

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

STEVEN O. STUMPPFF,)	
)	
Appellant,)	Case No. 07R-181
)	
v.)	DECISION AND ORDER AFFIRMING
)	THE DECISION OF THE CASS COUNTY
CASS COUNTY BOARD OF)	BOARD OF EQUALIZATION
EQUALIZATION,)	
)	
Appellee.)	

The above-captioned case was called for a hearing on the merits of an appeal by Steven O. Stumpff ("the Taxpayer") to the Tax Equalization and Review Commission ("the Commission"). The hearing was held in the Commission's Hearing Room on the sixth floor of the Nebraska State Office Building in the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska, on June 6, 2008, pursuant to an Order for Hearing and Notice of Hearing issued February 26, 2008. Commissioners Warnes, Salmon, and Hotz were present. Commissioner Wickersham was excused from participation by the presiding hearing officer. The appeal was heard by a panel of three commissioners pursuant to 442 Neb. Admin. Code ch.4 §11 (10/07). Commissioner Warnes was the presiding hearing officer.

Steven O. Stumpff was present at the hearing without legal counsel.

Nathan B. Cox, County Attorney for Cass County, Nebraska, was present as legal counsel for the Cass County Board of Equalization ("the County Board").

The Commission took statutory notice, received exhibits and heard testimony.

The Commission is required by Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5018 (Cum. Supp. 2006) to state its final decision and order concerning an appeal, with findings of fact and conclusions of law, on

the record or in writing. The final decision and order of the Commission in this case is as follows.

I. ISSUES

The Taxpayer has asserted that actual value of the subject property as of January 1, 2007, is less than actual value as determined by the County Board. The issues on appeal related to that assertion are:

Whether the decision of the County Board determining actual value of the subject property is unreasonable or arbitrary; and

The actual value of the subject property on January 1, 2007.

The Taxpayer has asserted that taxable value of the subject property as of January 1, 2007, is not equalized with the taxable value of other real property. The issues on appeal related to that assertion are:

Whether the decision of the County Board determining the equalized taxable value of the subject property is unreasonable or arbitrary;

Whether the equalized taxable value of the subject property was determined by the County Board in a manner and an amount that is uniform and proportionate as required by Nebraska's Constitution in Article VIII §1; and

The equalized taxable value of the subject property on January 1, 2007.

II. FINDINGS OF FACT

The Commission finds and determines that:

1. The Taxpayer has a sufficient interest in the outcome of the above captioned appeal to maintain the appeal.
2. The parcel of real property to which this appeal pertains is described as BEAVER LAKE LOT 25A in Cass County, Nebraska, ("the subject property").
3. Actual value of the subject property placed on the assessment roll as of January 1, 2007, ("the assessment date") by the Cass County Assessor, value as proposed in a timely protest, and actual value as determined by the County Board is shown in the following table:

Case No. 07R-181

Description: BEAVER LAKE LOT 25A,Cass County, Nebraska.

	Assessor Notice Value	Taxpayer Protest Value	Board Determined Value
Land	\$100,238.00	\$50,000.00	\$100,238.00
Improvement	\$300,174.00	\$150,000.00	\$279,738.00
Total	\$400,412.00	\$200,000.00	\$379,976.00

4. An appeal of the County Board's decision was filed with the Commission.
5. The County Board was served with a Notice in Lieu of Summons and duly answered that Notice..
6. The Taxpayer was served with a Notice in Lieu of Summons and duly answered that Notice.
7. An Order for Hearing and Notice of Hearing issued on February 26, 2008, set a hearing of the appeal for June 6, 2008, at 1:00 p.m. CDST.

8. An Affidavit of Service which appears in the records of the Commission establishes that a copy of the Order for Hearing and Notice of Hearing was served on all parties.
9. Actual value of the subject property as of the assessment date for the tax year 2007 is:

Land value	\$100,238.00
Improvement value	<u>\$279,738.00</u>
Total value	<u>\$379,976.00.</u>

III. APPLICABLE LAW

1. Subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission in this appeal is over exempt issues raised during the county board of equalization proceedings. *Arcadian Fertilizer, L.P. v. Sarpy County Bd. of Equalization*, 7 Neb.App. 655, 584 N.W.2d 353, (1998).
2. “Actual value is the most probable price expressed in terms of money that a property will bring if exposed for sale in the open market, or in an arm’s length transaction, between a willing buyer and a willing seller, both of whom are knowledgeable concerning all the uses to which the real property is adapted and for which the real property is capable of being used. In analyzing the uses and restrictions applicable to real property the analysis shall include a full description of the physical characteristics of the real property and an identification of the property rights valued.” Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-112 (Reissue 2003).
3. Actual value may be determined using professionally accepted mass appraisal methods, including, but not limited to, the (1) sales comparison approach using the guidelines in section 77-1371, (2) income approach, and (3) cost approach. Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-112 (Reissue 2003).

4. Use of all of the statutory factors for determination of actual value is not required. All that is required is use of the applicable factors. *First National Bank & Trust of Syracuse v. Otoe Cty.*, 233 Neb. 412, 445 N.W.2d 880 (1989).
5. “Actual value, market value, and fair market value mean exactly the same thing.” *Omaha Country Club v. Douglas County Board of Equalization, et al.*, 11 Neb.App. 171, 180, 645 N.W.2d 821, 829 (2002).
6. Taxable value is the percentage of actual value subject to taxation as directed by section 77-201 of Nebraska Statutes and has the same meaning as assessed value. Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-131 (Reissue 2003).
7. All taxable real property, with the exception of agricultural land and horticultural land, shall be valued at actual value for purposes of taxation. Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-201(1) (Cum. Supp. 2006).
8. “Taxes shall be levied by valuation uniformly and proportionately upon all real property and franchises as defined by the Legislature except as otherwise provided in or permitted by this Constitution.” *Neb. Const.*, Art. VIII, §1.
9. Equalization to obtain proportionate valuation requires a comparison of the ratio of assessed to actual value for the subject property and comparable property. *Cabela's Inc. v. Cheyenne County Bd. of Equalization*, 8 Neb.App. 582, 597 N.W.2d 623 (1999).
10. Uniformity requires that whatever methods are used to determine actual or taxable value for various classifications of real property that the results be correlated to show uniformity. *Banner County v. State Board of Equalization*, 226 Neb. 236, 411 N.W.2d 35 (1987).

11. Taxpayers are entitled to have their property assessed uniformly and proportionately, even though the result may be that it is assessed at less than the actual value. *Equitable Life v. Lincoln County Bd. of Equal.*, 229 Neb. 60, 425 N.W.2d 320 (1988); *Fremont Plaza v. Dodge County Bd. of Equal.*, 225 Neb. 303, 405 N.W.2d 555 (1987).
12. The constitutional requirement of uniformity in taxation extends to both rate and valuation. *First Nat. Bank & Trust Co. v. County of Lancaster*, 177 Neb. 390, 128 N.W.2d 820 (1964).
13. In the evaluation of real property for tax purposes, where buildings and improvements are taxable as a part of the real estate, the critical issue is the actual value of the entire property, not the proportion of that value which is allocated to the land or to the buildings and improvements by the appraiser. *Bumgarner v. Valley County*, 208 Neb. 361, 303 N.W.2d 307 (1981).
14. If taxable values are to be equalized it is necessary for a Taxpayer to establish by clear and convincing evidence that valuation placed on his or her property when compared with valuations placed on similar property is grossly excessive and is the result of systematic will or failure of a plain legal duty, and not mere error of judgement. There must be something more, something which in effect amounts to an intentional violation of the essential principle of practical uniformity. *Newman v. County of Dawson*, 167 Neb. 666, 94 N.W.2d 47 (1959).
15. A presumption exists that the County Board has faithfully performed its duties and has acted on competent evidence. *City of York v. York County Bd. Of Equalization*, 266 Neb. 297, 64 N.W.2d 445 (2003).

16. The presumption in favor of the county board may be classified as a principle of procedure involving the burden of proof, namely, a taxpayer has the burden to prove that action by a board of equalization fixing or determining valuation of real estate for tax purposes is unauthorized by or contrary to constitutional or statutory provisions governing taxation. *Gordman Properties Company v. Board of Equalization of Hall County*, 225 Neb. 169, 403 N.W.2d 366 (1987) (citations omitted).
17. The presumption remains until there is competent to the contrary is presented at which point the presumption disappears. From that point forward, the reasonableness of the valuation fixed by the County Board becomes one of fact based on all of the evidence presented. *Garvey Elevators, Inc. v. Adams County Bd. Of Equalization*, 261 Neb. 130, 621 N.W.2d 518 (2001).
18. The Commission can grant relief only if there is clear and convincing evidence that the action of the County Board was unreasonable or arbitrary. See, Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5016 (8) (Cum. Supp. 2006), and e.g. *Omaha Country Club v. Douglas Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 11 Neb.App. 171, 645 N.W.2d 821 (2002).
19. "Clear and convincing evidence means and is that amount of evidence which produces in the trier of fact a firm belief or conviction about the existence of a fact to be proved." *Castellano v. Bitkower*, 216 Neb. 806, 812, 346 N.W.2d 249, 253 (1984).
20. A decision is "arbitrary" when it is made in disregard of the facts and circumstances and without some basis which could lead a reasonable person to the same conclusion. *Phelps Cty. Bd. of Equal. v. Graf*, 258 Neb 810, 606 N.W.2d 736 (2000).

21. A decision is unreasonable only if the evidence presented leaves no room for differences of opinion among reasonable minds. *Pittman v. Sarpy Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 258 Neb 390, 603 N.W.2d 447 (1999).
22. “An owner who is familiar with his property and knows its worth is permitted to testify as to its value.” *U. S. Ecology v. Boyd County Bd. Of Equalization*, 256 Neb. 7, 16, 588 N.W.2d 575, 581 (1999).
23. The County Board need not put on any evidence to support its valuation of the property at issue unless the taxpayer establishes the Board's valuation was unreasonable or arbitrary. *Bottorf v. Clay County Bd. of Equalization*, 7 Neb.App. 162, 580 N.W.2d 561 (1998).
24. A Taxpayer, who only produced evidence that was aimed at discrediting valuation methods utilized by county assessor, failed to meet burden of proving that value of property was not fairly and proportionately equalized or that valuation placed upon property for tax purposes was unreasonable or arbitrary. *Beynon v. Board of Equalization of Lancaster County*, 213 Neb. 488, 329 N.W.2d 857 (1983).
25. Taxpayer must introduce competent evidence of actual value of the subject property in order to successfully claim that the subject property is overvalued. *Lincoln Tel. and Tel. Co. v. County Bd. Of Equalization of York County*, 209 Neb. 465, 308 N.W.2d 515 (1981).

IV. ANALYSIS

The subject property is an improved lakefront lot purchased in 2005 for \$407,500.

(E9:2). The Taxpayer testified that the purchase price of the subject property included \$30,000

in personal property which included a boat lift, appliances, and a pool table. The Taxpayer testified that he added approximately \$50,000 in improvements to the parcel by remodeling the kitchen and putting in a seawall. He testified that his opinion of value when he bought the subject property in 2005 was \$375,000 to \$377,000 and that the subject property on January 1, 2007 was \$375,000 to \$425,000. The County had assessed a taxable valuation for the subject property for 2007 of \$379,976. The testimony of the Taxpayer was that the valuation by the County was "...in the ballpark".

Prior to the County Board's protest hearing the County had reduced the assessed taxable valuation of the subject property by adjusting the quality rating. (E9:7). The County Board used this lowered recommendation of the Assessor and reduced the taxable valuation of the subject property to \$379,976 from the noticed valuation of \$400,412.

The Taxpayer asserted that the taxable value of the subject property as of January 1, 2007, is not equalized with the taxable value of other real property. He testified that the support for this belief is that the land component of alleged comparable properties is calculated on the basis of a formula which valued the first 100 feet of shoreline at \$110,000 and an additional \$10,000 for each additional 100 feet or portion thereof. This formula was in conflict with Exhibit 7 which showed a different rate for calculating the land component. The testimony of the Taxpayer acknowledged the County's use of Exhibit 7 and explained the Taxpayer's observation that the larger lots were valued such that their depth or square footage did not contribute to value in proportion to their size.

The Taxpayer provided as evidence that the improvements on other alleged comparable properties were not valued equally and uniform to the subject property. The two properties

alleged to be comparable to the subject property are shown in Exhibits 3 page 2 and Exhibit 4 page1. The Commission's review of these alleged comparable properties shows that there are significant differences between the properties and the subject property. The parcel in Exhibit 3 page 2 is a split level with 2,033 square feet of living area and was built in 1979. The subject property is a one-story style house with 1,872 square feet of living area built in 1999. (E2:2). Similarly, the parcel shown in Exhibit 4 page 2 was built in 1992 and is a two story style with 2,142 square feet of living area. The Taxpayer's alleged comparable properties had not sold recently. The Taxpayer did not provide evidence of actual value for any of those properties alleged to be comparable in order to support his assertion of the equalization issue.

The Commission, upon review of all of the evidence presented, finds that the Taxpayer has not provided competent evidence to meet his burden to rebut the presumption that the County Board faithfully performed its duties or acted on sufficient competent evidence. The Commission has reviewed all of the evidence presented and finds that the Taxpayer has not shown by the reasonableness of the evidence a different taxable valuation and has not proven by clear and convincing evidence that the County Board's decision was arbitrary or unreasonable. The appeal of the Taxpayer is denied.

V. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Commission has subject matter jurisdiction in this appeal.
2. The Commission has jurisdiction over the parties to this appeal.

3. The Commission finds that the Taxpayer has not provided competent evidence to meet his burden to rebut the presumption that the County Board faithfully performed its duties or acted upon sufficient competent evidence.
4. The Taxpayer has not adduced sufficient, clear and convincing evidence that the decision of the County Board is unreasonable or arbitrary and the decision of the County Board should be affirmed.

VI. ORDER

IT IS ORDERED THAT:

1. The decision of the County Board determining taxable value of the subject property as of the assessment date, January 1, 2007, is affirmed.
2. Actual value of the subject property for the tax year 2007 is:

Land value	\$100,238.00
Improvement value	<u>\$279,738.00</u>
Total value	<u><u>\$379,976.00.</u></u>
3. This decision, if no appeal is timely filed, shall be certified to the Cass County Treasurer, and the Cass County Assessor, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5018 (Cum. Supp. 2006).
4. Any request for relief, by any party, which is not specifically provided for by this order is denied.
5. Each party is to bear its own costs in this proceeding.
6. This decision shall only be applicable to tax year 2007.

7. This order is effective for purposes of appeal on July 21, 2008.

Signed and Sealed. July 21, 2008.

Nancy J. Salmon, Commissioner

Robert W. Hotz, Commissioner

William C. Warnes, Commissioner

SEAL

**APPEALS FROM DECISIONS OF THE COMMISSION MUST SATISFY THE
REQUIREMENTS OF NEB. REV. STAT. §77-5019 (CUM. SUPP. 2006), OTHER
PROVISIONS OF NEBRASKA STATUTES, AND COURT RULES.**