

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

SHAWN J. BARNES,
APPELLANT,

CASE NO: 22R 0915

V.

DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD
OF EQUALIZATION,
APPELLEE.

DECISION AND ORDER
REVERSING 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 0541490000.
2. The Douglas County Assessor (the County Assessor) assessed the Subject Property at \$90,000 for tax year 2022.
3. Shawn J. Barnes (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 \$90,000 for tax year 2022.
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 April 5, 2023, at Omaha State Office Building, 1313 Farnam Street, Room 227, Omaha, NE, before Commissioner Steven A. Keetle.
7. Shawn Barnes was present at the hearing for the Taxpayer.
8. Kurt Skradis with the County Assessor's Office (the County 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 Subject Property is a residential parcel improved with a 986 square foot split entry style residence constructed in 1963.
17. The Taxpayer alleged that the assessed value of the Subject Property should be reduced based on its purchase price of \$18,000.
18. 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 regarding the qualified sales that occurred in the economic area of the Subject Property. This information was used to determine the value attributed to residential properties in the area, including the Subject Property.
19. The County Appraiser stated that the purchase of the Subject Property took place in 2016 and would be considered too old a sale for assessment purposes. The County Board presented a list of 23 recent sales in the Subject Property's economic area.
20. The County Appraiser stated that the assessed value of the Subject property was below the average value of similar properties on a per square foot basis.
21. The Taxpayer alleged that the assessed value of the Subject Property should be reduced due to its condition.

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).

22. The Taxpayer stated that the Subject Property had incurred water damage prior to the 2016 purchase and discussed generally the condition of the interior of the Subject Property.
23. The Taxpayer did not provide estimates for the remediation of the water damage or any photographs of the interior of the Subject Property.
24. The Taxpayer stated that he removed the basement finish from the Subject Property due to the interior water damage and that there was no basement finish in the Subject Property as of the assessment date.
25. The Taxpayer has not presented information to demonstrate that the condition rating of average for the Subject Property was arbitrary or unreasonable.
26. The Commission finds that the value of the improvements on the Subject Property should be reduced by \$8,200⁹ to account for the removal of the basement finish, resulting in an improvement value of \$74,000¹⁰.
27. The Commission finds that the assessed value of the Subject Property for tax year 2021 is \$81,800, with \$7,800 allocated to the land component and \$74,000 for the improvements.
28. 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.
29. 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.

⁹ \$12,012 (Basement Finish) – \$4,567 (38.02% Depreciation) = \$7,445 x 1.0958 Nbhd Adj = \$8,200 (Rounded)

¹⁰ \$82,200 - \$8,200 = \$74,000.

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 2022 is vacated and reversed.
2. The taxable value of the Subject Property for tax year 2022 is:

Land	\$ 7,800
<u>Improvements</u>	<u>\$74,000</u>
Total	\$81,800

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 2022.
7. This Decision and Order is effective on May 22, 2024.

Signed and Sealed: May 22, 2024



Steven A. Keetle, Commissioner