

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

JAWARA S. JAMES
APPELLANT,

CASE NO: 21R 0918

V.

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

LANCASTER COUNTY
BOARD OF EQUALIZATION,
APPELLEE.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Subject Property is a rural residential parcel in Lancaster County, parcel number 23-25-100-012-000.
2. The Lancaster County Assessor (the County Assessor) assessed the Subject Property at \$375,800 for tax year 2021.
3. Jawara S. James (the Taxpayer) protested this value to the Lancaster County Board of Equalization (the County Board).
4. The County Board determined that the taxable value of the Subject Property was \$375,800 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 January 12, 2023, at the Tax Equalization and Review Commission Hearing Room, Nebraska State Office Building, Lincoln, Nebraska, before Commissioner James D. Kuhn.
7. Jawara S. James was present at the hearing.
8. Tim Sealock (the Appraiser) was 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 1.¹
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 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

¹ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-1301(1) (Cum. Supp. 2020).

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, 759 N.W.2d 464, 473 (2009).

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

⁴ *Id.* at 283-84.

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

⁶ *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.⁷
15. The Commission's Decision and Order shall include findings of fact and conclusions of law.⁸

III. FINDINGS OF FACT & CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

16. The Taxpayer stated that from 2017 to 2021, the Subject Property's value has risen higher than similar properties in the same time period. The Subject Property has risen \$99,200 since 2017, whereas the Castro property rose \$92,100; the McNeil property rose \$23,000; the Ronhovde property rose \$55,900; and the Connot property rose \$11,100 in that same time frame.
17. The Appraiser stated the Taxpayer purchased the Subject Property for \$332,500 in 2015 yet was assessed no more than \$276,600 that same year. The Appraiser stated this sale shows the assessment was grossly undervaluing the Subject Property for several years. In 2021 the assessed value surpassed the purchase price. The Appraiser stated the sale prices in the current market are continuing to increase for parcels like the Subject Property.
18. The Taxpayer stated the prices per acre are different when comparing to the aforementioned properties. It is noted some of the comparable properties are of agricultural classification and some are of residential classification. The valuation methodology for agricultural and residential classifications are different and not comparable.
19. The Appraiser stated the Subject Property is getting Greenbelt valuation due to agricultural usage. For the Subject Property,

⁷ *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).

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

the first two acres are valued at site values which is 100% value while the remaining acres are being valued as agricultural grassland value according to the soil type. The Appraiser stated the price per acre will differ depending on soil type and number of acres of each classification.

20. The Taxpayer failed to provide any property record files from the Assessor's office of similar properties showing the Subject Property is being valued unfairly or differently than similar properties.
21. 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.
22. 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.

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	\$140,700
<u>Improvements</u>	<u>\$235,100</u>
Total	\$375,800
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 2021.
7. This Decision and Order is effective on May 12, 2023.

Signed and Sealed: May 12, 2023



James D. Kuhn, Commissioner