

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

BEL FURY INVESTMENTS GROUP, LLC,)	
)	
)	Case No 08R 215
Appellant,)	
)	DECISION AND ORDER REVERSING
v.)	THE DECISION OF THE SARPY
)	COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION
SARPY COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION,)	(Stipulation)
)	
Appellee.)	

The above-captioned case was called for a hearing on the merits of an appeal by Bel Fury Investments Group, LLC ("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 March 16, 2010, pursuant to an Order for Hearing and Notice of Hearing issued January 4, 2010. Commissioner Warnes, Vice-Chairperson of the Commission, was the presiding hearing officer. Commissioner Wickersham, Chairperson of the Commission, was absent. Commissioner Warnes as Vice-Chairperson acting in the absence of the Chairperson, designated Commissioners Warnes, Salmon, and Hotz as a panel of the Commission to hear the appeal. Commissioner Salmon was excused. Commissioner Hotz was present. The appeal was heard by a quorum of a panel of the Commission.

Scott W. Bloemer, Managing Member of Bel Fury Investments Group, LLC was present at the hearing without legal counsel.

Nicole L. O'Keefe, a Deputy County Attorney for Sarpy County, Nebraska, was present as legal counsel for the Sarpy 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, 2008, 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, 2008.

The Taxpayer has asserted that taxable value of the subject property as of January 1, 2008, 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, 2008.

**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 LOT 33 WILLOW CREEK REPLAT I, Sarpy County, Nebraska, ("the subject property").
3. Actual value of the subject property placed on the assessment roll as of January 1, 2008, ("the assessment date") by the Sarpy 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. 08R 215

Description: LOT 33 WILLOW CREEK REPLAT I, Sarpy County, Nebraska.

	Assessor Notice Value	Taxpayer Protest Value	Board Determined Value
Land	\$21,000.00	\$21,000.00	\$21,000.00
Improvement	\$109,712.00	\$97,000.00	\$109,712.00
Total	\$130,712.00	\$118,000.00	\$130,712.00

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. An Amended Order for Hearing and Notice of Hearing issued on January 4, 2010, set a hearing of the appeal for March 16, 2010, at 3:00 p.m. CDST.

7. 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.
8. The parties have stipulated that actual value of the subject property as of the assessment date for the tax year 2008 is:

Land value	\$21,000.00
Improvement value	<u>\$104,587.00</u>
Total value	<u>\$125,587.00.</u>

**III.
APPLICABLE LAW**

1. Subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission in this appeal is over 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 qualified 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. *Omaha Country Club v. Douglas County Bd. of Equalization*, 11 Neb.App. 171, 645 N.W.2d 821 (2002).
16. The presumption that a county board of equalization has faithfully performed its official duties in making an assessment and has acted upon sufficient competent evidence to justify its action 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. *Omaha Country Club v. Douglas County Bd. of Equalization*, 11 Neb.App. 171, 645 N.W.2d 821 (2002).
17. 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).
18. The Commission can grant relief only if the action of the County Board was unreasonable or arbitrary. Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5016 (8) (Cum. Supp. 2006).
19. Proof that the action of the County Board's action was unreasonable or arbitrary must be made by clear and convincing evidence. See, e.g., *Omaha Country Club v. Douglas Cty. Bd. of Equal.*, 11 Neb.App. 171, 645 N.W.2d 821 (2002).

20. "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).
21. 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).
22. 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).
23. "Ordinarily, a stipulation entered by the parties to a proceeding or by their attorneys within the scope of authority for representation of the parties, establishes the fact or facts stipulated and binds the parties." *Ehlers v. Perry*, 242 Neb. 208, 218, 494 N.W.2d 325, 333 (1993) (Citations omitted).

IV. ANALYSIS

The stipulation of the parties disposes of all issues before the Commission and an order should be entered in accordance with the stipulation.

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 stipulation of the parties is 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 vacated and reversed.

**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, 2008, is vacated and reversed.
2. Actual value of the subject property for the tax year 2008 is:

Land value	\$21,000.00
Improvement value	<u>\$104,587.00</u>
Total value	<u>\$125,587.00.</u>
3. This decision, if no appeal is timely filed, shall be certified to the Sarpy County Treasurer, and the Sarpy County Assessor, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5018 (Cum. Supp. 2008).
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 2008.

7. This order is effective for purposes of appeal on March 22, 2010.

Signed and Sealed. March 22, 2010.

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 (REISSUE 2009), OTHER PROVISIONS OF NEBRASKA STATUTES, AND COURT RULES.