AAP Journal
Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania

AAP
ASSESSORS' ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

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CCAP
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS Association of Pennsylvania

An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

Assessment Reform - 2018 Accomplishments and Initiatives Toward That Goal

By Steve Howe, CPE, Director of Assessment, Dauphin County

The 2018 legislative session has ended with significant inroads toward assessment reform. The Property Assessment Reform Task Force of the Local Government Commission (LGC), with extensive input from the Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania (AAP), and in cooperation with the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), has adopted as best practices the following:

Data Collection Standards

In today's changing world, foremost in importance should be the safety of staff in the workplace - whether that workplace is in the office or outdoors in communities and neighborhoods. When our work group began developing this standard, we interviewed interested parties, including reassessment companies, in order to ascertain how counties accomplish infield-related activities related to review of real property and changes to assessment records. The group quickly realized that no standard of practice existed. Further, no standard existed regarding trespass. We have all heard horror stories of field staff confrontations with property owners that could have been avoided. The purpose of this standard is not to tell county commissioners or assessment office staff what to do, but this standard has been adopted by the LCG, AAP, and CCAP as best practices.

Major points in the standards are:

- The data collector, whether a CPE or not, represents the county. In all contacts, the individual should be knowledgeable and courteous.
- Respect the privacy of the property owner; no trespassing means no trespassing.
- When visiting a property, the first step should be an attempt to contact any occupant, leave identification information with the owner/occupant. If no answer at the property's door, consider leaving a door hanger and/or business card.
- Under no circumstances should entry into or discussion regarding the property take place with a minor child.
- If no one answers at the property door, identification/door hanger has been placed, and no gate exists, proceed with your field work.

RFP and Contracting Standards

The RFP and Contracting Standards document is intended to be a reference for counties considering a countywide reassessment. We discovered that county assessment offices and county commissioners may not fully understand the reassessment process, especially since Pennsylvania has no requirement for regular reassessments. This document, adopted as best practice by the LGC, AAP, and CCAP, is a step-by-step guide for counties to establish what is expected and required from a contractor for reassessment; whether it be turn-key, in-house, or hybrid, and not rely solely on what is recommended by a contractor. Having this additional information keeps the county in the driver's seat.

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AAP Education Calendar

Spring 2019 CPE Classes
CCAP Office, Harrisburg
Intro - March 4 - 8
Income – March 11 - 15
Cost – March 18 - 22
Site/Market - March 25 - 29

AAP Board Meeting
Sheraton Station Square, Pittsburgh
April 30

2019 Annual Conference
Sheraton Station Square, Pittsburgh
May 1 - 3

CPE Class Review
CCAP Office, Harrisburg
June 3 - 5

AAP Board Meeting
CCAP Office, Harrisburg
July 12

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 Conference
Hershey Lodge & Convention Center
November 7 - 8

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

What's Inside

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

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President's Message

By the time you receive this message we will have started the new year. I hope you had an enjoyable holiday and are ready to take on the new year with renewed energy!

I recommend that you take the time to review important changes made to the Consolidated County Assessment Law (CCAL) by Act 155 of 2018. This act goes into effect on January 1, 2020 and requires training for county Board of Appeals members. Members of the AAP Assessment Law and Education Committees are developing the required board training.

We are hopeful that the bills related to assessment reform that didn't pass in the last session will be reintroduced in the new session.

We have a new resource, *Assessment Office Public Relations: Building a Spirit of Cooperation and Understanding with the Public*, that the AAP adopted as best practices at our November Board of Governors' meeting at the Kalahari Resort. You can access the document on the AAP website, *www.paassessors.org*.

New educational opportunities based on the *Data Collection Standards* and the *Self-Evaluation Guide for County Officials* may be ready sometime in 2019.

Josh Zeyn and I spoke at the CCAP Fall Conference in Hershey this past November. The breakout session was called "Preparing Your County for Reassessment". We were pleased with the number of commissioners that expressed an interest in the subject. There was a lot of positive interaction with attendees. I encourage chief assessors and directors to take the time to review and discuss the *Self-Evaluation Guide* with your boards.

During the CCAP Fall Conference, CCAP members voted to make assessment reform one of their priorities for 2019. This is a promising step in the right direction for "fairness and equity" in assessments in Pennsylvania.

I am pleased to announce that JR Hardester was appointed to the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) Task Force #8 Geospatial Analysis Education, Phase II. Congratulations, JR!

It looks like 2019 may be another busy year for members of the AAP! I hope to see you at Spring Conference at the Sheraton Station Square, Pittsburgh from May 1st to 3rd.

Deb
AAP President
Chief Assessor, Tioga County



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,* we may have embarked upon a new year – a year likely to be filled with many new challenges and learning opportunities. In addition, a new legislative session will commence in January 2019. Therefore, it seems appropriate to review some highlights from the 2017/2018 Session.

Overall, the following legislation was introduced: 2694 House bills, 1178 House resolutions, 1265 Senate bills and 488 Senate resolutions. From this small tsunami of activity 37 House bills, two House resolutions and 27 Senate bills were assessment-related and two were ultimately enacted/approved:

Act 155 of 2018 (Senate Bill 1007) Approved 10/24/2018

This amendment clarifies what types of corrections may be made during an informal review of property value. It sets training requirements for members of Boards of Appeal and auxiliary boards who do not hold a CPE. It sets the conditions under which county commissioners may create auxiliary boards and states that auxiliary boards may not hear exemption appeals. It also allows for the creation of pools of qualified residents who may serve as auxiliary board of appeals members. Text of law can be found at *http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/BillInfo.cfm?syear=2017&sind=0&body=S&type=B&bn=1007.*

Pamphlet Laws Resolution No. 1 (House Bill 1285) – Filed in Office of the Secretary 7/17/2017

This Constitutional amendment raises the maximum amount of the homestead exclusion from 50% of the median value of all the homestead property to 100% of the value of each enrolled property. Approved by PA voters during the November 2017 general election. Please see text of law at *http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/BillInfo.cfm?syear=2017&sind=0&body=H&type=B&bn=1285.*

Topics of particular interest coming from the work of the Property Assessment Reform Task Force:

House Bill 1361/Senate Bill 689 - Addition of two CPEs to State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers (SBCREA)

House Bill 1890/Senate Bill 950 - Voluntary sales verification pilot program

House Bill 1991/Senate Bill 1006 - Building permit submission requirements

Other prevalent topics:

- Assessment Law Reform
- Taxpayer Relief/Real Property Tax Elimination
- Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans

A host of diverse legislation pertaining to the above topics was introduced during the session, much of which never moved out of committee. I anticipate that much of this legislation will be re-introduced during the next session.

Wishing each of you a productive and prosperous new year!

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Deadline for the Spring 2019 issue is March 6, 2019.

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

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AAP People & Chapter News

North West Chapter

The 2019 officers for the chapter are:

Joseph Galbo, III – President
Tyler Daniels – Vice President
Chad Cochran – Treasurer
Janet Courson – Secretary

The chapter's 2019 education classes are scheduled for April 12 (this session will include a three-hour continuing education class as well as the two-hour Act 28 class), June 7, August 9 and October 18.

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.

Adams County

Congratulations to **Daryl Crum**, Director of Tax Services, who ran the New York Marathon on November 4, 2018; his time was three hours, 13 minutes and he came in 2,445th out of 52,700 participants.

Chester County

Congratulations to **Eric Krawchuk** who passed his CPE exam in September 2018!

Fayette County

Congratulation to Chief Assessor **William Lukach** on his retirement at the end of December 2018. His fellow Fayette County assessors thank him for all he has done for their assessment office and wish him the best with his future endeavors. He will be sincerely missed.

The county is pleased to announce that **Jim Hercik**, AAP past president and former chief assessor, has been appointed as the *new* chief assessor. Congratulations, Jim!

Lancaster County

Congratulations to the county's newest CPE, **Stephanie Herr**.

Monroe County

Cindy Treible, Monroe County's chief assessor, would like to thank everyone for their well wishes, cards and thoughts and prayers during her husband's passing and recovery from her illness. Cindy returned to the office a few weeks ago and is hoping to see everyone at the conference in May!

Philadelphia County

Congratulations to **Michael McFarlane**, **Anthony Ruocchio**, **Monica Williams** and **James Williams** for completing and passing the coursework to be certified to teach IAAO classes.

Snyder County

Congratulations to **Michelle Mack** who passed her CPE exam in July 2018!

York County

Congratulations to **Ashley Scritchfield** who was promoted to the position of Assessor II!

AAP News

JP Fox, AAP past president and retired appraiser from Berks and Lehigh Counties, went to Hawaii during the summer of 2018 to house sit for a relative. He loved Hawaii so much he sold his home, most of his personal property and is now living 1000 feet away from Wiamea Bay on the island of Oahu. He says it really is paradise!

JR Hardester, Lawrence County chief assessor and AAP past president, has been invited to participate in the IAAO Geospatial Analysis Taskforce to design a curriculum outline and major learning objectives for a new tract of education on geospatial analysis in appraisal work. Congratulations, JR!

Send Your Chapter and County News!

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

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

Continued from page 1

This standard is designed as a customizable RFP and that will become a contract for reassessment services.

Self-Evaluation Tool

This guide was discussed in the Fall 2018 issue of the *AAP Journal* and has also been adopted as a best practice. Please review the cover article in the Fall issue for more information.

With the completion of the three above documents, the state mandate for a reassessment manual is essentially complete. Although they are not law, all have been adopted by the LGC, CCAP, and AAP and it is strongly suggested that all counties review and adopt as appropriate.

Board of Assessment Appeals

Act 55 of 2018 amends the Consolidated County Assessment Law (CCAL) to mandate training for assessment appeal board members. For many years this has been point of contention and discussion with AAP members. The passage of this act now brings to fruition the AAP's long-awaited reform to Boards of Assessment Appeals and Revisions. The act differentiates the "main" appeal/revision board from auxiliary appeal/revision boards. Prior to hearing appeals, the "main" board will be required to attend three three-hour sessions on topics including the assessment and valuation process (three hours), exemption qualifications (three hours), and state statutes and court cases (three hours), while auxiliary boards will be required to attend two three-hour sessions - assessment and the valuation process, and state law and court cases. This training requirement extends to public/appointed members as well as county commissioners acting as the Board of Assessment Appeals. The act takes effect January 2020 and will sync with the election of commissioners and appointments of appeals boards.

The AAP, in cooperation with CCAP, is working to develop the training curriculum and explore delivery methods.

Additional Legislative Developments

Other legislation considered during the 2017-18 legislative session -

- Senate Bill 689/House Bill 1361 which would expand the membership of the Pennsylvania State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers (SBCREA) to include two CPE members. This is extremely important legislation since the SBCREA, which governs CPE's, currently has no CPE representation on the board.
- SB 832/HB1594 which would amend Act 28 (Assessors' Certification Act) to further define the requirement for qualification and training of revaluation company personnel. This would provide more clarification to a gray area of the current act.
- SB980/HB1890 would provide for a pilot sales verification process. Although not adopted as an act, JR Hardester is planning a voluntary sales validation/verification process utilizing volunteer counties as participants.

While not all of the Association's goals for 2018 have been accomplished, the AAP, in partnership with the LGC and CCAP, has seen significant inroads to assessment reform. Although these previously mentioned bills were not enacted into law, we're hopeful that these, or similar bills, will be reintroduced in the upcoming legislative session.

Thanks to all AAP members for your continued support of the AAP and our objectives; and to the LGC, and CCAP for their recognition that our association members represent the best practitioners in our profession.

All of the documents referenced in article can be found on the LGC, CCAP and AAP websites - *www.lgc.state.pa.us, www.pacounties.org and www.paassessors.org.*

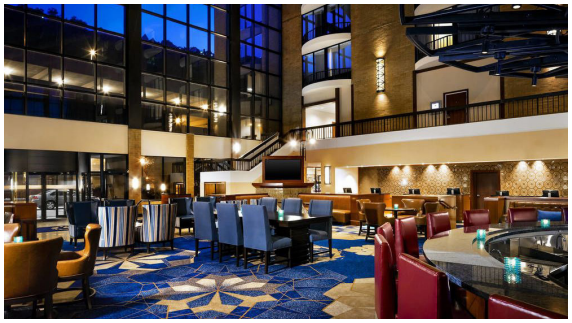
Steve Howe is co chair of the Assessment Law Committee and was chair of the Contracting Standards Committee.

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You're Invited to the AAP's 71st Annual Conference
May 1 to 3 in Pittsburgh, PA
Sheraton Station Square



Sheraton Station Square

Registration Opens on March 1!

You don't want to miss out on -

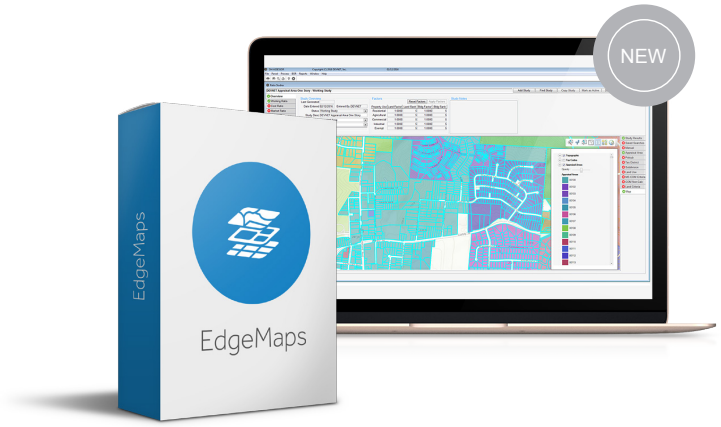
- Honoring AAP's award winners! *Don't forget to nominate a colleague!*
- Completing recertification credits by June 30th!
- Networking with your peers!

Enjoy Your Time in Pittsburgh!

- Visit the original Primanti Brothers.
- The city has topped the Most Liveable Cities list six times.
- The Burgh is home to amazing sports teams.
- For a full listing of city attractions and dining, check out *VisitPittsburgh.com*.



Pittsburgh Skyline



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County Corner: Greene County

The original inhabitants of Greene County were the Indian Sachem Six Nations and consisted of the Mohawks, Seneca, and Oneida Native American tribes. Greene County was established on February 9, 1796 when Washington County was divided into two counties through an act of the Legislature. The southern portion became Greene County named after the Revolutionary War General Nathanael Greene and consisted of 577 square miles. The first European inhabitants were a mix of English, Irish, Scotch, and German.

Greene County developed its economic base historically through mining and agriculture. Gas wells, coal mining, and wool production provided the early forms of growth in the county. At one point the wool industry was so prosperous that Greene County was the first in total Merino wool production and was said to have more sheep than human inhabitants county-wide. Although the agricultural component of the county has diminished, the mining industry is considered the top industry operating today. Sheep ranching and the mining are celebrated with two separate annual events. The Sheep and Fiber Festival that takes place in May is held at the Greene County Fairgrounds in Waynesburg, and the Bituminous Coal Show held in late August in Carmichaels.

Change has been the hallmark for the last 65 years in Greene County. Coal mining has become even more important to the county's economy. In 1986 Greene County began to lead all other Pennsylvania counties in the production of bituminous coal. Two new railroads were even built to carry this coal to market.

One of the most important aspects of change was the greater mobility brought about by the building of Interstate 79 through the county in the late 60s and early 70s. It ended Greene County's relative isolation because ease of access to Washington DC, Pittsburgh and Morgantown, West Virginia made employment and shopping opportunities more available to its residents.

The county has a rich diverse history that can still be seen throughout the county, whether in the rural countryside, boroughs, or coal patch towns.

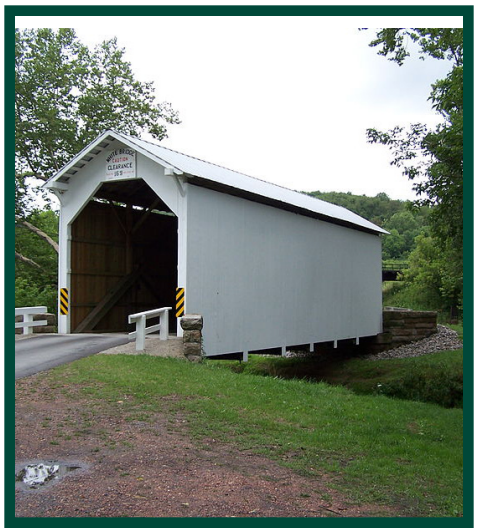
The quality of life improved for most residents in the last 65 years. Educational opportunities were enhanced when the township and borough school districts were merged into five larger districts. These new school districts built a modern high school and elementary school building, making possible a richer curriculum. Waynesburg College, established 1849, also improved its physical plant and modernized its course of study. In 2007 Waynesburg College became Waynesburg University and now offers doctoral, graduate and undergraduate programs in more than 70 programs of study.

The Greene County airport is a public use, general aviation airport. It currently has hanger space for small aircraft. There is also a flight school on the premises for beginners or continuing pilot education.

The rural landscape of Greene County is home to many covered bridges, some of which are still in use. The seven covered bridges are Carmichaels, Cox Farm, King, Scott, Shriver, White, and Woods covered bridges. All are still standing and some even have annual covered bridge festivals with food, entertainment and crafts. Another favorite attraction are the Mail Pouch barns that are scattered across the countryside. The barns were painted from 1890 to 1992 with the barn advertisement for the West Virginia Mail Pouch Chewing Tobacco Company. At the height of the program in the 1960s there were about 20,000 mail pouch barns across several states.

Some other historical monuments and places are the Mason Dixon Survey Point, Mather Mine Disaster Monument, Miners Monument, Robina Mine Monument, Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Greene County Historical Museum, Garards Fort and the Robert C. Wiley Armory.

If you are ever traveling through, the rural hills of Greene County stop and see all the county has to offer. For more information, please visit *visitgreene.org*.



White Covered Bridge

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