

BEFORE THE NEBRASKA TAX EQUALIZATION AND REVIEW COMMISSION

Bel Fury Investments Group, LLC,
Appellant,

v.

Douglas County Board of Equalization,
Appellee.

Case No: 17R 0555

Decision and Order Affirming the
Determination of the Douglas
County Board of Equalization

Background

1. The Subject Property is a residential parcel improved with a 1,372 square foot split entry townhouse, with a legal description of: Raven Oaks Replat No 1 Lot 4 Block 0 Irreg Estly 55.75 Ft, Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska.
2. The Douglas County Assessor (the County Assessor) assessed the Subject Property at \$83,800 for tax year 2017.
3. Bel Fury Investments Group, LLC, (the Taxpayer) protested this value to the Douglas County Board of Equalization (the County Board) and requested an assessed value of \$69,800 for tax year 2017.
4. The County Board determined that the taxable value of the Subject Property was \$83,800 for tax year 2017.
5. The Taxpayer appealed the determination of the County Board to the Tax Equalization and Review Commission (the Commission).
6. A Single Commissioner hearing was held on September 27, 2018, at Omaha State Office Building, 1313 Farnam, Room E, Omaha, Nebraska, before Commissioner Steven Keetle.
7. Scott W. Bloemer was present at the hearing for the Taxpayer.
8. Larry Thomsen, Senior Appraiser: Residential, of the Douglas County Assessor/Register of Deeds Office (the County Appraiser) was present for the County Board.

Applicable Law

9. All real property in Nebraska subject to taxation shall be assessed as of the effective date of January 1.¹
10. The Commission’s review of the determination of the County Board of Equalization is de novo.²

¹ See, Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-1301(1) (Reissue 2018).

² See, Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5016(8) (Reissue 2018), *Brenner v. Banner Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 276 Neb. 275, 286, 753 N.W.2d 802, 813 (2008). “When an appeal is conducted as a ‘trial de novo,’ as opposed to a ‘trial de novo on the record,’ it means literally a new hearing and not merely new findings of fact based upon a previous record. A trial de novo is conducted as though the earlier trial had not been held in the first place, and evidence is taken anew as such evidence is available at the time of the trial on appeal.” *Koch v. Cedar Cty. Freeholder Bd.*, 276 Neb. 1009, 1019 (2009).

11. When considering an appeal a presumption exists that the “board of equalization has faithfully performed its official duties in making an assessment and has acted upon sufficient competent evidence to justify its action.”³ That presumption “remains until there is competent evidence to the contrary presented, and the presumption disappears when there is competent evidence adduced on appeal to the contrary. From that point forward, the reasonableness of the valuation fixed by the board of equalization becomes one of fact based upon all the evidence presented. The burden of showing such valuation to be unreasonable rests upon the taxpayer on appeal from the action of the board.”⁴
12. The order, decision, determination or action appealed from shall be affirmed unless evidence is adduced establishing that the order, decision, determination, or action was unreasonable or arbitrary.⁵
13. Proof that the order, decision, determination, or action was unreasonable or arbitrary must be made by clear and convincing evidence.⁶
14. A Taxpayer must introduce competent evidence of actual value of the Subject Property in order to successfully claim that the Subject Property is overvalued.⁷
15. The Commission’s Decision and Order shall include findings of fact and conclusions of law.⁸

Findings of Fact & Conclusions of Law

16. The Taxpayer did not challenge the assessed value of the improvements on the Subject Property, but the Taxpayer alleged that the assessed land value of the Subject Property was too high and that the result was that the Subject Property was assessed at a higher relative value than a comparable property on a per square foot basis.
17. The Taxpayer presented the Property Record Files (PRF) for several properties whose lots the Taxpayer alleged were comparable to the Subject Property.
18. The County Appraiser stated that the County Assessor’s office did a land value study for the 2017 tax year that reallocated the value attributed to the land component of many residential properties in Douglas County. As a result of this land value study, lot values were different depending on the location of the property.
19. The County Appraiser stated that the properties presented by the Taxpayer were all located in different subdivisions and neighborhoods than the Subject Property. The properties presented were all improved with free standing single family houses while the

³ *Brenner* at 283, 811.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5016(9) (Reissue 2018).

⁶ *Omaha Country Club v. Douglas Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 11 Neb. App. 171, 645 N.W.2d 821 (2002).

⁷ Cf. *Josten-Wilbert Vault Co. v. Bd. of Equal. for Buffalo Cty.*, 179 Neb. 415, 138 N.W.2d 641 (1965) (determination of actual value); *Lincoln Tel. and Tel. Co. v. Cty. Bd. of Equal. of York Cty.*, 209 Neb. 465, 308 N.W.2d 515 (1981) (determination of equalized taxable value).

⁸ Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5018(1) (Reissue 2018).

Subject Property is improved with a townhouse that shares a common wall with its neighboring property.

20. The County Board presented a list of sales of property in the economic area of the Subject Property; this economic area contained the subdivision in which the Subject Property is located as well as the subdivisions of the other properties presented by the Taxpayer. This list of sales demonstrated that the characteristics, sales prices, and assessed values on a per square foot basis of the properties are different in the Subject Property's subdivision than they are in the subdivisions of the other property presented.
21. The Commission finds that properties presented by the Taxpayer are not comparable to the Subject Property for purposes of determining land valuation.
22. The Taxpayer has not demonstrated that the valuations of similarly situated properties were set at materially different levels entitling the Subject Property to a reduction in assessed values under the court's determination in *Scribante*.
23. The Taxpayer has not produced competent evidence that the County Board failed to faithfully perform its duties and to act on sufficient competent evidence to justify its actions.
24. The Taxpayer has not adduced clear and convincing evidence that the determination of the County Board is arbitrary or unreasonable and the decision of the County Board should be affirmed.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED THAT:

1. The Decision of the County Board of Equalization determining the taxable value of the Subject Property for tax year 2017, is affirmed.
2. The taxable value of the Subject Property for tax year 2017 is:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Land | \$23,100 |
| <u>Improvements</u> | <u>\$60,700</u> |
| Total | \$83,800 |

3. This Decision and Order, if no further action is taken, shall be certified to the Douglas County Treasurer and the Douglas County Assessor, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5018 (Reissue 2018).
4. Any request for relief, by any party, which is not specifically provided for by this Decision and Order is denied.
5. Each Party is to bear its own costs in this proceeding.
6. This Decision and Order shall only be applicable to tax year 2017.

7. This Decision and Order is effective on January 17, 2020.

Signed and Sealed: January 17, 2020

Steven A. Keetle, Commissioner