AAP Journal
Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania

AAP
ASSESSORS' ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

Summer 2019
Issue 3 Volume 16

CCAP
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS Association of Pennsylvania

An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

Assessment Office Public Relations

By Deborah Crawford, CPE
Tioga County Chief Assessor/Tax Claim Director

On November 14, 2018 the Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania's Board of Governors adopted as best practices *Assessment Office Public Relations: Building a Spirit of Cooperation and Understanding with the Public.* This was the final document created as part of the Pennsylvania Local Government Commission's Assessment Reform Task Force. This article is based on the recommendations set forth in that document.

A proactive public relations program can build a better relationship with the public and aid the assessment office in providing courteous, accurate and thorough information to various constituencies. The strongest opinions about the assessment office are formed by the words and actions of its employees.

There are four steps in developing a public relations program: research, action planning, communication and evaluation.

Research. Anticipate and interpret public opinion, attitudes and issues that may impact the assessment office and or assessment office personnel. Listen to what the public is saying about the assessment office, processes and procedures; observe public reactions in person and through social media.

Action Planning. Based upon the results of your research, develop an action plan. The county assessment office should formulate a plan, in coordination with the county commissioners or the appeals board and the public relations spokesperson. An action plan is vital when the county is preparing to undergo and implement a countywide reassessment.

When faced with criticism, the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) recommends the following actions.

- Respond quickly, honestly and openly.
- Identify key constituencies and pay special attention to their views.
- Involve all staff from top management down.
- Prepare and preserve complete written documentation of the criticism and the solutions proposed or adopted.

Communication. When engaging and building relationships with the public demonstrate appropriate demeanor. Assessment office personnel should be ready to answer questions from the public and be an empathetic listener. This is especially important when tax bills and change of assessment notices are mailed. Knowledgeable staff can promote cooperative relationships between the office, county and the public.

The assessment office should develop communication tools such as, a

Continued on page 5

AAP Education Calendar

AAP Board Meeting
CCAP Office, Harrisburg
July 12

IAAO Annual Conference
Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada
September 8 - 11

Fall 2019 CPE Classes
CCAP Office, Harrisburg
Intro - September 15 - 20
Site/Market – September 23 - 27
Cost – September 20 - October 4
Income - October 7 - 11

2019 Fall Board Meeting
Hershey Lodge &
Convention Center
November 6

2019 Fall Conference
Hershey Lodge &
Convention Center
November 7 - 8

CPE Class Review
CCAP Office, Harrisburg
December 2 - 4

** Check the AAP website, www.paassessors.org, for more details!*

What's Inside

President's Message, Legislative Update, County Corner, AAP People

AAP OFFICERS

Mark Kellerman, CPE
Centre County
President
(814) 355-6721
mjkellerman@centrecountypa.gov

Robert Roland, CPE
Bedford County
President Elect
(814) 623-4842
rroland@bedfordcountypa.org

Susan Miller, CPE
Adams County
Vice President
(717) 337-9837
sbmiller@adamscounty.us

Jennifer Pettina, CPE
Centre County
Treasurer
(814) 355-6721
jkpettina@centrecountypa.gov

Joshua Zeyn, CPE
Tioga County
Secretary
(570) 724-9117
jzeyn@tiogacountypa.us

Deborah Crawford, CPE
Tioga County
Immediate Past President
(570) 723-8112
dcrawford@tiogacountypa.us

AAP COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Jonathan Schuck, CPE
Chester County
Government Information Chair
(610) 344-6147
jschuck@chesco.org

Charles 'JR' Hardester, CPE
Lawrence County
Education Co Chair
(724) 656-2191
chardester@co.lawrence.pa.us

Randy Waggoner, CPE
Perry County
Education Co Chair
(717) 582-2131
rwaggoner@perryco.org



President's Message

Hello Everyone,

Spring has arrived and it's time to get outdoors to enjoy all those warm weather activities we've missed so much through those seemingly never ending winter months.

Our 71st Annual Conference at Sheraton Station Square was a success. I enjoyed the venue, classes and visiting Pittsburgh. I thank the Conference Planning Committee for scheduling the classes and instructors which is never an easy task, but is more difficult at the end of the certification renewal period.

I want to say thank you to outgoing President Deb Crawford for the outstanding job she did throughout this past year. I would be remiss in not thanking my fellow officers, the Board of Governors, CCAP staff and our friends at the Local Government Commission for all their good work and guidance. A warm welcome goes out to Joshua Zeyn, our newly elected Secretary. Our Association's future is in good hands.

I would like to thank Joan Righter Price for her dedication, service and countless contributions to the AAP for many years. I look forward to future presentations from Joan as an instructor. I welcome Jeffrey Engle as the new AAP Solicitor.

At the time of this writing, a number of Local Government Commission Assessment Reform Task Force bills are progressing through the legislature. Amendments to Act 98 would provide for the appointment of two Certified Pennsylvania Evaluators to the State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers, amendments to Act 28 would define qualifications and training of revaluation company personnel and Certified Pennsylvania Evaluators. Also, HB 1034/ SB 493 would provide greater accountability for permit information to be forwarded to county assessment offices and authorizes counties to enact reporting ordinances. The AAP Assessment Law Subcommittee and the Local Government Commission have been working together on many of these projects over the past years and their efforts are much appreciated.

One other very important ongoing project involving CCAP, the AAP and the Local Government Commission is Act 155 which requires appeal board member training. A work group has been formed to provide the curriculum for the nine hours of training. We have made great progress and plan to have it finalized this fall.

While education is one of the primary goals of the AAP, it is also important that members stay up to date with changes in the legislation and case law that affects us every day. I've found the best way to have a voice in this association and our profession is to become involved at the chapter and state level. I encourage your involvement in the AAP and believe you will find it as rewarding as I have.

I hope everyone has a wonderful summer, enjoy family and friends and stay safe. I look forward to seeing everyone at our Fall Conference at Hershey Lodge.

Mark

Mark Kellerman, CPE
AAP President



Legislative Update

By Jonathan B. Schuck, Chair
Government Information Committee and
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, it will be well into the summer season. Hope you have already enjoyed some well-deserved vacation time or have plans to enjoy time off before the seasons once again turn. In either case, those who are part of the AAP remain committed to meeting the complex and diverse challenges encountered with a combination of intelligence, applied knowledge and creativity. Keeping abreast of the legislative environment is one means of accomplishing this goal.

Five months into the 2019/2020 Session, 2661 bills/resolutions have been introduced, 42 of which pertain to assessment-related matters. Since the prior Update in early March, there has been some movement on a number of bills and several new bills of possible interest. Enjoy!

House Bill 1032/Senate Bill 491

These companion amendments would increase the size of the State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers from eight to ten members. Six of the members would be certified real estate appraisers, two would be Certified Pennsylvania Evaluators and two would be public members. An appointee can be both a certified real estate appraiser and a CPE but the appointment has to specify in which capacity they are being appointed. House Bill 1032 had its first consideration in the Local Government Committee on May 6 and Senate Bill 491 had its second consideration and is currently in the Appropriations Committee.

House Bill 1033/Senate Bill 492

These companion amendments would change the definitions of "assessor", "Certified Pennsylvania Evaluator" and "revaluation company" and add definitions for "property valuation model" and "revaluation company personnel". Also they would require that all persons responsible for the valuation of real property for ad valorem taxation purposes be certified. This includes people employed by revaluation companies who are directly responsible for valuation of real property or the development of a property valuation model. Like the previous companion bills, House Bill 1033 had its first consideration in the Local Government Committee on May 6 and Senate Bill 492 had its second consideration and is currently in the Appropriations Committee.

House Bill 1034/Senate Bill 493

These companion amendments would strengthen provisions of current assessment law on proper and timely submission of building permits to county assessment offices. It also allows for the creation of a county improvement certification form which would be submitted to the county assessment office by all persons making substantial improvements to their property regardless of whether a building permit is required. It provides for a civil penalty for those who fail to submit the form. House Bill 1034 had its first consideration in the Local Government Committee on May 6 and Senate Bill 493 had its first consideration in the Local Government Committee March 29.

Continued on Page 4

AAP STAFF

Douglas E. Hill
Executive Director
PO Box 60769
Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769
(717) 736-4715
fax (717) 526-1020
dhill@pacounties.org

Terry Cochran
Deputy Director
PO Box 60769
Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769
(717) 736-4734
fax (717) 526-1020
tcochran@pacounties.org

Lori Lawyer
Administrative Assistant
PO Box 60769
Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769
(717) 736-4712
fax (717) 526-1020
llawyer@pacounties.org

The *AAP Journal* is published four times a year.
Deadline for the Fall 2019 issue is September 6, 2019.

Article submissions are welcome.
Please send to:
Terry Cochran
AAP Deputy Director

Publication Disclaimer
The information provided in this publication is not intended to take the place of professional advice. Readers are encouraged to consult with competent legal, financial, or other appropriate professionals. Statements of facts and opinions expressed in this publication, by authors other than Association staff and officers, are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent an opinion or philosophy of the officers, members and staff of the Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania (AAP). No endorsement of advertised products or services is implied by AAP unless those products or services are expressly endorsed, or are owned or managed by the Association programs, or our affiliates. This publication may not be reproduced, modified, distributed, or displayed in part or in whole, by any means, without advance written permission of AAP. Please direct your requests to Terry Cochran. *Note:* As part of its copyright agreement, the AAP grants the author the right to place the final version of his/her manuscript on the author's home page, subject to AAP's standards, or in a public digital repository, provided there is a link to the AAP website.

AAP People & Chapter News

South Central Chapter

The chapter meets quarterly - March, June, September and December. Each meeting begins with the business meetings at 9 a.m., with seminars beginning immediately after the meeting (approximately 9:30 a.m.) and are held at the Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, 670 Old Harrisburg Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325. Please contact **Susan Miller** at (717) 337-9837 for more information.

Centre County

Centre County would like to announce its newest CPE - **Jeff Catherman**!

Chester County

Chester County Assessment Office team member **Monica Snyder** passed the CPE exam on May 23. Congratulations, Monica!

Clarion County

The county and the Northwest Chapter would like to wish **Roxanne "Roxi" Randolph** all the best in her retirement. Roxi's last day will be June 28, but she will continue on part-time with the county until the fall. Roxi served as President of the chapter in 2015, and has provided us with a lot of smiles over the years. Thank you Roxi!!

Cumberland County

Welcome to the county's newest appraiser, **Joe Mazzola,** commercial appraiser. Joe was formerly an appraiser in Luzerne County.

Dauphin County

The county welcomes **Mike Zito** as the newest appraiser. Mike was a former field data collector in Adams County.

Franklin County

The county welcomes **Mary Connolly** their newest Appraiser I.

Huntingdon County

Congratulations to Chief Assessor **Ken Tucker** who retired from the county on May 3. Congratulations, Ken!

Melissa Bousum is currently serving as the interim chief.

Lebanon County

Commercial appraiser **Carl Stumpf** married Tara Ensminger on May 18. Carl and Tara are planning an extended honeymoon to Australia, New Zealand and a visit Carl's parents in Australia. Carl did pass along that he is planning the vacation around the 2019 appeal schedule. Congratulations to the happy couple!

Send Your Chapter and County News!

Don't forget to send your county or chapter news for the Fall 2019 issue of the AAP Journal. Our next deadline is **September 6.**

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

Legislative Update
Continued from Page 3

House Bill 1299

This amendment would repeal the Uniformity Clause of the Pennsylvania Constitution and allow for consideration of more progressive personal property tax policies. Introduced in the Finance Committee on April 25.

House Bill 1566

This amendment would grant to boards and commissions dealing with professional licenses the power to issue advisory opinions concerning the meaning or interpretation of an act or regulation pertaining to their respective professions. A person acting in good faith on the board's advisory opinion would not be subject to criminal or civil penalties or disciplinary action by the board or commission. Introduced in the Professional Licensure Committee on June 4.

Serving PA Assessors for 42 years

Tax Bill Printing
Tax Claim Notice Printing
Mailing Services
Document Imaging
Electronic Archives

INFOCON CORPORATION
Now a division of HARRIS LOCAL GOVERNMENT
(814) 472-6066

Public Relations

Continued from page 1

procedural manual, printed/electronic information and correspondence. A well-designed assessment office website is another way to communicate with the public. It is important that information is easy to access and understand.

Review and Evaluation. After conducting the research, performing action planning and developing communication tools, the public relations program should be reviewed for effectiveness regularly and adjusted as deemed necessary.

Public Relations and Countywide Reassessments. (See Model RFP and *Contracting Guidelines for County Reassessment Services* and *Pennsylvania Property Assessment: A Self-Evaluation Guide for County Officials*)

Public relations and information is an important part of a successful reassessment. Depending on the type of reassessment (turnkey, hybrid or in-house) the revaluation company in cooperation with the county must conduct a comprehensive public information program. A public information campaign should include media releases, informational literature and handouts, direct mailings, broadcasts and rebroadcasts on television and radio, podcasts, a website, social media and oral presentations. Presentations should be tailored to specific communities/audiences.

The goal is to promote public understanding of the reassessment process. Possible public relations challenges should be considered. Are there certain areas of the county that may see a larger increase in values? What are the potentially negative issues and red flags you may need to prepare inform ation or a crisis response for in advance?

Public information releases with regard to the following phases of the project should be included.

- Contract signing
- Public meeting schedule
- General Project information
- Data collection visitation schedules
- Inventory mailer
- Informal review
- Project status updates

Below are a few of the points that should be addressed as often as possible.

- Significance of real property tax
- Necessity of the project
- Purpose and methods
- Role of the county and assessors
- Necessity of data collection
- Caliber, training and identification of data collectors (Data Collector Standards)

The revaluation company should include in its proposal sample press releases, brochures, pamphlets and any other materials used in previous projects.

"*Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their public.*" Public Relations Society of America.

Resources: *IAAO Standard on Public Relations*
Pennsylvania Property Assessment: A Self-Evaluation Guide for County Officials
Model RFP and Contracting Guidelines for County Reassessment Services
Public Relations Society of America

VISION
GOVERNMENT SOLUTIONS

Unrivaled
Service

Unparalleled
CAMA System

Unmatched
Appraisal Expertise

For More Information:
Phone: **(508) 351-3628**
Email: **sales@vgsi.com**
www.vgsi.com



CONNECTED SERVICES
ARE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

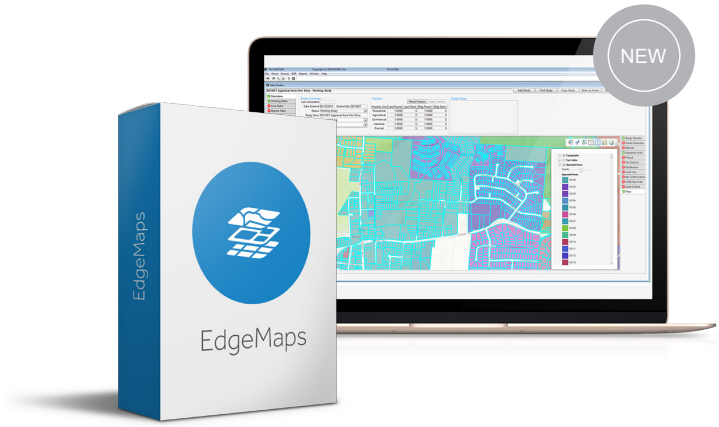
Allow our services to work for you, not the other way around.

As the budget tightens, your office faces the challenge of accomplishing more with fewer resources.

Imagine using industry-leading appraisal services to minimize time and effort, verify information, and reduce appeals. Our experienced industry experts handle it all while allowing you to focus on working smarter, not harder. With Tyler, appraisal services are supportive.

See what's possible at tylertech.com/appraisalservices.

tyler technologies
Empowering people who serve the public®



EdgeMaps™

EdgeMaps™ provides real-time GIS integration with authoritative CAMA and tax data. Powered by Esri's ArcGIS Platform, easy-to-configure web maps are embedded throughout the Edge™ software suite, offering high-value interactive thematic maps.

DEVNET

info@devnetinc.com | (866) 4-DEVNET | www.devnetinc.com

County Corner: Bradford County

By: Donna Roof, CPE, Chief Assessor

Bradford County is a beautiful county located in the Northeastern part of Pennsylvania. It's the second largest county in the state covering 1,161 square miles in area. It's bounded on the North by the New York state counties of Chemung and Tioga; East by Susquehanna County; Southeast by Wyoming County; South by Sullivan and Lycoming Counties; and, West by Tioga County.

There are 14 Boroughs and 37 Townships in the county. Towanda is centrally located and is the county seat where you can see a magnificent, unique courthouse. The first courthouse was a two-story wooden structure built in 1818 and was destroyed by fire in 1847. The second courthouse was a three story building constructed of brick and stone in 1848 and was condemned by the courts in 1897. The courthouse you see today is made of sandstone and was built in 1898. The sandstone was quarried and cut from Barclay Mountain in Bradford County. The white oak that was used for all doors, baseboards, window casings and exposed woodwork was also native hardwood from Bradford County.



Bradford County Courthouse

Listed in the National Register of Historical Places, the interior architecture of the courthouse is grand and exceptional for a county courthouse. Once inside the Main Street entrance, you will be captivated by the expert craftsmanship, materials, and ornate paintings that are seen throughout the building. As you stand under the rotunda looking up you will see a large one ton chandelier that was specially made for the Courthouse. There is also a beautiful large split Italian marble staircase that leads from the second to third floor.



Courthouse Rotunda

The exterior roof is copper and on top of it stands a 10' tall "Lady Justice" statue. She does not wear a blind fold.

You will find winding country roads, rural farmlands, mountains, streams, the mighty Susquehanna River, an abundance of wildlife, and friendly people! While there are no major interstate roads that run through the county, there are some very scenic routes (including Route 6) that will take you through picturesque landscapes and charming old towns. You might even see a majestic bald eagle perched on a tree branch or flying along the Susquehanna River… they are simply stunning.

Traveling west of Wyalusing along Route 6 you will find a couple of great places to pull off and enjoy a panoramic view of the river and mountains. One is the Wyalusing Rocks and the other being the Marie Antoinette Lookout.

The Wyalusing Rocks, also known as "Prayer Rocks", was once a sacred spot to Native Americans. This mountain cliff sits 500 feet above the Susquehanna River. It's located along "The Great Warrior Path", a Native American trail leading north to the lake region and south to the Carolinas. It was a signaling point for the Iroquois. There is a footpath that leads to the rocks themselves.

The Marie Antoinette Lookout is a scenic overlook that offers a view of the Susquehanna River, mountains, and the French Azilum historical site. The French Azilum was an established settlement for French refugees between 1793 and 1803. It is said that Queen Marie Antoinette was planning to escape France and come to live here, but she never made it out of France alive.



Marie Antoinette Lookout

Agriculture has always been an important way of life for many people who live in Bradford County. There are several manufacturing plants operating in the county and a few hospitals. One thing that changed the economy in our area is the presence of the Marcellus Shale gas industry It has brought jobs to the area, construction of hotels, and has been a good boost for local businesses. No matter what time of year it is, you can find people enjoying all that Bradford County has to offer.

From hunting, fishing, biking and hiking on over 54,000 acres of state game lands, to fairs and festivals, boating, or camping at one of the county parks, there's a lot to do in Bradford County! For more information on visiting Bradford County, go to *www.bradfordcountypa.org*

An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

PO Box 60769
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17106-0769
(717) 526-1010
fax (717) 526-1020