

Assessing FAQs Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Role of the City Assessor?

The Assessor is responsible for estimating the value of your property, which determines your assessed valuation. The Assessor does not determine your property taxes. Instead, the assessed valuation determines the overall share of taxes you pay. Because your assessment affects your property taxes, it is important that your assessed value be accurate and fair. It is also important that you understand how the value of your property is estimated and what can cause property values to change.

2. How is your Property Value Estimated?

The Assessor estimates the value of your property typically by first examining and collecting information on the physical characteristics of the property. Physical characteristics can include, among others, the square footage of land and improvements, the number of bedrooms in a home, whether or not the improvements include a garage, the number of bathrooms, and the nature of amenities such as swimming pools and fireplaces.

3. What Causes Property Values to Change?

A property's value can change for many reasons. The most obvious is that the property changes: a bedroom, garage, or swimming pool is added, or part of the property is destroyed by flood or fire. The most frequent cause of a change in value is a change in the market.

4. What is a State Equalized Value?

State Equalized Value (SEV): 50% of Market Value or True Cash Value, commonly referred to as your property assessment.

5. What is Capped Value?

Capped Value (CV): the formula is: Previous year's Taxable Value minus Losses (physical changes to the property) times the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or 5%; whichever is less, plus Additions (physical changes to the property), $(TV - \text{Losses} \times \text{CPI} (5\%) + \text{Additions} = CV)$

6. What is Taxable Value?

Taxable Value (TV) is the value upon which property taxes are based. TV is the Lesser of State Equalized Value (SEV) or Capped Value (CV). TV in the year following a transfer of ownership (sale, gift inheritance, etc.) is equal to the SEV.

7. Why isn't my new assessment 50% of my purchase price?

The simple answer is that it is against the law. MCL 211.27 states that the purchase price is no longer the presumptive True Case Value of a property. The assessment may be close to 50% of the purchase price but the property SEV is determined by investigating the other sales in the vicinity of the property. All of the SEV in the vicinity of the property is set using that sales study.

8. Sale prices are going down in my neighborhood, why hasn't my assessment gone down?

Sale prices going down in the neighborhood will not be reflected immediately in your assessment. The State allows for a two year sales study and an optional one year sales study. In inflationary times, a two year study helps the taxpayer because sales used are older and therefore lower in value. In deflationary times such as now, a one year sales study helps the taxpayer because it reflects the more recent sales. The City of Portage has used one year sales studies for 2009 and 2010.

9. What is the time period considered in the 2009 sales study?

The State Tax Commission recommends using a period from October 1, 2008 to September 30, 2009. This is considered to be a 12 month study.

10. When can I appeal my assessment?

By law, the only time you may appeal your assessment is at the March Board of Review, which is held the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday following the second Monday in March. After you receive the Change of Assessment notice you may contact the City Assessor's Department at 269-329-4433 to schedule an appointment; or send a letter of appeal, [including the Michigan Department of Treasury Form L-4035 – Petition to Board of Review](#), which is available at the Office of the City Assessor. You may also click the above link to download.

[Read the Board of Review notice for dates and times.](#)

11. What are the Grounds for an Appeal?

An assessment appeal is not a complaint about higher taxes. It is an attempt to prove that your property's estimated market value is either inaccurate or unfair.

You may appeal when you can prove at least one of three things:

- Items that affect value are incorrect on your property record. For instance, you have one bath, not two; you have a carport, not a garage; your home as 1,600 square feet, not 2,000 square feet.
- The estimated market value is too high. You have evidence that similar properties have sold for less than the estimated market value of your property.
- The estimated market value of your property is accurate but inequitable because it is higher than the estimated value of similar properties.

12. What happens if I'm not happy with the decision of the March Board of Review?

State law provides the next level of appeal at the Michigan Tax Tribunal. A letter of appeal on residential property must be sent to the Tribunal (P.O. Box 30232, Lansing, MI 48909) by July 31st following an appeal to/at the March Board of Review.

13. Why can't I protest my taxes when I get my tax bill in July?

State law provides for one time per year to protest the value of your property. That protest may be made at the March Board of Review only.

14. Is all of the Assessor information available online?

Almost all of the information in the Assessor's Office is public record. The amount paid in taxes is also public record and it is available on the [City of Portage website](#). Access the Assessor's area and you may look up information by name, address or parcel number. Square footage and 2009 values are available. 2010 values will not be posted online until the roll has been reviewed and confirmed following the March Board of Review. Preliminary information is available at the Assessing Department counter beginning March 1, 2010.

15. Where do I change my mailing address?

You need to send a written request by fax 269-324-8073, email to assessor@portagemi.gov or regular mail to 7900 South Westnedge Ave, Portage, MI 49002 to change your mailing address. This will change the address for both assessments and taxes. It will not, however, change the water billing address. You must contact the Portage Treasury Office at 269-329-4455 separately.

16. How do I qualify for the homestead exemption?

The homestead exemption is more correctly known as the Principal Residence Exemption (PRE). The qualifications are simple; you must own and occupy the home as your principal residence on or before May 1st. A person or a married couple is allowed only one PRE in the state. You may not claim an exemption in any other state. The exemption continues until the use of the home as your principal residence changes. When the change occurs, you must notify the Assessor's Department in writing. Proposal A and state law does NOT allow for partial credit. As an example, even if you move into a non-homestead property on May 5th, the exemption does not begin until the following year. Recent legislation has allowed the granting of a second homestead in certain conditions. The "Conditional Rescission" is available when the previous homestead is not occupied or rented and is listed for sale. Please contact the Assessing Department if you think you qualify for the additional exemption.