Disabled, Disabled Veteran) on your property as of January 1, 2007. Note: If you acquired this property AFTER January 1, these "inherited" exemptions from the previous owner will **automatically expire** at the end of this year. You must apply for your own Homestead and other exemptions on this property (if eligible), regardless of whether you previously had it elsewhere. Exemptions do NOT transfer from one property to the next.
- I The taxable value of your property (Assessed Value minus Exemptions = Taxable Value).
- ] The value of your Seniors' Additional Exemption (for gualified seniors on fixed incomes).
- K The taxable value of your property after any deduction for the Seniors' Additional Exemption.
- L Non-Ad Valorem fees or "special assessments." The Property Appraiser has nothing to do with setting these fees, and they have no relationship to the value of your property. Contact the authorities listed in this lower portion if you have questions about any of these assessments.

## **Property Values vs. Millage (Tax) Rates**

If you don't like what you see in your TRIM Notice, who should you call?

VALUES & EXEMPTIONS - The Property Appraiser is responsible for determining market values, assessed values, and applying exemptions and special classifications (non-profits and agricultural). If the VALUE is more than you believe a buyer would pay for your property -- or you applied for an EXEMPTION but it wasn't printed on the TRIM Notice -- call the Property Appraiser's office.

TAX RATES & SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS - If you think the amount of TAXES is too much, the MILLAGE RATE is too high, or the non-ad valorem FEES are too costly, you need to contact the taxing authorities (City Commission, County Commission, School Board, hospital district, etc.) listed on your notice. The Property Appraiser does NOT levy or collect any taxes.

## **Extended Hours for TRIM Season**

To speak in person with one of our appraisers about your assessment, please visit our Main Office at 115 South Andrews Avenue, Room 111, in downtown Fort Lauderdale (just south of Broward Boulevard). Our Main Office is always open weekdays from 7 am until 6 pm -- and we will stay open until 7 pm weekdays during September 4-18.

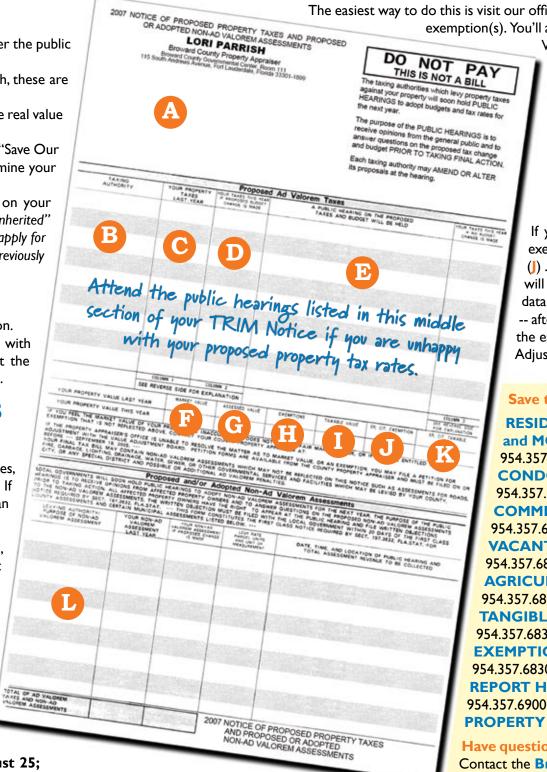
SPECIAL WEEKEND HOURS: Both of our offices will also be open on Saturday, August 25; Saturday, September 8; and Saturday, September 15 from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm to better serve your busy schedules.

Skip the lines! Download V.A.B. petitions and find other info at our BCPA.NET website -- just click the menu link for "Appeals Process."

IMPORTANT: All petitions APPEALING ASSESSED VALUES must be received by the Broward County Value Adjustment Board by the close of business on September 18, 2007. All "Good Cause" late filing petitions for an EXEMPTION must be received by the Broward County Value Adjustment Board by the close of business on December 31, 2007.

## **Did You Forget to File for a 2007 Exemption?**

If you forgot to file for a 2007 Homestead Exemption, Widow/Widower Exemption, Disabled Veteran Exemption or some other tax-saving exemption for which you were eligible as of January 1, 2007, you still have time to "late file."



The easiest way to do this is visit our office by September 18,2007 and file an application for the appropriate exemption(s). You'll also need to file a "Late Filing" petition and pay a \$15 filing fee to the Value Adjustment Board. It's not complicated -- and we'll gladly help you with the simple paperwork. You may still late file from September 19, 2007 to December 31, 2007, but the Value Adjustment Board requires additional "Good Cause" paperwork and will likely require you to attend a hearing before any exemptions may be approved by our office.

## "How Can I Challenge My Appraised Value?"

If you think the market value (F) for your property is wrong ... or an exemption you thought you had did not appear on your TRIM Notice (H) and () ... the **first thing** you should do is call our office. One of our appraisers will be happy to speak with you, listen to your concerns, and discuss the data we used to reach the value. If there was a mistake, we'll correct it. If -- after speaking with you -- we still believe our value is accurate, we'll explain the easy steps you can take to file an appeal with the Broward County Value Adjustment Board (an independent and guasi-judicial review board).

### Save time by directing your call to the BCPA section you need:

### **RESIDENTIAL VALUES (SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES, TOWNHOMES** and MOBILE HOMES):

954.357.6831 (Dennis Staruch, Supervisor - dstaruch@bcpa.net) CONDO, CO-OP and TIME-SHARE VALUES: 954.357.6832 (Scott Lewis, Supervisor - slewis@bcpa.net) **COMMERCIAL (incl. DUPLEXES) REAL PROPERTY VALUES:** 954.357.6835 (Paul Murphy, Manager - pmurphy@bcpa.net) **VACANT LAND VALUES:** 954.357.6890 (Mark Taravella, Supervisor - mtaravella@bcpa.net) **AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES:** 954.357.6866 (Jason Curtis, Analyst - jcurtis@bcpa.net) TANGIBLE (COMMERCIAL) PERSONAL PROPERTY: 954.357.6836 (Jack Gruber, Director - jgruber@bcpa.net) **EXEMPTIONS AND ALL OTHER GENERAL QUESTIONS:** 954.357.6830 (Cheryl Guske, Manager - cguske@bcpa.net) **REPORT HOMESTEAD FRAUD:** 954.357.6900 (Ron Cacciatore, Director - rcacciatore@bcpa.net) PROPERTY APPRAISER LORI PARRISH: 954.357.6904 - lori@bcpa.net

Have questions for the Value Adjustment Board (VAB) about your petition? Contact the Broward County Value Adjustment Board directly at 954.357.7292 or visit their office at 115 S. Andrews Avenue, Room 120, Fort Lauderdale.