



# STATE TAX COMMISSION OF MISSOURI

VERNICE HICKS,	)	
	)	
Complainant(s),	)	
	)	Appeal No. 23-10798
v.	)	Parcel No. 16N240837
	)	
JAKE ZIMMERMAN, ASSESSOR,	)	
ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MISSOURI,	)	
	)	
Respondent.	)	

## DECISION AND ORDER

Vernice M. Hicks (Complainant) appealed the St. Louis County Board of Equalization's (BOE) decision finding the true value in money (TVM) of the subject property on January 1, 2023, was \$395,000. Complainant alleges overvaluation and proposes that the TVM of the subject as of that date was \$321,000.<sup>1</sup> The BOE decision is affirmed. The TVM of the subject property on January 1, 2023, was \$395,000.

The evidentiary hearing was held on May 7, 2025, via Webex. Complainant appeared *pro se* via phone and Respondent was represented by counsel Steve Robson. The

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<sup>1</sup> Complainant timely filed a complaint for review of assessment. The State Tax Commission (STC) has authority to hear and decide Complainant's appeal. Mo. Const. art. X, sec. 14; Section 138.430.1, RSMo 2000. All statutory citations are to RSMo 2000, as amended.

appeal was heard and decided by Senior Hearing Officer Benjamin Slawson.

## **FINDINGS OF FACT**

**1. The Subject Property.** The subject residential real property is located at 11057 Sandistan Dr, Saint Louis, Missouri, Parcel No. 16N240837. The subject property is a ranch-style home consisting of 1,817 square feet of living space with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, dining room, and basement.

**2. Assessment and Valuation.** Respondent determined the TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$430,800. The BOE independently determined the TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$395,000.

**3. Complainant's Evidence.** Complainant did not submit any documentary evidence. Complainant testified based on what a realtor told her, she believes the property to be worth \$341,000 as of January 1, 2023.<sup>2</sup>

Complainant testified that the comparables used by Respondent to value her home were not similar to the subject property as they were larger in square footage than the subject property. Because of this, Complainant stated that she believes that Respondent overvalued her property. In addition, Complainant testified that the findings of the BOE are arbitrary and capricious because when she asked, the BOE did not explain how it arrived at the \$395,000. Complainant also testified that she did not present comparable sales to the BOE because she was told by a realtor that such evidence would not be good evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> Complainant's Complaint for Review indicated a proposed value of \$321,000, not \$341,000.

**4. Respondent's Evidence.** Respondent submitted Exhibit 1, consisting of the October 17, 2023, BOE decision letter for the subject property. Exhibit 1 shows the BOE valued the subject property at \$395,000. Exhibit 1 was admitted without objection.

**5. Value.** The TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$395,000.

## **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

**1. Assessment and Valuation.** Residential real property is assessed at 19% of its TVM as of January 1 of each odd-numbered year. Section 137.115.5(1)(a). The TVM is "the fair market value of the property on the valuation date[.]" *Snider v. Casino Aztar/Aztar Mo. Gaming Corp.*, 156 S.W.3d 341, 346 (Mo. banc 2005) (internal quotation omitted). The fair market value is "the price which the property would bring from a willing buyer when offered for sale by a willing seller." *Mo. Baptist Children's Home v. State Tax Comm'n*, 867 S.W.2d 510, 512 (Mo. banc 1993). "True value in money is defined in terms of value in exchange not value in use." *Tibbs v. Poplar Bluff Assocs. I, L.P.*, 599 S.W.3d 1, 7 (Mo. App. S.D. 2020) (internal quotation omitted). "Determining the true value in money is an issue of fact for the STC." *Cohen v. Bushmeyer*, 251 S.W.3d 345, 348 (Mo. App. E.D. 2008).

"For purposes of levying property taxes, the value of real property is typically determined using one or more of three generally accepted approaches." *Snider*, 156 S.W.3d at 346. The three generally accepted approaches are the cost approach, the income approach, and the comparable sales approach. *Id.* at 346-48. The STC has wide discretion in selecting the appropriate valuation method but "cannot base its decision on opinion

evidence that fails to consider information that should have been considered under a particular valuation approach." *Id.*, at 348.

The comparable sales approach "is most appropriate when there is an active market for the type of property at issue such that sufficient data are available to make a comparative analysis." *Snider*, 156 S.W.3d at 348. For this reason, the comparable sales approach is typically used to value residential property. "The comparable sales approach uses prices paid for similar properties in arms-length transactions and adjusts those prices to account for differences between the properties." *Id.* at 347-48 (internal quotation omitted). "Comparable sales consist of evidence of sales reasonably related in time and distance and involve land comparable in character." *Id.* at 348.

**2. Evidence.** "Although technical rules of evidence are not controlling in administrative hearings, fundamental rules of evidence are applicable." *Mo. Church of Scientology v. State Tax Comm'n*, 560 S.W.2d 837, 839 (Mo. banc 1977). The hearing officer is the finder of fact and determines the credibility and weight of the evidence. *Kelly v. Mo. Dep't of Soc. Servs., Family Support Div.*, 456 S.W.3d 107, 111 (Mo. App. W.D. 2015). "It is within the purview of the hearing officer to determine the method of valuation to be adopted in a given case." *Tibbs v. Poplar Bluff Assocs. I, L.P.*, 599 S.W.3d 1, 9 (Mo. App. S.D. 2020). The hearing officer "may inquire of the owner of the property or of any other party to the appeal regarding any matter or issue relevant to the valuation, subclassification or assessment of the property." Section 138.430.2. The Hearing Officer's decision regarding the assessment or valuation of the property may be based solely upon

his inquiry and any evidence presented by the parties, or based solely upon evidence presented by the parties. *Id.*

**3. Complainant's Burden of Proof.** The taxpayer bears the burden of proof and must show by a preponderance of the evidence that the property was overvalued. *Westwood P'ship v. Gogarty*, 103 S.W.3d 152, 161 (Mo. App. E.D. 2003). The BOE's valuation is presumptively correct. *Tibbs*, 599 S.W.3d at 7. The "taxpayer may rebut this presumption by presenting substantial and persuasive evidence that the valuation is erroneous." *Id.* (internal quotation omitted). The taxpayer also must prove "the value that should have been placed on the property." *Id.*

"Substantial evidence is that evidence which, if true, has probative force upon the issues, and from which the trier of fact can reasonably decide the case on the fact issues." *Savage v. State Tax Comm'n*, 722 S.W.2d 72, 77 (Mo. banc 1986) (internal quotation omitted). Evidence is persuasive when it has "sufficient weight and probative value to convince the trier of fact." *Daly v. P.D. George Co.*, 77 S.W.3d 645, 651 (Mo. App. E.D. 2002); *see also White v. Dir. of Revenue*, 321 S.W.3d 298, 305 (Mo. banc 2010) (noting the burden of persuasion is the "party's duty to convince the fact-finder to view the facts in a way that favors that party").

**4. Complainant Did Not Produce Substantial and Persuasive Evidence of Overvaluation.**

Complainant did not produce substantial and persuasive evidence to support his \$231,000 opinion of value and claim of overvaluation.

Comparative assessment is not the method used to find a TVM for a property.

Therefore, Complainant's testimony that the Respondent did not properly use similar comparable properties assessed differently than the subject to the value the subject is not persuasive evidence.

The comparable sales approach is the usual method used to determine the TVM of residential real property. "The comparable sales approach uses prices paid for similar properties in arms-length transactions and adjusts those prices to account for differences between the properties." *Snider*, 156 S.W.3d at 347-48 (internal quotation omitted). Complainant did not provide an appraisal report from an independent appraiser determining value based on market-based adjustments to sales prices of comparable properties at the time of the assessment date. Complainant testified that she did not present comparable sales to the BOE because she was told that would not be convincing evidence of value. Despite this, the BOE independently determined the TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$395,000, lowering the value from Respondent's original TVM of \$430,800. Complainant did not show that the BOE failed to take into account the information she presented to the Board when they determined the new value.

Complainant has not proven that the TVM of the subject property is \$321,000 as of January 1, 2023. While a property owner's opinion of value is generally admissible, the opinion "is without probative value where it is shown to have been based upon improper elements or an improper foundation." *Shelby Cty. R-IV Sch. Dist. v. Herman*, 392 S.W.2d 609, 613 (Mo. 1965); see also *Cohen v. Bushmeyer*, 251 S.W.3d 345, 349 (Mo. App. W.D. 2008) (noting a property owner's opinion of value loses probative value when it rests on an improper foundation). Complainant's alleged valuation is based on improper elements

and therefore is speculative.

### **CONCLUSION AND ORDER**

The BOE decision is affirmed. The TVM of the subject property as of January 1, 2023, was \$395,000.

### **Application for Review**

A party may file an application for review of this decision within 30 days of the mailing date set forth in the certificate of service for this decision. The application "shall contain specific detailed grounds upon which it is claimed the decision is erroneous." Section 138.432. The application must be in writing, and may be mailed to the State Tax Commission of Missouri, P.O. Box 146, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0146, or emailed to Legal@stc.mo.gov. A copy of the application must be sent to each person listed below in the certificate of service. *Failure to state specific facts or law upon which the application for review is based will result in summary denial.* Section 138.432.

### **Disputed Taxes**

The Collector of St. Louis County, and the collectors of all affected political subdivisions therein, shall continue to hold the disputed taxes pending the possible filing of an application for review, unless the disputed taxes have been disbursed pursuant to a court order under the provisions of section 139.031.

SO ORDERED June 10, 2025.

Benjamin C. Slawson  
Senior Hearing Officer  
State Tax Commission

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that a copy of the foregoing has been electronically mailed and/or sent by U.S. Mail on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025, to: Complainant(s) and/or Counsel for Complainant(s), the County Assessor and/or Counsel for Respondent and County Collector.

Stacy M. Ingle  
Legal Assistant