

BEFORE THE NEBRASKA TAX EQUALIZATION AND REVIEW COMMISSION

Louis A. Mason Jr.,
Appellant,

v.

Lancaster County Board of Equalization,
Appellee.

Case No: 19R 0358

Decision and Order Reversing
County Board of Equalization

Background

1. The Subject Property is a single family dwelling, with a legal description of: Coddington Mill Replat, Block 4, Lot 84.
2. The Lancaster County Assessor (the Assessor) assessed the Subject Property at \$77,500 for tax year 2019.
3. Louis A Mason Jr. (the Taxpayer) protested this value to the Lancaster County Board of Equalization (the County Board) and requested a lower value for tax year 2019.
4. The County Board determined that the taxable value of the Subject Property was \$77,500 for tax year 2019.
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 October 14, 2020, at the Tax Equalization and Review Commission Hearing Room, Sixth Floor, Nebraska State Office Building, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, Nebraska, before Commissioner James D. Kuhn.
7. Louis A. Mason Jr. was present at the hearing.
8. Cynthia Pittman (the 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 a determination of the County Board of Equalization is de novo.²
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

¹ 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).

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 stated the Subject Property is a modular home that is falling apart faster than he can fix. The Taxpayer estimates it would cost \$53,000 to do all the repairs needed to fix the Subject Property.
17. The Taxpayer provided photos of numerous deficiencies with the Subject Property. The Taxpayer provided one estimate from White Castle Roofing for \$10,009 to replace the shingles and had hand written estimates for siding, gutters, windows, concrete repairs, flooring repairs and garage wall repairs. The Taxpayer stated he talked to the contractors for these repairs but did not get anything in writing from them. The total cost to repair everything on the Taxpayers list was \$53,000.
18. The Appraiser provided a packet of information from the Assessor’s office with a property record card, information from the County Board protest meeting and a methodology used by the Assessor’s office.
19. The Commission is convinced the Subject Property has many deficiencies that should be addressed; however, without written estimates by a contractor, the Commission cannot make an allowance for a cost to cure. The Commission will reduce the assessed value of

³ *Brenner v. Banner Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 276 Neb. 275, 283, 753 N.W.2d 802, 811 (2008).

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. County 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).

the improvement component of the Subject Property by \$10,009 as shown on the White Castle Roofing estimate, to \$39,490 (rounded).

20. The Taxpayer has produced competent evidence that the County Board failed to faithfully perform its duties and to act on sufficient competent evidence to justify its actions.
21. The Taxpayer has 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 vacated.

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 2019 is vacated and reversed.
2. The taxable value of the Subject Property for tax year 2019 is:

Land	\$28,000
<u>Improvements</u>	<u>\$39,490</u>
Total	\$67,490

3. This Decision and Order, if no further action is taken, shall be certified to the Lancaster County Treasurer and the Lancaster 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 2019.
7. This Decision and Order is effective on January 8, 2021.

Signed and Sealed: January 8, 2021

James D. Kuhn, Commissioner