

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

VICKI J. MELIES,	)	
	)	
Appellant,	)	Case No. 09R 102
	)	
v.	)	DECISION AND ORDER
	)	AFFIRMING THE DECISION OF
DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD OF	)	THE DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD OF
EQUALIZATION,	)	EQUALIZATION
	)	
Appellee.	)	

The above-captioned case was called for a hearing on the merits of an appeal by Vicki J. Melies ("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 August 11, 2010, pursuant to an Order for Hearing and Notice of Hearing issued June 10, 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.

Vicki J. Melies was present at the hearing. No one appeared as legal counsel for the Taxpayer.

Thomas S. Barrett, a Deputy County Attorney for Douglas County, Nebraska, was present as legal counsel for the Douglas County Board of Equalization ("the County Board").

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

The Commission is required to state its final decision and order concerning an appeal, with findings of fact and conclusions of law, on the record or in writing. Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5018 (Reissue 2009). 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, 2009, 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, 2009.

The Taxpayer has asserted that taxable value of the subject property as of January 1, 2009, 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, 2009.

**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 ("the Subject Property") is described in the table below.
3. Actual value of the subject property placed on the assessment roll as of January 1, 2009, ("the assessment date") by the Douglas County Assessor, value as proposed in a timely protest, and actual value as determined by the County Board is shown in the following table:

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Description: RESIDENCES AT WEST DODGE STATION, Douglas County, Nebraska.

	Assessor Notice Value	Taxpayer Protest Value	Board Determined Value
Land	\$35,000.00	\$35,000.00	\$35,000.00
Improvement	\$268,400.00	\$243,300.00	\$255,000.00
Total	\$303,400.00	\$278,000.00	\$290,000.00

4. An appeal of the County Board's decision was filed with the Commission.
5. An Order for Hearing and Notice of Hearing issued on June 10, 2010, set a hearing of the appeal for August 11, 2010, at 9:00 a.m. CDST.
6. 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.

7. Actual value of the subject property as of the assessment date for the tax year 2009 is:

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Land value	\$35,000.00
Improvement value	<u>\$255,000.00</u>
Total value	<u>\$290,000.00.</u>

**III.  
APPLICABLE LAW**

1. Subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission in this appeal is over all questions necessary to determine taxable value. Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5016(7) (Reissue 2009).
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 2009).
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 2009).

4. “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).
5. 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 2009).
6. 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) (Reissue 2009).
7. “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.
8. Equalization is the process of ensuring that all taxable property is placed on the assessment rolls at a uniform percentage of its actual value. *MAPCO Ammonia Pipeline v. State Bd. of Equal.*, 238 Neb. 565, 471 N.W.2d 734 (1991).
9. The purpose of equalization of assessments is to bring the assessment of different parts of a taxing district to the same relative standard, so that no one of the parts may be compelled to pay a disproportionate part of the tax. *MAPCO Ammonia Pipeline v. State Bd. of Equal.*, 238 Neb. 565, 471 N.W.2d 734 (1991); *Cabela's Inc. v. Cheyenne County Bd. of Equalization*, 8 Neb.App. 582, 597 N.W.2d 623, (1999).

10. Equalization to obtain proportionate valuation requires a comparison of the ratio of assessed to actual value for the subject property and comparable property. See, *Cabela's Inc. v. Cheyenne County Bd. of Equalization*, 8 Neb.App. 582, 597 N.W.2d 623 (1999).
11. 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).
12. 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).
13. 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).
14. 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).
15. 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).

16. 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).
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).
18. The presumption disappears if there is competent evidence to the contrary. *Id.*
19. 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. Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5016 (8) (Reissue 2009).
20. Proof that the order, decision, determination, or action appealed from 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).

21. "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).
22. 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).
23. 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).
24. "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).
25. 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).
26. A Taxpayer, who only produced evidence that was aimed at discrediting valuation methods utilized by the 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).
27. A Taxpayer must introduce competent evidence of actual value of the subject property in order to successfully claim that the subject property is overvalued. Cf. *Lincoln Tel. and*



*Tel. Co. v. County Bd. Of Equalization of York County*, 209 Neb. 465, 308 N.W.2d 515 (1981); *Arenson v. Cedar County*, 212 Neb. 62, 321 N.W.2d 427 (1982) (determination of equalized taxable value); *Josten-Wilbert Vault Co. v. Board of Equalization for Buffalo County*, 179 Neb. 415, 138 N.W.2d 641 (1965) (determination of actual value).

#### **IV. ANALYSIS**

The subject property is a residential parcel improved with a ranch style house of 1,956 square feet of living area built in 2007. (E2:9). The house is rated good for quality and condition. (E2:9).

The Taxpayer has asserted that taxable value of the subject property as of January 1, 2009, is not equalized with the taxable value of other real property.

The appraiser for the County Assessor inspected the subject property on March 6, 2009 and made adjustments reducing the square footage of the brick veneer from 400 square feet to 200 square feet; the living area was reduced to 1,956 square feet from 1,922 square feet; and the unfinished basement was reduced from 1,944 square feet to 1,916 square feet. (E2:4). The appraiser reduced the assessed valuation for 2008 from \$300,400 to \$290,000 based on the adjustments he found. The adjustments he noted from his inspection are not updated and shown on the County's exhibits shown as the property record file. (E2:7 to 14). His opinion of value of the subject property for 2009 based on his inspection of the subject property and giving the Taxpayer the benefit of the corrections to the subject property as shown on Exhibit 7, page 1, using the cost approach to valuation is \$294,300 (\$259,300 for improvement and \$35,000 for land).

The Taxpayer provided fourteen alleged comparable parcels to the subject property, but testified that the most comparable parcel was that shown in Exhibit 12, 18151 Lafayette Ave. The Commission's review of this parcel shown in Exhibit 12 shows that it is assessed for 2009 at \$305,404 as compared to the assessed value of the subject property of \$290,000. The land component of the parcel shown in Exhibit 12 is assessed at \$38,500 with a slightly smaller lot size of 12,197 square feet, as compared to the subject property's \$35,000 for a lot of 16,117 square feet. The alleged comparable parcel shown in Exhibit 12 has differences with the subject property and cannot be compared without adjustments.

“Comparable properties” share similar quality, architectural attractiveness (style), age, size, amenities, functional utility, and physical condition. *Property Assessment Valuation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, International Association of Assessing Officers, 1996, p. 98.

When using “comparables” to determine value, similarities and differences between the subject property and the comparables must be recognized. *Property Assessment Valuation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, 1996, p.103. Most adjustments are for physical characteristics. *Property Assessment Valuation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, 1996, p.105. “Financing terms, market conditions, location, and physical characteristics are items that must be considered when making adjustments . . .” *Property Assessment Valuation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, 1996, p. 98.

The principal differences noted by the Commission between the subject property and the parcel shown in Exhibit 12 are the living area with the subject property having 1,922 corrected square feet as compared to the comparable which has 1,832 square feet. (E12:5). Another difference is the size of the total basement - 1,916 corrected square feet as compared to the 1,785 square feet of the parcel shown in Exhibit 12. The third and last example noted by the

Commission is the size of the garages with the subject property having 1,014 square feet as compared to the 754 square feet of the parcel shown in Exhibit 12. When these three differences are treated as adjustments in Exhibit 12, page 5, the resulting adjusted value of the comparable is \$294,792 (\$256,292 + \$38,500) This is to compare to the \$290,000 assessed taxable value of the subject property for 2009. The analysis indicates the subject property is valued uniformly to the comparable. The Commission finds that the Taxpayer has not established by clear and convincing evidence that the valuation placed upon his property when compared to valuations placed on other similar property is grossly excessive and is the result of a systematic exercise of intentional will or failure of plain duty, and not mere errors of judgment.

Despite the Taxpayer providing 14 alleged comparable parcels in support of her valuation and equalization allegations, she testified that her Exhibit 5, page 1 contains the basis for her opinion of the equalized value of the subject property for 2009, \$275,108. The Commission's review of Exhibit 5, page 1 shows that the Taxpayer formed her opinion of equalized value of the subject property based on a ratio of the 2009 assessed value to the price paid for the alleged comparable parcels. The Commission finds that this method of determining actual value is not an approved professional method of valuation nor in accordance with mass appraisal techniques. An example of the problem with this method is that the dates of sales of the parcels ranged from December 2005 (18231 Lafayette Ave) to January 1, 2009 (November 2009, 18508 Honeysuckle) the effective date when the County Assessor needed to assess the subject property. In addition, the alleged comparable parcels are not found to be comparable in that there are many differences between them and the subject property with no adjustments having been made to allow a comparison.

The Commission does not find merit to the other allegations of the Taxpayer. A taxpayer who offers no evidence that the subject property is valued in excess of its actual value and who only produces evidence that is aimed at discrediting the valuation methods utilized by county assessor fails to meet his or her burden of proving that the value of the property was not fairly and proportionately equalized or that valuation placed upon the 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).

There is a presumption that a board of equalization has faithfully performed its official duties in making an assessment and has acted upon sufficient competent evidence to justify its action. The presumption remains until there is competent evidence to the contrary presented, and the presumption disappears when there is competent evidence on appeal to the contrary. From that point on, 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....[t]he burden of persuasion imposed on the complaining taxpayer is not met by showing a mere difference of opinion unless it is established by clear and convincing evidence that the valuation placed upon his property when compared to valuations placed on other similar property is grossly excessive and is the result of a systematic exercise of intentional will or failure of plain duty, and not mere errors of judgment. *Id.* Taxpayer must introduce competent evidence of actual value of its property in order to successfully claim that a 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).

The Commission finds that the Taxpayer has not provided competent evidence to rebut the presumption that the County Board faithfully performed its duties and had sufficient competent evidence to make its determination.

The Commission finds that the Taxpayer has not provided 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 Taxpayer has not produced competent evidence that the County Board failed to faithfully perform its official duties and to act on sufficient competent evidence to justify its actions.
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 actual value of the subject property as of the assessment date, January 1, 2009, is affirmed.

2. Actual value, for the tax year 2009, of the subject property is:

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Land value	\$35,000.00
Improvement value	<u>\$255,000.00</u>
Total value	<u>\$290,000.00.</u>

3. This decision, if no appeal is timely filed, shall be certified to the Douglas County Treasurer, and the Douglas County Assessor, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §77-5018 (Reissue 2009).
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 2009.
7. This order is effective for purposes of appeal on September 15, 2010.

Signed and Sealed. September 15, 2010.

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Robert W. Hotz, Commissioner

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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.**