

**BEFORE THE NEBRASKA TAX EQUALIZATION AND REVIEW  
COMMISSION**

SCOTT W. DAMROW,  
APPELLANT,

CASE NO: 21R 0915

V.

DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD  
OF EQUALIZATION,  
APPELLEE.

DECISION AND ORDER  
AFFIRMING THE DECISION  
OF THE DOUGLAS COUNTY  
BOARD OF EQUALIZATION

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. The Subject Property is an improved residential parcel in Douglas County, parcel number 2202445056.
2. The Douglas County Assessor (the County Assessor) assessed the Subject Property at \$273,000 for tax year 2021.
3. Scott W. Damrow (the Taxpayer) protested this value to the Douglas County Board of Equalization (the County Board).
4. The County Board determined that the taxable value of the Subject Property was \$265,000 for tax year 2021.
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 February 22, 2023, at the Omaha State Office Building, 1313 Farnam, Room 227, Omaha, Nebraska, before Commissioner Steven Keetle.
7. Scott W. Damrow was present at the hearing for the Taxpayer.
8. Scott Barnes and Kurt Skradis with the County Assessor's Office (the County Appraisers) were present for the County Board.

## II. APPLICABLE LAW

9. All real property in Nebraska subject to taxation shall be assessed as of the effective date of January 1.<sup>1</sup>
10. The Commission's review of a determination of the County Board of Equalization is de novo.<sup>2</sup>
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."<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup>
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.<sup>5</sup>
13. Proof that the order, decision, determination, or action was unreasonable or arbitrary must be made by clear and convincing evidence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-1301(1) (Cum. Supp. 2020).

<sup>2</sup> 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, 759 N.W.2d 464, 473 (2009).

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

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 283-84.

<sup>5</sup> Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-5016(9) (Reissue 2018).

<sup>6</sup> *Omaha Country Club v. Douglas Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 11 Neb. App. 171, 174-75, 645 N.W.2d 821, 826 (2002).

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.<sup>7</sup>
15. The Commission's Decision and Order shall include findings of fact and conclusions of law.<sup>8</sup>

### III. FINDINGS OF FACT & CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

16. The Subject Property is a residential parcel improved with a 2,317 square foot two story residence constructed in 1984. The Subject Property has a quality rating of good and a condition rating of average.
17. The Taxpayer alleged that the increase in the assessed value of the Subject Property, particularly as compared to the increase in assessed value of other properties in the neighborhood, was unreasonable or arbitrary.
18. The assessed value for real property may be different from year to year, dependent upon the circumstances.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, a prior year's assessment is not relevant to the subsequent year's valuation.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, prior assessments of other properties are not relevant to the subsequent assessment.<sup>11</sup>
19. The Commission must look to the value of the Subject Property as of January 1 of each tax year.<sup>12</sup>
20. The County Board presented the Property Record File (PRF) for the Subject Property. The PRF contains information about the characteristics of the Subject Property and information

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<sup>7</sup> *Josten-Wilbert Vault Co. v. Bd. of Equal. for Buffalo Cty.*, 179 Neb. 415, 418, 138 N.W.2d 641, 643 (1965) (determination of actual value); *Lincoln Tel. and Tel. Co. v. Cty. Bd. of Equal. of York Cty.*, 209 Neb. 465, 468, 308 N.W.2d 515, 518 (1981) (determination of equalized taxable value).

<sup>8</sup> Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-5018(1) (Reissue 2018).

<sup>9</sup> See *Affiliated Foods Coop. v. Madison Co. Bd. of Equal.*, 229 Neb. 605, 613, 428 N.W.2d 201, 206 (1988).

<sup>10</sup> See *DeVore v. Bd. Of Equal.*, 144 Neb. 351, 13 N.W.2d 451 (1944), *Affiliated Foods*, 229 Neb. at 613, 428 N.W.2d at 206 (1988).

<sup>11</sup> *Kohl's Dep't Stores v. Douglas Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 10 Neb. App. 809, 814-15, 638 N.W.2d 877, 881 (2002).

<sup>12</sup> Neb. Rev. Stat §77-1301(Reissue 2018).

regarding the qualified sales that occurred in the economic area of the Subject Property. This information was used to determine the value attributed to each of the characteristics of residential properties in the area, including the Subject Property.

21. The PRF shows that there was a reappraisal of the market area in which the Subject Property is located for the 2021 assessment year.
22. The Taxpayer alleged that the assessed value of the Subject Property is not equalized with other comparable properties.
23. Comparable properties share similar use (residential, commercial/industrial, or agricultural), physical characteristics (size, shape, and topography), and location.<sup>13</sup>
24. “A sales comparison adjustment is made to account (in dollars or a percentage) for a specific difference between the subject property and a comparable property. As the comparable is made more like the subject, its price is brought closer to the subject’s unknown value.”<sup>14</sup>
25. The Taxpayer presented a table with information for eight other properties he alleged were comparable to the Subject Property but assessed at a lower amount per square foot than the Subject Property. The Table also contained a statistical analysis of the values.
26. The Taxpayer requested a valuation of the Subject Property at the average per square foot assessed value of these properties plus one standard deviation.
27. A determination of actual value may be made by using professionally accepted mass appraisal methods.<sup>15</sup> The methods expressly stated in statute are the sales comparison approach, the income approach, and the cost approach.<sup>16</sup> The Taxpayer’s opinion of value was determined by averaging assessed values of

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<sup>13</sup> See generally, International Association of Assessing Officers, *Property Assessment Valuation*, at 169-79 (3rd ed. 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Appraisal Institute, *Appraising Residential Properties*, at 334 (4th ed. 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-112 (Reissue 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-112 (Reissue 2018).

other properties and adding one standard deviation to account for historical differences. The Taxpayer's method is not identified in statute and no evidence of its professional acceptance as an accepted mass appraisal method has been produced. Therefore, the Commission finds it does not constitute competent evidence and gives little weight to it.

28. Additionally, averaging assessed values does not account for differences in the characteristics of the properties whose assessed values are being averaged.<sup>17</sup>
29. The Taxpayer did not present the PRF for the properties listed on the table of properties presented as equalization comparables. Accordingly, the Commission cannot see the basis for the determination of assessed value for the properties presented by the Taxpayer or compare their characteristics to the characteristics of the Subject Property. The Commission is unable to determine the contribution of the different characteristics of the properties contained in the Taxpayers table to the Subject Property.<sup>18</sup>
30. The Taxpayer did present limited information from the County Assessors web site regarding the eight other properties. This information shows that while the Subject Property has 500 square feet of basement finish only one of the eight other properties has any basement finish.
31. The information regarding these eight properties does not show the quality or condition ratings or the age or other amenities (such as fireplaces, sprinkler systems, or decks for example) that the other properties have.
32. The County Board presented a table with information for the properties in the Subject Property's neighborhood that recently

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g. Appraisal Institute, *The Appraisal of Real Estate* 389 (14th ed. 2013).

<sup>18</sup> For this reason, the Order for Single Commissioner Hearing and Notice issued to the Taxpayer on October 19, 2022, includes the following:

**NOTE:** *Copies of the County's Property Record File for any property you will present as a comparable parcel should be provided so that your claim can be properly analyzed. The information provided on the County's web page is **not** a property record file. A Property Record File is only maintained in the office of the County Assessor and should be obtained from that office prior to the hearing.*

- sold, ten of which were two-story properties with the same quality and condition ratings as the Subject Property.
33. The County Appraisers discussed these sales and how the assessed value of the Subject Property is below the median sales price on a per square foot basis for two story properties with the same quality and condition rating.
  34. The County Board did not present the PRFs for the properties on the list of sold properties presented. Accordingly, the Commission cannot see the basis for the determination of assessed value for the properties presented by the County Board or compare their characteristics to the characteristics of the Subject Property. The Commission is unable to determine the contribution of the different characteristics of the properties contained in the Taxpayers table to the Subject Property.<sup>19</sup>
  35. The information regarding these ten properties discussed by the County Appraisers does not show the size of the garages of the properties or other amenities (such as fireplaces, sprinkler systems, or decks for example) that the ten properties have.
  36. The information presented shows that generally the Subject Property has a higher per square foot assessed value than properties with no finished basement but a lower per square foot assessed value than properties with more finished basement than the Subject Property.
  37. 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.
  38. 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.

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<sup>19</sup> For this reason, the Order for Single Commissioner Hearing and Notice issued to the Taxpayer on October 19, 2022, includes the following:

**NOTE:** *Copies of the County's Property Record File for any property you will present as a comparable parcel should be provided so that your claim can be properly analyzed. The information provided on the County's web page is **not** a property record file. A Property Record File is only maintained in the office of the County Assessor and should be obtained from that office prior to the hearing.*

#### IV. 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 2021 is affirmed.
2. The taxable value of the Subject Property for tax year 2021 is:

Land	\$ 35,000
<u>Improvements</u>	<u>\$230,000</u>
Total	\$265,000

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 2021.
7. This Decision and Order is effective on January 11, 2024.

Signed and Sealed: January 11, 2024



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Steven A. Keetle, Commissioner