AAP Journal
Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania

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CCAP County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania
Serving Counties Since 1886
An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

Asssessment Reform Part of CCAP Priorities

County leaders from throughout Pennsylvania recently unveiled a list of ten key county government priorities for 2012 that called on state lawmakers to provide counties with the tools to provide efficient delivery of important services to state residents. Among those priorities was the administration of the assessment system. "Our goals are ambitious" Jo Ellen Litz, Lebanon County commissioner and 2012 CCAP president said during an announcement in the Capitol Rotunda. Litz said the priorities reflect a consensus of Pennsylvania's county governments on issues of highest significance and greatest potential impact to counties and their taxpayers.

ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT REFORM PRIORITY

Fairness and equity are not easily achieved in the current administrative system and the current statutory construct, and the property tax assessment system is in need of reform. Several important steps have been accomplished toward this goal, and several more are underway. Over the last several years CCAP and AAP participated in the work of the Local Government Commission to codify, combine and clarify the varying assessment laws into a single statute.

In 2010, codification was achieved under Act 93. Although it is simply a codification, and is not a substantive change to assessment law or practice, it achieves the goal of making the law's application more uniform for property owners, county assessors and other practitioners. And while it is not assessment reform, its reduction of the multiple laws into a single statute is an important first step toward reform of the system. The second most significant recent development was the September 2010 release by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) of the results of its study and recommendations on improvement to the assessment systems. The report has been widely recognized as the most thorough and accurate review done to date of the operation of the system, along with its strengths and deficiencies. The report, Pennsylvania's System for Property Valuation and Reassessment, can be found on the LBFC website, *www.lbfc.legis.state.pa.us.*

CCAP has endorsed all six recommendations contained in the report. The Association has the legislative options sections under review. Some legislative work has begun on review and implementation of the LBFC report and recommendations. This session, the report has been reviewed with relevant legislative committees, and most recently CCAP and AAP have been appointed as members of House task forces convened to study and make recommendations on assessment practices and on changes in State Tax Equalization Board (STEB) methodology, both of which are among the LBFC recommendations.

Separately, CCAP and AAP have convened a work group to meet with STEB on enhancements to its operations, and to develop more detailed best practices for assessment office operations.
LBFC report.

Ideas for You

BECOME A RESPSECTED COMMUNICATOR

Good communication takes hard work and daily practice. Speak to your boss and colleagues succinctly and with purpose. Here's how:

- **Begin with a strong statement.** Grab listeners by revealing your most important point first. *Example:* "We need to be more efficient as a team." Now your listeners want to hear more.
- **Stay focused.** Everyone's short on time, so stick to the point of the conversation. Avoid distractions such as irrelevant stories and lots of data.
- **Offer real value.** Don't talk just to protect your interests or show off what you know. When people become fed up with your drivel, they will stop listening. *Worse:* You could hurt your career.
- *Tip:* Change your mindset from just informing the listener to influencing the listener.

What's Inside

President's Message, Legislative Update, AAP People, IAAO Membership Offer, Upcoming Conferences

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President's Message

Dear AAP Members,

2012…You've got to be kidding…what happened to 2011?

As we make plans for 2012, be sure to place on your calendars the 2012 AAP conferences…the Annual Conference is May 9 to 11 at Seven Springs, and the Fall Conference is November 15 and16 at the Penn Stater in State College. If you're marking your 2013 calendar, Annual Conference is scheduled for Seven Springs from April 24 to 26 and the fall conference at the Nittany Lion Inn from November 7 to 8.

We all realize that budgets are strained to the limit. Mandatory continuing education required under Act 28 is one thing, but getting together with other assessors and having the ability to just talk over issues is equally important.

We'll also be looking for nominations for the AAP Board at the upcoming Conference in May. In addition to nominations from the Nominating Committee, you as AAP members can make nominations from the floor for anyone you, as AAP members, believe will represent you on the Board.

As county budgets are stretched, we have found that more and more tasks are being added to directors, chief assessors and assessment offices. If you find yourself in this position, let us know. We as an association may want to look at developing educational opportunities to assist you in your "newly found" responsibilities. This is your association…let us know how the AAP can help.

Very truly yours,

Steve



Legislative Update

By Jonathan B. Schuck, Chair
Government Information Committee and
Assistant Director of Assessment/Tax Claim, Chester County

Greetings fellow assessment professionals throughout the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. By the time you receive this issue of the AAP Journal, we will have embarked upon a new year – a year likely to be filled with many new challenges and learning opportunities. Some of these challenges and opportunities may result from legislative activity since my last update. Following is a summary of activity since September 2011:

House Bill 937

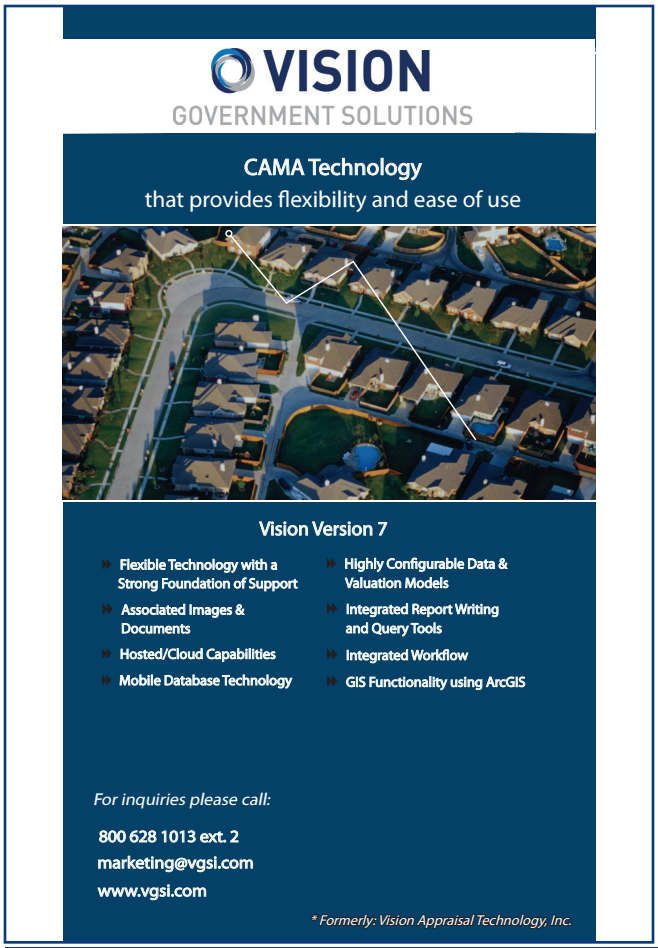
This amendment changes the scope of Section 402 to apply to cities of the first class in counties of the first class. It also limits the increase in the amount of taxes levied to five percent. It goes on to say that this limit to the increase is not a cap on the increase to individual properties. Bill referred to Local Government Committee as of October 18.

House Bill 1600

This amendment allows cities of the first class, eligible under Section 8586.1, to grant a homestead exclusion. Bill referred to Urban Affairs Committee as of October 18.

House Bill 1929

This Constitutional amendment would extend the disabled veterans' exemption to the unmarried surviving spouse of a citizen or resident killed in action. Bill referred to Finance Committee as of October 24.



House Bill 2019

This act would phase out real estate property tax over a three year period and replace it with an increased sales tax, use tax and personal income tax. While the property tax is phased out (in thirds), the increases to the other taxes are phased in (also in thirds), eventually becoming 3% additional sales tax, 3% additional use tax and 1.5% additional personal income tax. School districts and municipalities would have the option of increasing (or imposing) an earned income tax to make up any shortfall, but this would be subject to referendum. Bill referred to Finance Committee as of November 17.

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Article submissions are welcome.
Please send to:
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Get your newbies up to speed and fully motivated to start work

If you can't motivate your newest hires to stick around, you'll waste all the time and money you put into recruiting them in the first place. A good orientation program can strengthen retention in the short term as well as for the long run, and it can create a workforce of motivated and productive employees.

Follow these tips:

Start ahead of time. Send the new hires a package at home that gives them an overall picture of the organization. Focus on what each area does and how all the employees are connected. Express excitement about the new employee's arrival.

Get face to face. Don't rely on a written manual or online materials to explain what new employees need to know. Bring managers and trainers in to put a human face on your organization from the beginning. Emphasize communication so employees feel comfortable asking questions and listening to each other.

Don't overwhelm employees. Start with the most important information while employees are still fresh. Break the orientation into segments to present over time, not all at once, and keep the sessions lively and hands-on so no one gets bored.

Emphasize communication so employees feel comfortable asking questions and listening to each other.

Use a buddy system. Team up each new hire with an experienced employee to explain how things work and answer questions. You'll relieve a lot of new employee anxiety, and you'll help the newcomer meet people right away.

Establish some goals. Give your new people some real work that can be completed within the first few weeks. Getting them up and running quickly gives new employees a sense of being a valuable and necessary member of the team.

Keep feedback flowing. Don't just drop newcomers into the workforce after the orientation is over. They need to know they're doing a good job as they adjust to your organization, so set up a schedule for meeting then regularly to keep the lines of communication open.

Adapted from a Kelly Services press release on the PR Wire website.





CHAPTER NEWS

South Central Chapter

The South Central Chapter meets quarterly. Meetings are quarterly - March, June, September and December, beginning with a business meetings at 9 a.m. with seminars beginning immediately after the meeting and are held at the Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, 670 Old Harrisburg Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325.

North West Chapter

The North West Chapter had the following members pass their CPE exam in 2011: **Tim Beyer**, Warren County, **Barry Seastead**, Warren County, **Robert Coon**, Jefferson County and **Megan Park**, Elk County.

COUNTY NEWS

Montgomery County

Montgomery County has a new CPE - **Adam Rhoads** passed his exam in January 2011. Congratulations, Adam!

Perry County

Randy Waggoner, Chief Assessor of Perry County, and his family welcomed his new granddaughter, Maddie Rose Waggoner, right before Christmas. Congratulations to the Waggoner family.

Philadelphia County

Philadelphia County is happy to report that the county has several new CPEs and has had numerous promotions within the assessment office.

The county's new CPEs are **Rhoda Lynn Campbell, Donna Dirscherl, Joan Engard, Joseph Granato, Scott Meyer, George Morgan, James Murphy, William Paravisini, Paul Prior, Allan Richter, Sharon Swann** and **Chandler Wolf**.

The following staff members have been named to the position of Evaluator 1: **William Black, Rosa Castillo, Carol Gaudini, Theresa Ginter, Kenneth Madden** and **Denise Wadsworth**. In addition, the follow staff members have been promoted to Evaluator 2: **Julia Berg, Neil Blunt, Kenlyn Brown, Edward DiGirolamo, Michael Gugliemelli, Antonette LaFauci, Rita Leone, Deidre O'Toole** and **Jihan Pauling**.

Sending out get well wishes to **Marian Ciliberti** who had both of her knees replaced in 2011.

Tioga County

In October 2011 **Josh Zeyn** became the proud dad of Madison Elizabeth. You might know her grandpa, **George Zeyn**, chief assessor in Union County. Congratulations!

Contact us with your chapter or county news!

Don't forget to send your important news for the next *AAP Journal*.

Our next deadline is March 7.

Please send all your news to Terry Cochran at *tcochran@pacounties.org*.

Position only:
See new artwork

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Jonathan B. Schuck
Assistant Director
Assesment/Tax Claim
Chester County

Name: Jonathan B. Schuck

Position: Assistant Director, Assessment/Tax Claim

Years in assessment field: Three

County: Chester

Marital status and family: Married, four children – one girl (17) and three boys (15,13,11)

What irritates me most in the assessment business: unfunded mandates

Most people would be surprised to know: I've been to Paradise and back twice in my life

Biggest challenge as an assessor: explaining Pennsylvania's base year assessment model and appeal process to new homeowners and residents

First Job: hardware clerk in high school

If I couldn't be an assessor, I'd be: a professor of medieval history

If I won millions in the lottery, I would: "donate" half to the government, pay off my mortgage, fully fund my kids' college funds and support sustainable public health enterprises in developing countries

Favorite vacation: second honeymoon in Quebec City, Canada

Favorite food and drink: a rack of barbeque ribs with a pint of Tartan Special Ale

Favorite movie: The Matrix

Three people living or dead that I would invite to dinner: George C. Marshall, Francis A. Schaeffer and Condoleezza Rice

If I could live in the past for one day, I would: ask for my bride's hand in marriage at an even younger age.

My best friend: my wife Rhonda

AAP
ASSESSORS' ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

MEMBERABILIA

Legislative Update continued from page 3

Senate Bill 1267

This act would allow taxing bodies to abate the tax year 2011 property taxes for properties damaged by Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. The reduction would be effective retroactively to January 1, 2011, and properties that have already paid would be eligible for refunds. The amount abated or refunded is not to exceed $30,000. The act also allows for a graduated three year exemption for reconstruction or repairs. Passed in the Senate 49-0 on September 28 and in House Finance Committee as of November 18.

Senate Bill 1281

This amendment would allow governing bodies (counties, towns, boroughs, cities) to impose a real estate tax on the aggregate land value (less $200,000) of property owned by an institution of purely public charity. Referred to Finance Committee as of October 3, 2011.

Senate Bill 1298

This amendment adds "any land devoted to composting or used for nutrient management" to the list of things which can be enrolled under "agricultural use" in Act 319. It also provided definitions for these two new types. Referred to Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee as of October 18 and under first consideration as of December 14.

Senate Bill 1314

This amendment repeals Section 11, making the Act apply to counties of the first class. It then gives assessors employed by counties of the first class four years to become certified under the act. Referred to Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee as of October 26.

Wishing each of you a productive and prosperous new year!

IAAO Membership Offer

2 for $200 It's Back!

Good things come in pairs, so IAAO offers new members the chance to get up to two years (or more!) of membership for only $200. New members who join now won't pay dues again until January 1, 2014! Take advantage of this incredible $200 membership offer before it expires on **March 31, 2012**.

Members who recruit new members are entered into a monthly drawing for $200 for each new member referred. Don't forget to put your name on the referral line of the application! (2 for $200 pricing is not applicable for membership renewals.) The application can be accessed on the IAAO website at *www.iaao.org*.

Financial Hardship?

IAAO can help. Hardship Scholarships are available to help defray the cost of membership. Apply for the Hardship Scholarship before February 29, 2012.

Contact Angela Blazevic, Director of Administration, at *blazevic@iaao.org* or (816) 701-8123 for more information.



AAP Calendar

Spring CPE Classes
CCAP North Office Building, Harrisburg

Introduction - March 5-9
Site/Market - March 13-16
Income - March 20-23
Cost - March 26-30

2012 Conferences

May 9 to 11 - Annual Conference,
Seven Springs Mountain Resort
Seven Springs

November 15 to 16 - Fall Conference
Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel
State College

* Registration and class details are available on the AAP website, *www.paassessors.org*.

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